



# Islamabad POST

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**IMF Chief warns against risks to economic stability**

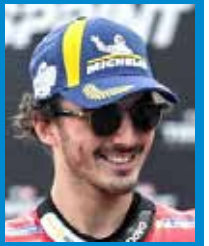
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**Hungary sick of Western criticism: FM**

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**Bagnaia wins Portuguese MotoGP sprint**

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## Briefs

### Imran Khan thanks Lahorites

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has thanked Lahorites to make Minar-e-Pakistan rally a success. Taking to twitter after the Lahore power show, Imran wrote: "Despite cabal of crooks locking down Lahore (see map) & arresting 2000 of our workers, people of Lahore came in huge numbers to make our 6th Minar-e-Pakistan jalsa a great success. I want to especially thank my Lahorites for not letting me down yet again. Proud of you." A large number of party supporters attended the PTI rally despite the Punjab government sealed roads leading to Minar-e-Pakistan by placing containers and erecting barricades to stop them from reaching the place. However, caretaker Punjab Info Minister Amir Mir denied that people were being restricted from going to the rally through barriers.

### Govt will restore economy

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Mariyum Aurangzeb says present government, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, will restore Pakistan's economy and make people prosperous. Addressing a news conference in Lahore today, she said first time in country's history, present government is providing free flour to deserving segment of society during Holy Ramadan. The Minister said previous PML-N government, led by Nawaz Sharif, had left country on the path to progress and prosperity with 6 percent growth rate while Imran Khan left behind a Pakistan with grave issues of price hike, unemployment and poverty.

### Sehr, Iftar Timing



Ramazan 05, 1444

Sehr: 04:40 am  
Iftar: 06:24 pm  
Fiqu-e-Jafria  
Sehr: 04:30 am  
Iftar: 06:34 pm

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## Amid political tensions

# PM terms Alvi's letter as PTI's PR

The PM stresses that he is fully aware of his duties and the duties of govt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday termed the contents of the letter written by President Dr Arif Alvi as of partisan in nature, one-sided and based upon anti-government views' which were openly espoused by the latter notwithstanding the constitutional oath/office of the president. In response to the president's letter of March 24 containing five pages and seven points, the prime minister said that he was constrained to express his disappointment at the blatant partisan nature of the letter, "which in parts reads like a Press Release of the Opposition political party i.e. the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). "Mr. President, the Constitution does not vest any powers in or assigns any functions to the President whereby the President can seek explanation from the Government or the Prime Minister. The only reason I am responding to your letter is because I want to bring your partisan attitude and actions on record and to set the record of our Government straight," the contents of the letter shared by PM Office Media Wing quoted the prime minister as saying. The prime minister stressed that he was fully aware of his duties and the duties of the federal government under the constitution and the government was fully committed to preserve, protect and

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# Russia to station nukes in Belarus

A small no. of Iskander missiles have already been transferred

CENTRELINE REPORT

MOSCOW: Russia will station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, President Vladimir Putin has said. President Putin said the move would not violate nuclear non-proliferation agreements and compared it to the US stationing its weapons in Europe, according to Russian state media. Moscow would not be transferring control of its arms to Minsk, he added. Belarus shares a long border Ukraine, and with Nato members Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. This will be the first time since the mid-1990s that Moscow will have based nuclear arms outside the country. The Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 meant weapons became based in four newly-independent states - Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan - with the transfer of all warheads to Russia completed in 1996. The Belarusian regime is a firm Kremlin ally and supporter of the invasion of Ukraine. President Putin told Russian state television on Saturday that Belarusian leader

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## NATO slams 'irresponsible' nuclear rhetoric

NEWS DESK

KYIV: NATO on Sunday criticised Vladimir Putin for what it called his "dangerous and irresponsible" nuclear rhetoric, a day after the Russian president said he would station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. Putin announced the move on Saturday and likened it to the U.S. stationing its weapons in Europe, while insisting that Russia would not violate its nuclear non-proliferation promises. Although the move was not unexpected, it is one of Russia's most pronounced nuclear signals since the beginning of its invasion of Ukraine 13 months ago,

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**BAHAWALPUR:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visits free flour distribution centers to overview the process of distribution. – DNA

## PM visits free flour distribution centers

Listens to the complaints of people; orders action

STAFF REPORT

BAHAWALPUR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited free flour distribution centers in Bahawalpur and expressed satisfaction on the process of distribution. He visited flour distribution centers established at Abbasia High School and Dring Stadium in the city and expressed satisfaction over the process of distribution. The prime minister issued directions to provide free flour to elderly and sick persons on priority basis. He also directed to provide two bags of flour to the deserving people to save them from repeated visits to the distribution centers. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also visited Multan on Sunday and inspected free flour distribution center established at Sports Ground. He examined the process from registration to delivery of flour to the registered deserving families and expressed his satisfaction on the arrangements. The Prime Minister listened to the complaints of people and directed authorities to solve these immediately. The Prime Minister was told that 34 free flour distribution centers have been established in Multan district to distribute around 2.6 million bags of flour among 850,000 families.

## Imran to appear in court PTI slams PM's 'ill response' to President's letter

Asad says people rejected the tactics being employed by the fascist government, at the PTI's Minar-e-Pakistan rally

ABID RAZA / DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior vice president Fawad Chaudhry on Sunday said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif gave an ill response to President Dr Arif Alvi's letter written within the constitutional provisions. Addressing a presser along with PTI general secretary Asad Umar, he said the way PM had responded to the president's letter was enough to dawn [on people] how lowly a man he was. "There is no space for forced disappearances in the country and the country is not far from constitutional government", he added. He said hundreds of thousands of people rejected the tactics being employed by the fascist government at the PTI's Minar-e-Pakistan

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## PTI moves IHC to halt ECP action

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) rejection of the request to cross-examine witnesses in the prohibited funding case. The PTI said that the ECP did not issue the show-cause notice via "legitimate authority" and the court should annul it and stop proceedings until the verdict is announced.

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## Palestine condemns Israeli aggression

Palestine also condemns the unlawful detention of worshippers

DNA

RAMALLAH: The State of Palestine condemns in the strongest terms Israel's continued provocations and aggression against both the worshippers and the sanctity of Holy Sites in Jerusalem, particularly in an around Al-Haram Al-Sharif; Israeli occupying forces' aggression against worshippers during the holiest month of the year, in grave violation of historic, legal, and political status quo of Jerusalem. The State of Palestine also condemns

the unlawful detention of worshippers followed by the forced invasion of Jewish settlers into Al-Haram Al-Sharif under the protection of Israeli occupying forces. Israel, the occupying Power, is not committed, as it falsely claims, to either bring about calm in Jerusalem or to guarantee the freedom of religion and worship for all. Israel, the occupying Power, is willfully and deliberately provoking Muslim worshippers during the Holy Month of Ramadan and is imposing additional punitive restrictions. The State of Palestine holds Israel fully responsible for dangerous repercussions of its violations on regional and international peace and security.

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# Imran Khan's 10-point recovery plan: will it work?

The PTI plea against the ECP announcement has already been admitted. It will ostensibly determine whether the country is to be run as per the Constitution or whims and wishes of particular persons or institutions

COMMENT

ANSAR M BHATTI

**F**ORMER Prime Minister and Chairman PTI Imran Khan while addressing a mammoth public gathering at the Minar-e-Pakistan on March 25, 2023 unfurled a 10-point recovery plan, which, according to him, shall steer the country out of economic and political crises. The salient features of the proposed plan include fetching of foreign investments; boosting exports; tourism promotion; minerals exploration; encouraging the small and medium size enterprises; agriculture; expanding the tax net; checking the money laundering and welfare schemes for the poor class of the country. As a matter of fact these were the very pillars upon which the PTI had established its government in 2018. And it deserves to be



given credit that in some areas such as tourism, tax net, and welfare schemes the PTI government tried to scheme things with a view to facilitating the general public and improving the economic outlook of the country. Compared with the incumbent PDM government, the socio-economic indicators during the PTI regime were quite encouraging, at least in the first one year. The country possessed handsome foreign exchange reserves with a huge contribution from the overseas Pakistanis. Of course the then PTI government was supposed to do much more as it had come to power to not only break the status quo but introduce a system of Riyasat-e-Madina in which everybody was to be treated equally. But on this front the PTI failed and perhaps failed miserably that is why when it was removed from power people heaved sigh of relief. Imran Khan later claimed that he could not perform since his hands were tied and decisions were taken not in the prime minister's house but somewhere else. If that was the case then he should have stepped down immediately and sought a

fresh mandate, is the argument he had to confront even from his supporters. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has surprised all by announcing that the elections in Punjab would take place on October 8 this year. The KP governor, who was probably waiting for this move, immediately set the October 8 election date. It is an open secret now that except PTI nobody wants elections at least before October. The way things continue to transpire in Pakistan, elections even in October seem uncertain. There are two fundamental questions that would require an answer if the election would not take place on the date already specified by the President on the directions of the apex court, 1) what shall be the status of the caretaker government whose mandate cannot be stretched beyond 90 days and how the President of Pakistan shall be elected when the incumbent President finishes his term in September this year? The President is elected by the provincial assemblies and the Senate and National Assembly members. If there are no immediate elections then there won't

be Punjab and KP assemblies in place hence no election of the President also. As analysts suggest the PDM government wants to have its own president sooner rather than later. The obvious reason for this appears to be the sentence of Nawaz Sharif because it is the President who can pardon any kind of sentence. If the PTI would win in Punjab and KP as a result of elections on April 30 then for sure they would not support the Presidential candidate nominated by the PDM. But if there are no elections at all, even then the PDM candidate will have to face challenges. So in both cases the PDM predicament is quite obvious however in the second scenario where there are no elections, the PDM thinks it might maneuver things in its favour. The constitution states that election to the office of President must be held no earlier than sixty days and no later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of the incumbent president. If assemblies are not present, the constitution allows the election of president to be delayed thirty days after the general election. The electoral process itself is done via a

secret ballot due to the post of the president being constitutionally non-partisan. Therefore, unlike during the election of the Prime Minister, cross-party voting is not liable to be considered defection. The emerging political scene suggests that a lot of haggling is going to take place for the election of the President no matter whether elections for the Punjab and KP assemblies take place within 90 days or otherwise. The PML N supremo Nawaz Sharif is desperate to come back to Pakistan for which he needs a clean chit first. Courts may give him temporary relief by barring the law enforcing agencies not to arrest him upon his return nevertheless the permanent relief i.e. to do away with sentence, can only come from the President of Pakistan. The Supreme Court hearing therefore shall be of utmost importance. The PTI plea against the ECP announcement has already been admitted by the apex court. This is going to be a landmark case in the judicial history of Pakistan. It will ostensibly determine whether the country is to be run as per the Constitution or whims and wishes of particular persons or institutions.



## 2nd death anniversary of Haseena Moin observed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani dramatist, playwright and scriptwriter, Haseena Moin was paid glowing tributes on her remarkable services in the field of literature, on her second death anniversary observed on Sunday. She was born on 20 November in 1941 at Kanpur, United Provinces of British India and after the independence of Pakistan in 1947, she migrated with her family to Pakistan, said a news release received here. Haseena Moin wrote several plays for stage, radio and television which were highly appreciated and lauded by the people. She was the recipient of the Pride of Performance award for her services to the performing arts in Pakistan. She wrote Pakistan's first original script Kiran Kahani aired in the early-1970s. Before this, PTV relied on novel-based scripts for dramas. Haseena Moeen is considered to be the best playwright and dramatist Pakistan has ever witnessed. She passed away on this day in 2021 in Karachi.

## 46,446 Corona patients discharged

RAWALPINDI: As many as 46,446 Coronavirus patients had been discharged after getting treatment from the district's health facilities, out of which 42,789 were Rawalpindi residents and 3,659 were from other districts. According to the data shared by the District Health Authority, 47,815 patients have tested positive since the pandemic, out of which 44,156 belong to Rawalpindi and 3,659 from the outside district. The report further updated that 26 patients were quarantined at home while 7,006,011 people, including 44,790 health workers, had jabbed themselves against the lethal Coronavirus. Meanwhile, District Health Officer for Infectious Diseases, Dr Waqar Ahmed told APP that Corona patients have increased in the last ten days. He added that around five to six patients were reported regularly in the last two weeks, while the number reached zero earlier. The health officer advised the residents to wear face masks, avoid crowded places and follow safety measures issued by the government.—APP

## Police arrest PO in murder case

PESHAWAR: Police have arrested a proclaimed offender (PO) wanted in connection with a murder and attempted murder case on Sunday. On a tip regarding the presence of the PO, the Station House Officer (SHO) Phandu, Aqib Khan conducted a raid and arrested the PO Ijaz son of Maulana Saakin, resident of Ghareebabad. The arrested accused had murdered a person, Hazrat Omar over a monetary dispute in June 2022. After committing the crime, the accused was on the run and hiding somewhere and declared a proclaimed offender. Further investigation from the accused was in progress.—APP

## Sikh community continues goodwill gesture during Ramzan

PESHAWAR: The Sikh community in Peshawar has continued its goodwill gesture of serving food among fasting Muslims during the holy month of Ramzan with the objective of promoting love, fraternity, respect and honor among people of different faiths. Every year Sikh community living in different parts of the country including Peshawar, arrange Iftari (serving of food for breaking fast) and food distribution among fasting Muslims with the aim of reflecting the sentiments of reverence they had for holy month of Ramzan. As the fasting month of Ramzan begins, Sikh residents in Peshawar come out for arranging Iftar dinners, announcing special discounts on their shops for fasting Muslims besides helping the poor fasting faithful by providing them edible goods at their doorsteps. For ordinary citizens gathering of



ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar posing for a group photo with the winners of the women awards during an Iftar dinner hosted by the ICCI.— Another picture and news on the Back Page.—DNA

# Pricing dispute causes shortage of critical medicine

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A simmering price dispute between the pharmaceutical industry and the Health Ministry has resulted in an acute shortage of critical medicines, forcing patients to rely on smuggled and potentially counterfeit drugs at increased costs. Grappling with rising production costs owing to skyrocketing inflation and massive devaluation of the local currency in recent years, the industry demands a 38 per cent increase. The government, however, has rejected the demand, propelling pharmaceutical companies to either stop or go into a limited-scale production of scores of essential and non-essential medicines. Adding salt to the injuries, the importers have stopped or drastically reduced the imports of about 100 crucial medicines related to general anesthesia, plasma-derived

products, vaccines, oncology products, and biological products, causing a dearth of medicines across the country. "Some of these medicines are either not being imported or are available in the market on a limited scale just because of the legal binding," Abdul Samad, an office-bearer of the Pakistan Chemist and Drugs Association, told Anadolu, citing a government law that binds an importer to not completely stop importing medicine for which he has been granted a license. "Most of the importers are nowadays importing a minimum quantity of dozens of essential and non-essential medicines just to keep their licenses intact. Otherwise, it's no longer a profitable business for them due to a huge devaluation of the rupee against the dollar," he said. Samad cited the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war as key reasons behind rising prices for products on the

international market, primarily because of, and an unprecedented rise in global inflation. "Worst is yet to come" Increasing costs of fuel, electricity, freight charges, cold chain maintenance, packing material, and a cumulative 4pc non-adjustable sales tax at the import stage, have "seriously" jeopardised the sustainability of the medicine business, according to Samad. Farooq Bukhari, chairman of the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, defended the demand for an "inflationary price adjustment," which, according to him, is a must due to a dollar-rupee disparity and skyrocketing inflation. "The (local) pharmaceutical industry is on the verge of collapse because of no corresponding adjustment in pricing despite a 60pc increase in the materials' cost in recent years," he told Anadolu. The rupee, in recent months, has hit an all-time

low at 286 rupees against \$1, becoming one of Asia's weakest currencies. It was Rs 188 against \$1 until April 2022. The government is reeling from an acute balance of payments crisis, desperately seeking to secure external financing, with foreign reserves falling to slightly more than \$4 billion. Following the sharp depreciation in the rupee, the consumer price inflation jumped to 31.5pc in February, its highest since June of 1974. "When we demanded a 38pc raise, a dollar was Rs235. And now it's Rs286, which means even this 38pc increase will not be enough," said Bukhari. "However, we are still open to any government offer in this regard." If the government does not bow to the manufacturers' "logical" demand, he warned, pharmaceutical companies would be compelled to shut down their units, risking more than 1 million jobs.

## Rates of food items increasing with every day passing without any check

Rates of fruits also increased like Malta 440 per dozen, Cano 400 per dozen while Banana Rs. 300 per dozen, Pomegranate Rs. 400, Irani Apple Rs. 340 per kg, Guava Kohati Rs. 350 and Strawberry Rs. 280 per kg.

PESHAWAR: With the onset of Ramazan, the prices of food items started to skyrocket and no check on that from the concerned quarters. During a visit to the markets to check the food items' rates and compare it with the government rates issued by the district administration, it is clearly evident that the rates of food items are increasing with every passing day during the holy month of Ramadan. The price of live chicken has increased to Rs. 350 per kg and the price of rice increased by Rs 70 per kg, said a Vander during a visit to the market. He said the price of rice has gone up to Rs 335 per kg, split chickpeas (Chana Dal) started selling at 220 to 260 rupees per kg and the price of beans increased by Rs 60 per kg with jumping of beans rates from Rs. 281 to

Rs 339 per kg. The price of spices increased from Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 per kg, a shopkeeper told APP during a visit. He disclosed that the price of spices in the city has reached Rs. 600 per kg and the prices of oil and ghee also increased. He said the price of ghee and oil increased by Rs. 62 per kg while the other vegetables and fruits were also out of purchasing power. Garlic is being sold at Rs. 360 and ginger at Rs 620 per kg while Peas 200, Arvi 180, Zucchini 170, green and capsicum 150 rupees and tomato 120 per kg are being sold. The rates of fruits also increased like Malta 440 per dozen, Cano 400 per dozen while Banana Rs. 300 per dozen, Pomegranate Rs. 400, Irani Apple Rs. 340 per kg, Guava Kohati Rs. 350 and Strawberry Rs.

280 per kg. The skyrocketing price hike was also witnessed in beef, which was Rs 700 per kg before Ramazan now sold at Rs 800 and Rs. 1000 per kg while the rates of mutton was increased from Rs 1400 to 1600 per kg, thereby increasing to 1800 per kg. "The rates issued by the district administration do not suit us," a Butcher in the local market said. When asked about the imposition of fine and raid from the officials of the district administration, he replied with a smile that during the recent rain, most of the officials did not come inside the Sabzi Mandi for checking rates due to heavy mud stranded water, therefore, the shopkeepers were charging rates of their own choice.—APP

## 1 killed, 7 injured in different incidents

DNA

ATTOCK: One person was killed while seven others were injured in two different incidents in Attock district on Sunday, police and rescue officials said. In the first incident, a Rawalpindi bound passenger van coming from Kohat turned turtle as its drive lost control due to over speeding near Bhall railway crossing on Rawalpindi road in the limits of Fatehjang Police Station. As a result, a person identified as Hamza Khan was killed on the spot while seven others received injuries. The injured were identified as Nasir Shahzad, Sher Ahmed, Azmat Hussain, Shahzad Ali and driver of the van Fida Hussain. On getting information, rescue 1122 teams reached at the spot and shifted the injured to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Fatehjang for medical treatment. In the second incident, a couple sustained multiple injuries as their car fell in road side ditch near Pindigheb on Hakla-DI Khan motorway (M-14).

## Seven of family slaughtered in Pakpattan

PAKPATTAN: Seven people of a family were slaughtered in Pakpattan on a property dispute on Saturday morning. A man with the help of his accomplices stormed into the house of his brother and shot dead his mother, brothers, sister-in-law and children at Sehri time in village Barri Rakh of Pakpattan. A seven-year-old girl was seriously injured in the firing who was rushed to hospital for emergency treatment. After no response from the Rescue 1122 service despite repeated calls, the injured girl was rushed to the hospital in a police van. Police said the slain included their mother, Sherbaz, Ifthikhar and his wife, two sons and a daughter. A large contingent of police along with forensic teams have arrived at the crime scene. The police have launched an investigation as the accused fled from the scene after committing the gruesome crime. It may be mentioned here that on March 7 a man had murdered his two brothers and sister-in-law over a property dispute in Pakpattan. The triple murder was reported in Village 48-SP in Chakbedi Police Station precincts. The land dispute had led accused Saleem to open fire on his two brothers Aslam and Yousaf and Yousaf's wife, Kalsoom. They all died on the spot. Pakpattan DPO Hassan Iqbal took notice of the triple murder and constituted a police team to arrest the accused. IGP Punjab Dr Usman Anwar took notice of the murder of seven people of a family in Pakpattan and sought a report from RPO Sahiwal. The IGP ordered DPO Pakpattan to constitute a special team for the early arrest of the accused.—DNA

## Fascist Modi regime wreaked havoc in IIOJK

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has said that after revoking the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), Modi-led India's fascist regime has wreaked havoc in the region by stepping up state terrorism and human rights violations. He expressed these views while talking to a delegation which called on him under the leadership of veteran AJK political leader Faiz Hameed Faizi, at Jammu Kashmir House in Islamabad on Sunday, AJK President office said. Referring to relentless suppression and brutal barbarism in Indian-occupied Kashmir, the president said that human rights violations were on the rise not only in IIOJK but also in India, where minorities were being persecuted and crushed violently by Hindutva warriors. He said that it was high time to expose India's ugly face and Modi's Hindutva policies before the world.—APP

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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. Patricks Day

March 20 / Tunisia Independence Day

March 21 / Namibia National Day

March 25 / Greece National Day

March 26 / Bangladesh National Day

March 27 / Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....111 133 133

Marriott.....051- 2826121

Monal.....0334-5421812

Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....8494949

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Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122

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Motorway Police.9270601-20

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MH.....561116

Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11

DHQ.....5556311-4

RGH.....9290301-7

Holy Family.....9290322-7

PIMS.....9261170-79

Polyclinic.....9218300-09

Shifa International 4603666

Departments

CDA.....9221334-43

CDA.....9208301-04

Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

# ‘Delay in IMF tranche worsening economic crisis’

## Economy of Pakistan, particularly the SMEs are striving to deal with the present economic crunch

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has observed that the delay in the resumption of the IMF loan program and political instability exacerbated the country’s vulnerability through the depletion of foreign exchange reserves, as the resulting rupee depreciation amplified inflationary pressures by magnifying the effect of global price increase.

PIAF Chairman Faheem ur Rehman Saigol asked the government to formulate long-term and consistent policies for high industrial growth and sizeable improvement in exports, which is the actual remedy of Pakistan’s prosperity. The PIAF Chief said that trade and industry need low cost energy to bring down their cost of production, keeping their goods competitive in the international market.

He said that the government would have to reduce the price of electricity along with the cut in the prices of petroleum products to bring down the cost of doing business and to promote industrial activities. He said that the business activities were already in decline and in this situation the government should take serious steps to cut the cost of doing business, as continued hike in oil rates would further enhance the cost of production, making transport more expensive.

Faheem Saigol said that the economy of Pakistan, particularly the SMEs are striving to deal with the present economic crunch and need to get support. Instead of providing subsidies or waivers, it is unjust to overburden the industries with hike in cost of production. He observed that the burden of the surge in oil price in the international market is immediately transferred to masses by the government but the process of reduction in the prices is always very slow, he noted.

He said that a concerted approach is required to encourage increased localization of the manufacturing base, along with the lowering of energy intensity of the economy by ensuring energy efficiency and conservation. Moreover, amid the growing issues related to climate change and inadequate food security situation, there is an urgent need to formulate a well-thought-out strategy to meet these challenges, he said.

He said that the experience from FY22 brought to the fore once again the need to address the country’s structural weaknesses, such as a narrow base of foreign exchange earnings and meager inflows of foreign investment.

# People worried about jobs and inflation



**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: Former Vice President of FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh on Sunday said the masses are worried about their jobs and increasing inflation and they are fed up with endless political wrangling. Politicians have crossed all boundaries of morality in the race to humiliate each other and instead of giving any program to save the country’s economy, they are indulging in accusations, he said.

Atif Ikram Sheikh who has also served as Chairman of PVMA said in a statement issued here that the IMF is playing a cat-and-mouse game with Pakistan while not a single political party has any plan to run the economy with or without the help of the international organization. Political leaders have failed to present a workable solution to the nation, which is disappointing the public and the business community, he added.

The business leader said that the politicians are unable to understand that the problem of the people is not their power, but earning bread and keeping employment in the unbearable inflation. He said that for the majority, it has become impossible to run the budget of their homes and the solution to such problems lies with the government which gives some relief and protection to the people but now the welfare of the people has been neglected and they are at the mercy of the circumstances. There is no economic governance in the country and the political leaders are not ready to agree on the Charter of Economy.

# IESCO installs 8,702 net metering connections

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has installed 8,702 net metering connections having a total generation capacity of 106.43 megawatts (MW) in various circles of the company from January 2016 to February 2023. Manager Public Relations Asim Nazir Raja told APP here that the company had received 9,177 applications of net metering with 114.29 MW capacity during the said period. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) issued licences to 9,122 net metering connections with an accumulative capacity of 113.68 MW so far, he added. He said that the import and export of billing units had been started from 7781 net metering connections with a total capacity of 95.35 MW. The total exports and imports from these connections stood at 133,529,246 units and 167,307,686 units respectively, he said. Asim said that the company had paid an amount of Rs 2,327,559 to the connections’ holders up to June 2022.

To a question, he said that the company had authorised to grant licences up to 25 kilowatts (kW) capacity while over 25 kW capacity, NENPRA issued licenses for net metering connections. It is pertinent to mention here that the net-metering project had been launched in 2016 countrywide. —APP

# Elections will be held after Aug 2023’

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education Rana Tanveer Hussain Sunday said that the next general elections will be held on time after August 2023

of the country. The ECP under the constitution had postponed the elections keeping in view the security, political and economic challenges, he said while talking to a private news channel. “The term of the current National Assembly will end in August 2023 to be followed by the establishment of an interim government that will hold elections,” he further said.

He also called on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leadership to end growing polarization in the country and decide on an election date by coming together. Minister emphasised for electoral reforms to ensure transparency in the next elections.—APP

# Well-balanced diet during Ramadan urged

ISLAMABAD: Health specialist on Sunday has advised the public for a disciplined routine and a well-balanced diet while fasting as gaining weight during Ramadan can cause chronic inflammation, heart disease, diabetes and reduced lung function. Talking to a private news channel, a renowned specialist Dr Shahzad Ali Khan advises people to avoid eating fried, oily and heavy food items as they cannot be easily digested and can make you feel bloated.

Meals should be chewed slowly and thoroughly rather than being eaten hastily, he said, adding, it is important to drink plenty of water and other hydrating fluids during the non-fasting hours to prevent dehydration during the day.

Regular short-distance walks for a couple of hours are also suggested after iftar also helps digestion. Moreover, he recommended consuming foods that are rich in protein during Seher and Iftar, adding, consuming too much sugar can also leads to feelings of fatigue, decreased energy and reduced alertness.

Replying to a question, the iftar meal should be a balanced meal that replenishes energy and nutrients, adding, it should include complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, along with some protein and healthy.—APP

# Khubaib Foundation distributing cooked food

ISLAMABAD: The Khubaib Foundation is distributing cooked food in earthquake-affected areas of Turkiye by setting up a mobile kitchen there to provide hot meals to needy people during the holy month of Ramadan. The foundation is committed to making a positive impact on the lives of people affected by the earthquake, and helping them to recover and rebuild them, said a news release. “It has already organized funds raising event in Manchester United Kingdom (UK) to generate funds and raise awareness for the victims of recent earthquakes in Turkiye and Syria.” The event aimed to bring attention to the plight of those who have lost their homes and loved ones and encourage people to donate generously towards the cause.—APP

www.joinpaf.gov.pk

پاکستان ایئر فورس

میں بحیثیت اسجوکیشن انسٹرکٹر / ایروٹریڈز اور سپورٹس مین شمولیت اختیار کریں

آن لائن رجسٹریشن 27 مارچ تا 02 اپریل 2023

ٹیسٹ کمپیوٹرائزڈ ہونے کی وجہ سے امیدواروں کو کمپیوٹر کا بنیادی استعمال جاننا ضروری ہے۔ مزید معلومات اور آن لائن رجسٹریشن کے لیے ویب سائٹ [www.joinpaf.gov.pk](http://www.joinpaf.gov.pk) ملاحظہ کیجئے۔

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اوقات رابطہ

صبح 0800 سے 1430 بجے تک

اسجوکیشن انسٹرکٹر

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / عمر : 22 تا 28 سال بشمول تاریخ 02 اکتوبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

ٹیسٹس میں (04 Years) / BS (04 Years) / MSC (04 Years) کم از کم

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ایروٹریڈز

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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سپورٹس مین

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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دیہی علاقہ جات

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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خیر بختون خواہ (فاٹا)

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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اسجوکیشن انسٹرکٹر

قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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ایروٹریڈز

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سپورٹس مین

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دیہی علاقہ جات

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قومیّت : پاکستانی مرد / ازدواجی حیثیت : غیر شادی شدہ / عمر : 15% تا 20 سال بشمول تاریخ 25 دسمبر 2023 تک / قد : 163 تا 188 سینٹی میٹر

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# پاکستان ایئر فورس قوم کا سرمایہ، افتخار



## Briefs

**Wanted member of thief gang held; stolen cash Rs 4 lac recovered**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad capital police Noon police team arrested an accused involved in theft activities and recovered stolen cash Rs 4 lac from his possession, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements involved in theft activities in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, a Noon police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending an accused involved in theft activities. The accused was identified as Muhammad Riaz. Police team also recovered stolen cash Rs 4 lac from his possession. Case has been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. CPO /DIG Operations Islamabad Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in heinous crimes. "Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard" he added.—DNA

**21 absconders involved in various criminal activities held**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad capital police have arrested 21 absconders involved in heinous crime during the last 24 hours, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, special tasks were assigned to all police officials to ensure the arrest of proclaimed offenders and absconders involved in heinous crimes. During the crack-down Islamabad capital police teams of Secretariat, Margalla, Shalimar, Aabpara, Bhara Kahu, Phulgran and Bani Gala police station team arrested 21 absconders during the last 24 hours. CPO/DIG Operations Islamabad Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari has appreciated the performance of the police team and said that Islamabad police are making all out efforts for the safety and security of citizens. He further said that, the Islamabad Capital Police is taking all possible steps to eradicate crime from the city and those involved in heinous crimes and illegal activities will be dealt with iron hands.—DNA

**Six outlaws arrested; drugs and weapons recovered**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad capital police apprehended six outlaws from different areas of the city and recovered drugs and weapons with ammunition from their possession, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directives, the Bani Gala police team arrested an accused namely Arslan and recovered 640 gram heroin from his possession. Similarly, the Golra police team arrested an accused namely Wajid Mehmood and recovered 519 gram heroin from his possession. The Industrial Area police team arrested an accused namely Shahzad Hakeem Zada.—DNA

## FOOD STANDARDS

## ICCI calls for consulting stakeholders: Bakhtawari

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the business community welcomes the establishment of Food Authority in Islamabad as it will ensure the supply of safe and unadulterated food to the citizens. However, he emphasized that the Food Authority should finalize the food standards and laws in consultation with the stakeholders, which will yield better results for both sides. He said this while talking to Dr. Tahira Chairperson Islamabad Food Authority during her visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the Islamabad Food Authority (IFA) should conduct awareness sessions in markets to educate and sensitize the business community of the food sector



about food standards. He said that ICCI will cooperate with IFA for awareness sessions and is ready to provide its auditorium for this purpose. He said that a committee comprising representatives of ICCI and IFA should be formed to play a role in solving the problems of

the food sector and move forward with consensus. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Tahira, Chairperson, Islamabad Food Authority said that the aim of her authority is to ensure the availability of quality food to the citizens and hoped that the business

community of the food sector would cooperate in achieving this goal. She said that the business community of the food sector, including restaurants and bakeries, will be provided comprehensive guidance about food safety measures to save them from fines and pun-

ishment. She hoped that the business community would provide all possible support in advancing the mission of IFA. Azharul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI, said that ICCI should first be taken on board about any complaint against any restaurant, bakery or any trader so that such issues can be solved with joint efforts and food interests of citizens can be better protected. Zafar Bakhtawari former President ICCI, Khurram Khan President Islamabad Restaurant Association, Ajmal Baloch President Anjuman Tajaran Pakistan, Khalid Chaudhry, Haji Mumtaz Ahmed, Saqib Abbasi, Ashar Hafeez, Saifur Rehman Khan, Khawaja Junaid, Umar Riaz, Muhammad Yahya, Rohail Butt Shikarpuri, Muzaffar Hashmi and others also spoke at the occasion and emphasized the need for taking business community on board for enforcement of food standards.

**Two member of thief gang held; stolen cash and valuables recovered**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police Shalimar police team arrested two wanted members of a thief gang involved in theft activities and recovered stolen cash and valuables worth Rs 3.1 million from their possession, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, a Shalimar police station team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending two wanted members of a thief gang involved in different theft activities. The accused were identified as Zahoor Ahmed and Ali Hasan. Police team also recovered stolen cash and gold ornaments worth Rs 3.1 million from their possession.—APP

## Pak-China to cooperate promoting flaxseed research

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Gansu Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Sindh Agricultural University signed a memorandum of understanding for the China-Pakistan flax research and innovation hub.

"Our new flax varieties, the Longya series, are all selected according to the climate conditions of dry with little rainfall in Northwest China. In the planting experiments, the yield is generally more than 10 percent higher than that of the local varieties, and the resistance to diseases and insect pests is stronger. At present, Longya No. 11, No. 14, and No. 15 have been planted in Pakistan preliminarily. I firmly believe that



the Longya series should be able to exert a good effect of drought resistance and increase yield under the climate conditions of Pakistan." Zhao Wei, Researcher at the Crop Research Institute of GAAS, indicated in an exclu-

sive interview with China Economic Net. "It is a variety most Pakistani farmers are not familiar with but it can produce edible oil much needed in the country", project leader Abdul Ghaffar Shar, a doc-

toral candidate of Northwest A&F University who has been studying in China for nine years told CEN, adding, "Experiment has started at SAU, Tandojam. Flaxseed contains 35-44 percent oil. The seed oil, rich in unsaturated fatty acids mainly linolenic acid, serves as a nutritional supplement, in addition to its huge role in coatings, textiles and animal husbandry. Flax is a promising economic crop." As Abdul Ghaffar Shar pointed out, the average production of flaxseed in Pakistan is as low as 692 kg per hectare because of less soil fertility, blind use of fertilizers, lack of high-yield hybrid varieties and old cultivation practices.

## Proud moment for British-Pakistani diplomat

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Fouzia Younis, a British-Pakistani diplomat, has made history for being appointed His Majesty's British Consul General to Toronto. She is currently working in Islamabad as a senior British diplomat and expected to leave for Canada soon. She said on Twitter: "Privileged to be appointed as His Majesty's British Consul General to Toronto. Special moment as we think it's the 1st time

(but don't have data) that a British Muslim woman has been appointed as Head of a Diplomatic Post. I won't be the last. "To the girls who look like me, who are battling prejudice, racism and sexism from within communities & outside, who are told they can't do it, or that they don't sound or look the part. Don't let anyone dim your power. You can change the world. Shout out to my colleagues & old/new bosses for your every word of advice and challenge to help me find

my voice. We serve and represent the UK of today, we represent all of us, we shape all our futures I can't wait to get cracking in Toronto to do just that! Earlier, she was appointed director of communications at the British High Commission. According to a report, she was born in Birmingham to Pakistani parents and passed graduation and master's from the Universities of Birmingham and Cambridge before joining the UK Foreign Service.

## Chinese scientists help enhance quality of citrus fruits

DNA

Islamabad, March 26 (: Chinese scientists help to enhance quality and quantity of citrus fruits in Pakistan, China Economic Net (CEN) reported. In this connection, they are collaborating with Pakistani scientists to develop biological control measures to achieve the purpose. To this end, a research centre was launched in the two countries to jointly explore green and sustainable solutions to the growing prevalence of citrus diseases across the South Asian nation. Speaking to China Economic Net (CEN), Prof Dr Qiu Baoli and Prof Dr Shaukat Ali, director and deputy director of the China-Pakistan citrus pest management centre, said that while chemical measures can provide quick responses to citrus dis-

ease outbreaks, they also increase the resistance of pests against pesticides, posing grave environmental and health threats. The researcher told CEN reporter that the centre, initiated by South China Agricultural University and Sargodha University, has undertaken four strands of research work to produce environmentally friendly solutions. The first line of research, Dr Qiu and Dr Ali noted, focuses on the use of "lure and kill" technology to dispel pests. For example, the researchers have investigated how different types of traps and lures will affect the efficacy of capturing pests in citrus orchards across six citrus-producing Pakistani cities. Dr Qiu told CEN that the researchers have also been developing technologies to breed parasitic wasps and predatory insects, which are natural enemies for cit-

rus pests. "So far, we have discovered 22 new species of predatory insects and reported 7 new genera and 2 new subgenera," he noted. In addition, the centre has been researching biological pesticides for emergency control. "We aim to develop commercial formulas for entomopathogenic fungi targeting citrus pests and evaluate their toxicity under laboratory and field conditions," Dr Ali told CEN, adding that strides have been made in the investigation and evaluation of Pakistan's entomopathogenic fungal resources. Dr Qiu noted, "To effectively combat the pests, we will also develop a comprehensive pest management approach that combines various pest control strategies." The technology mix will be tested in citrus orchards in Pakistan for demonstration and promotion.

## Grocery items' sale witnesses peak ahead of Ramadan

ISLAMABAD: With the holy month of Ramadan, the demand for grocery items had witnessed high where retailers were seen doing brisk business and offering several promotions on various consumer goods at competitive prices to attract more customers. "Ramadan is considered one of the best sales seasons in which retailers will maintain more stock and get ready early by launching various special offers and promotions, a retailer said while talking to a private news channel. Housewives are busy with Ramadan shopping, as with the start of the Holy month they cook Sehri-Iftari for family members, said a consumer, adding, we are rushing to markets and shopping marts to purchase necessary kitchen items on discount rates. "Ramadan is also an appropriate time for brands and other local companies to take advantage of the shift in consumer behaviors, lifestyle habits, and overall ", The shops selling dates and other kitchen items witness an increasing turnout of customers as the month of Ramadan is fast approaching, said a shopkeeper in a grocery store. The sale of groceries is witnessing high demand in Ramadan as many traders will start offering discount promotions to attract citizens, said a woman at the grocery store, adding, every year we used to purchase groceries one week ahead of Ramadan. A female consumer at the shopping mall said that the sale of Ramadan groceries has begun in full swing, adding that she had shopped much of her groceries a week before. Ramadan begins in order to stock up for Iftar meals. Another buyer said the quantities of kitchen items we buy are a little more than usual, adding, many consumers prefer to buy in bulk during Ramadan, rather than to make multiple short trips to the mal.—APP

## 303 projects being completed in Pindi

RAWALPINDI: As many as 303 schemes including 123 new and 180 ongoing were being completed in Rawalpindi district under Annual Development Programme (ADP) said a Commissioner Office spokesperson. She informed that In Rawalpindi district, 72 projects of road sector, 36 of urban development, 32 of public buildings, six of specialized health care and medical health, 11 of primary and secondary health care, 33 of WASA, 07 of irrigation, 42 of local government, 26 schemes of school education and 09 of higher education were being completed. After completion these schemes would bring convenience to the people of Rawalpindi district, she added. She informed that Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta chairing a meeting reviewed the progress of ADP schemes.—APP

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## Taiwan losing ‘allies’

The visit that United States Special Presidential Advisor for the Americas Christopher Dodd paid to Honduras about 10 days ago, which was a last-gasp effort by Washington to try and help Taipei retain its “diplomatic ally” in Latin America, proved to be futile. In a statement issued on Saturday, the Honduran government declared it was severing “diplomatic relations” with Taipei, which makes the Central American country the ninth “diplomatic ally” the Tsai Ing-wen administration has lost since it took office in 2016, and reduced the number of states that Taipei has “diplomatic relations” with to 13. State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang and his Honduran counterpart Eduardo Enrique Reina met in Beijing on Sunday and signed the Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Honduras. That the Honduran government established diplomatic relations with Beijing just prior to Tsai setting off on a trip to Central America, which includes a transit stay in the United States on each leg, means that she will no doubt try her best to come up with something to save face. In its statement, the Honduran government said it recognizes that the government of the People’s Republic of China is the only legitimate government that represents all of China, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. That’s something some politicians and media outlets should be reminded of. Not only is that recognized by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758, it is also a prevailing consensus of the international community and a universally recognized norm governing international relations. Yet whenever Taipei “loses” a “diplomatic ally” to Beijing there are always some who make irresponsible remarks insinuating that Beijing is squeezing the island’s “international space”. However, their “criticism” smacks of colonial condescension as if they are in the position to dictate these countries’ diplomacy. In fact, it is the great lengths to which the pro-independence Tsai administration has gone to bet the island’s future on Washington’s risky geopolitical game since taking office that has effectively shrunk the island’s “international space”. More and more of Taipei’s “diplomatic allies” have opted to jump ship after realizing that as they have become disillusioned with Washington’s bullying diplomacy. In that sense, it has been the complicity between Taipei and Washington that has long isolated the “diplomatic allies” of the island from the broad international development initiatives, programs, platforms and mechanisms championed by Beijing. Taipei treats the limited funding it provides to its “diplomatic allies” as a patronizing gift in exchange for the latter’s faithfulness, a diplomatic practice the Tsai authorities have picked up from the US. The move by Honduras brings it into line with the consensus of the international community and with the UN system. It is only a matter of time before the remaining 13 states follow suit and step onto the right side of history.



# Arab plan for Syria puts US and Europe in a bind

James Dorsey

A push by Arab allies of the United States to bring Syria in from the cold highlights the limits of a Chinese-mediated rapprochement between the Middle East’s archrivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The effort spearheaded by the United Arab Emirates, and supported by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, demonstrates that the expected restoration of diplomatic relations between the kingdom and the Islamic republic has done nothing to reduce geopolitical jockeying and rebuild trust. At best, the Chinese-mediated agreement establishes guardrails to prevent regional rivalries from spinning out of control, a principle of Chinese policy towards the Middle East. The Saudi-Iran agreement also is an exercise in regime survival. It potentially allows the two countries to pursue their economic goals unfettered by regional tensions. For Saudi Arabia, that means diversification and restructuring of the kingdom’s economy, while Iran seeks to offset the impact of harsh US sanctions. The goal of countering Iran in Syria is upfront in the Arab proposal for returning Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the Arab and international fold. If accepted by Syria, the United States, and Europe, it would initiate a political process that could produce a less sympathetic Syrian government to Iran. It would also establish an Arab military presence in Syria designed to prevent Iran from extending its influence under the guise of securing the return of refugees. For Mr. Al-Assad, the carrot is tens of billions of dollars needed to rebuild his war-ravaged country and alleviate the humanitarian fallout of last month’s devastating earthquakes in northern Syria. Hampered by sanctions, Mr. Al-Assad’s Russian and Iranian backers don’t have the economic or political wherewithal to foot the bill. Nevertheless, potential Gulf investment is likely to encounter obstacles. The US sanctions that hamper Russia and Iran, also erect barriers for Saudi Arabia and the UAE that will limit the degree to which they want to be seen as sanctions busters. Moreover, countering Iranian in-

fluence in Syria would have to go beyond trade and investment in physical reconstruction. Iran has over the years garnered substantial soft power by focusing on embedding itself in Syrian culture and education, providing social services, and religious proselytization. Meanwhile, China has made clear that its interests are commercial and further limited to aspects of Syrian reconstruction that serve its geopolitical and geo-economic goals. Mr. Al-Assad was in Moscow this week to discuss trade and humanitarian aid. The Syrian president’s rejection of a Russian request that he meets his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, suggests that Mr. Al-Assad will be equally opposed to key elements of the Arab proposal. The Syrian president said he would only meet Mr. Erdogan once Turkey withdraws its troops from rebel-held areas of northern Syria. Even so, the Arab push potentially offers the United States and Europe the ability to strike a reasonable balance between their lofty moral, ethical, and human rights principles and the less savory contingencies of realpolitik. The terms of the Arab proposal to allow Syria back into the international fold after a decade of brutal civil war that killed some 600,000 people, displaced millions more, and significantly enhanced Iran’s regional footprint appears to take that into account. According to The Wall Street Journal, the proposal offers something for everyone but also contains elements that are likely to be difficult to swallow for various parties. While Mr. Al-Assad rejects the principle of political reform and the presence of more foreign troops on Syrian territory, legitimizing the regime of a man accused of war crimes, including using chemical weapons against civilians, is a hard pill to swallow for the United States and Europe. However, it is easy to claim the moral high ground on the backs of thousands trying to pick up the pieces in the wake of the earthquakes. The same is true for the plight of the millions of refugees from the war whose presence in Turkey and elsewhere is increasingly precarious because of mounting anti-migrant sentiment. That is not to say that Mr. Al-Assad should go scot-free. Nonetheless, the failure to defeat the Syrian regime, after 12 years in which it brutally prosecuted a war with the backing of Russia and Iran, suggests the time has come to think out of the box. The al-

ternative is maintaining a status quo that can claim the moral high ground but holds out no prospect of change or alleviation of the plight of millions of innocent people. To be sure, morality is not a concern of Arab regimes seeking to bring Mr. Al-Assad in from the cold. However, countering Iran and managing regional conflicts to prevent them from spinning out of control is. Even so, the Arab proposition potentially opens a way out of a quagmire. It would enhance the leverage of the United States and Europe to ensure that political reform is the cornerstone of Mr. Al-Assad’s engagement with elements of the Syrian opposition. In other words, rather than rejecting any solution that does not involve Mr. Al-Assad’s removal from power, the United States and Europe could lift sanctions contingent on agreement and implementation of reforms. Similarly, the US and Europe could make sanctions relief contingent on a safe, uninhibited, and orderly return of refugees. However, there would be questions about the ability and willingness of Arab forces loyal to autocratic regimes to safeguard that process impartially. US and European engagement with Arab proponents of dealing with Mr. Al-Assad would potentially also give them a seat on a train that has already left the station despite their objections. Ali Shamkani, the Iranian national security official who negotiated the deal with Saudi Arabia in Beijing, was in the UAE this week to meet President Mohammed bin Zayed. There is little doubt that Syria was on the two men’s agenda. Mr. Al-Assad met this weekend in Abu Dhabi with Mr. Bin Zayed for the second time in a year and traveled to Oman for talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq last month. The Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers recently trekked separately to Damascus for the first time since the civil war in Syria erupted in 2011. Perhaps, the most fundamental obstacle to the Arab proposition is not the fact that Syria, the United States, and Europe would have to swallow bitter pills. The prime obstacle is likely to be the Arab proponents of the plan. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan are unlikely to stick to their guns in presenting the plan as a package. Having taken the lead in cozying up to Mr. Al-Assad, the UAE has since last year demonstrated that it is willing to coax the Syrian leader to back away from

Iran at whatever cost to prospects for reform or alleviation of the plight of his victims. Saudi Arabia, like Qatar and several other Arab countries, initially opposed reconciliation but the kingdom has since embraced the notion of rehabilitation of Mr. Al-Assad. In early March, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud noted “that there is a consensus building in the Arab world, that the status quo is not tenable. And that means we have to find a way to move beyond that status quo.” Mr. Al-Saud insisted, however, that it was “too early” to discuss Syria’s return to the Arab League that groups the Middle East’s 22 Arab states. The League suspended Syrian membership in 2011 because of Mr. Al-Assad’s prosecution of the civil war. Even so, this puts the ball in the US and European courts. Much of the Arab proposition is about enticing the United States and Europe to be more accommodating and more inclined to a conditioned lifting of sanctions. The problem is that Mr. Al-Assad is likely to call the Arab states’ bluff in the knowledge that Iran is his trump card. A speedy in principle US and European embrace of the Arab proposition would hold Emirati and Saudi feet to the fire and put Mr. Al-Assad on the back foot. Thank you for joining me today. I hope you enjoyed the newsletter and/or podcast. Diplomats, policymakers, investors, executives, journalists and academics listen to my twice-weekly podcast and/or read my syndicated newsletter that is republished by media across the globe. Maintaining free distribution ensures that the podcast and newsletter have maximum impact. Paid subscribers help me cover the monthly cost of producing the newsletter and podcast. Please consider becoming a paid subscriber. You can do so by clicking on Substack on the subscription button at [www.jamesdorsey.substack.com](http://www.jamesdorsey.substack.com) and choosing one of the subscription options or support me on Patreon at [www.patreon.com/mideastsoccer](http://www.patreon.com/mideastsoccer). Please join me for my next podcast in the coming days. Thank you, take care and best wishes. —Dr. James M. Dorsey is an award-winning journalist and scholar, an Adjunct Senior Fellow at Nanyang Technological University’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and the author of the syndicated column and podcast, The Turbulent World with James M. Dorsey.

## A tale of two JITs..

Qamar Bashir

On a fateful day in July 2017, the Supreme Court declared three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif untruthful and untrustworthy for failing to declare his deemed income from his son, for whom he was an employee on paper. This decision was based on the findings of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) formed in 2017 to look into corruption allegations against Nawaz Sharif and his family in the Panama Papers case. This report provided the Supreme Court with much-needed fodder to disqualify Mr. Nawaz Sharif from holding public office, a decision that the court allegedly had already made on behalf of establishment but needed a shoulder from which to shoot its gun, which the JIT provided in the form of accusing Nawaz Sharif and his family members of several financial irregularities, including owning offshore companies and properties worth millions of dollars but not declaring them in their tax returns or wealth statements. According to the JIT report, Maryam Nawaz also submitted forged documents to prove the legality of the properties allegedly purchased by her family. Based on these findings, Pakistan’s Supreme Court barred Nawaz Sharif from holding public office and directed the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to charge him and his family members with corruption. The merit of the decision remained under discussion and criticism from many quarters. Nawaz Sharif who never accepted this decision termed it politically motivated and designed to weaken his party, legal experts argued that the Supreme Court had overstepped its bounds, and that the decision could set a dangerous precedent for future cases. This was not, however, the first time Nawaz had been deposed prematurely. He was removed from office in April 1993, citing corruption allegations. On October 12, 1999, he was deposed for the second time by a military coup on charges of corruption, hijacking, and terrorism. He was deposed for the third time in 2017 on failing to declare certain assets in his election nomination papers, barred from holding public office for life and was removed as leader of his political party. On July 6, 2018, he was sentenced to ten years in prison in the Avenfield corruption case and his daughter, Maryam Nawaz, was sentenced to seven years. In December 2019, Nawaz Sharif was granted bail on medical grounds and left Pakistan for medical treatment in London. The Islamabad High Court later revoked his bail in November 2020, and he was ordered to surrender to Pakistani authorities upon his return. Nawaz and Maryam both endured the decision and its consequences but neither forgave Imran nor Saqib Nisar. Recent events in Zaman Park provided them one in lifetime opportunity and both greedily grabbed it. Both did not waste a moment to charge Imran Khan as a terrorist and his party a terrorist party and without waiting a moment set up an JIT to investigate the charges having almost the same composition as that JIT which was formed against Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif’s posture during a recent interview demonstrated complete command. His body language and confidence in his voice clearly indicated that he was the mastermind behind the idea to use JIT as a proven tool to permanently fix Imran Khan. During his brief speech, he accused Imran Khan of harboring terrorists in his residence in Zaman Park,

Lahore, and instigating a petrol bomb attack on law enforcement agencies, as well as attacking the courts with a massive crowd mustered by him and his coteries on every occasion of his appearance before the court as a tool to intimidate the judges into making any unfavorable decision. He did not mince words when he stated that this was the first time in the country’s history that political party workers had attacked law enforcement agencies with petrol bombs. He seemed in a rush to use the JIT report to label Imran Khan a terrorist and the PTI a terrorist party. He referred to Imran Khan as “the country’s biggest liar and fraud, a terrorist, not a politician,” and vowed that after the JIT report, the world would realize Imran Khan was not only a liar, but also a fraudster and a terrorist. Why was a JIT formed against Imran Khan? Nawaz Sharif with his proven ability to keep the grudge alive and never forgive the enemy is now using the proven weapon against Imran Khan to declare him ineligible to hold any public office for life. Perhaps everything is falling into place now. From the government’s perspective, the strategy of encircling Imran Khan from all sides and then physically or politically eliminating him from national discourse is working. In his most recent interview with GEO, the interior minister stated emphatically that the purpose of filing over 100 FIRs against Imran Khan is to wear him down, chase him out, and embroil him in court in various parts of the country in order to divert his attention away from politics and arrest and fix him for eternity at the first available opportunity. Ms. Maryam has vowed not to hold elections in the country until there is a level playing field. The government is using all powers thankfully bestowed upon it by Imran Khan himself when he dissolved both the Provincial assemblies of Punjab and, later, KP provinces, and willingly handed over his power bases to the government, leaving him vulnerable to attack without any administrative or security cover. Now that the PML(N) and its allies are fully empowered in the center and provinces, they can pursue Imran Khan in any direction they want. One million dollar question however remained unanswered, why did Imran Khan dissolve the assemblies? did he made an error of judgment, did he fell willingly in the trap laid down by the government, when they offer his a bait that once the provincial assemblies are dissolved, the country would automatically enter into election mode and once they installed their own stooges as governors and chief ministers, they conveniently forgot about it and delayed the elections even at the cost of violating the constitutional provisions which necessitate holding of election with 90 days. Or, was this his most calculated and daring move, albeit full of risks, but he perhaps knows very well that the bigger the risk, the bigger the reward. During our discussions in the Presidency, most of our colleagues described Imran Khan’s decision to dissolve the assemblies as hasty, lacking political wisdom, premature, and illogical. They believed that by doing so, he had rendered himself completely vulnerable and defenseless against administrative and political attacks by the government, which allegedly had the full blessing and support of the deep state. Other colleagues, however, were of the opinion that, while Imran Khan will pay dearly for his bold and unexpected decision, this is what great leaders do. If they make decisions based on common logic and common wisdom, they should become followers rather than leaders. Imran Khan’s decision to put himself in danger was an excellent political maneuver, but how? The ultimate goal of all leaders and political parties is to gain power, preferably

with a two-thirds majority, in order to put their manifesto into action and bring prosperity and progress to the country. This is only possible if the leader or political party has widespread public support. This was what exactly Imran Khan gained after he sacrificed his assemblies. Now he is enjoying widespread public support and sympathy from people all over the country and the world. In one of his interviews, when Hassan Nisar, a veteran journalist was asked, which one is the most popular political party, he replied in his usual candid style that PTI is currently holding first, second and third place, PPPP is holding fourth place and PML(N) fifth place all other political analysts and thinkers share the same opinion. On the other hand, all constituent parties of PDM are discredited due to allegations of corruption, mismanagement of the economy, and for the reason d’ tre of skyrocketing inflation, price hikes, rising rates of unemployment, historic depreciation of the currency, rising wave of terrorism, rockbottom industrial and agricultural growth which has lead to their total annihilation of public support and impending election defeat, prompting the government to launch all out offensive to eliminate Imran once of all and win back the country from his clutches and dole it out to their upcoming generation. But what if their goal of eliminating Imran proved elusive and will the newly constituted JIT serve the purpose? Let’s take a look at the chessboard. The government has all power pieces, including governments in all provinces and the center, the Election Commission, civil and military bureaucracy, and government resources to win people’s support and sympathy, as well as the combined political capital of thirteen political parties, but they lack pawns. Imran Khan, on the other hand, has nothing but pawns, both his own and those of the government. The government appeared to be in an advantageous position with power pieces, but the game is not over yet, as the player with the pawns can still use them strategically to block the power pieces and control key squares on the board. Furthermore, the player with the power pieces must be careful not to expose their king to attack while focusing on capturing the opponent’s pawns. Imran Khan’s unconventional and risky moves have perplexed his opponents, who are accustomed to taking conventional and traditional moves devoid of creativity and foresight and expect the same from their political opponents. His ability to manage seemingly illogical decisions and convert them into success and ultimately winning the game is exceptionally well and proven, leaving his opponents in total disarray, helpless and incapable of making any cogent move to neutralize his non conventional and non traditional moves. So far, so good; he has dealt with over 100 FIRs filed against him, successfully defeating and neutralizing many audio and video leaks to defame and discredit him, wriggling out of toshakhana, foreign funding and the Tyrian Jade Khan White case, and prudently providing defense to contempt of court cases. But how would he counter the latest JIT weapon, which has been assigned the task of declaring him a terrorist and his party a terrorist party? Perhaps he will blunt the JIT weapon in the same manner he has blunted the other weapons by the intelligent, smart and unconventional use of pawns to first contain the power pieces and later neutralize them one by one. He is immune to any political attack by the government due to his wise use of people’s power. The government has realised that it is impossible to defeat him politically, and going to elections at this point of time when Imran Khan is riding on the high tides of popularity would be suicidal therefore it has chose to apply conventional solutions to first delay the elections, buy time, bait

Imran Khan with additional temptations, incentivize him to make mistakes and then use the state power to arrest and eliminate him for political chessboard as, many other politicians were eliminated including first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan who was assassinated in 1951 while he was attending a public meeting in Rawalpindi, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was executed in 1979 after being convicted of conspiracy to murder a political opponent, Benazir Bhutto, who served as Prime Minister twice before she was assassinated in 2007 while she was campaigning for the upcoming general elections, Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, who was assassinated in 2011 by his own security guard for his opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, was assassinated in 2011 for his vocal opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws and Imran Farooq, a senior leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), was assassinated in London in 2010. Is the formation of JIT one step towards achieving this goal? Or Imran will blunt this weapon as well with his unconventional and surprise moves. Imran, who is riding unprecedented waves of popularity, is unlikely to slow down, no matter what weapon the government has at its disposal. Unlike other politicians who use politics to protect their vested interests and pass on their legacy to future generations, Imran has nothing to lose; he is capable of raising billions by campaigning for a greater cause, his philanthropic contributions are unparalleled, and, most importantly, he has no legacy to which he can pass on his political career. This is both a hot and cold fact. Hot because if he is removed, there will be no one to carry on his vision and passion, and his party, which he has spent over thirty years building, will likely be destroyed in no time. If he lives long enough, he will be able to serve another term in office before succumbing to aging. This leaves him with only five productive years to turn his vision into reality, and if the bus passes without him becoming prime minister in the next general election, he will most likely continue to give any government a difficult time for the next five to ten years, leaving the field exclusively for old timers and their political heirs. Perhaps the government parties are aware of this reality, so it is a matter of life and death for them to disqualify him from running for public office in the upcoming general elections, and the formation of the JIT brings them one step closer to achieving this goal. Unfortunately, in this elephant war, the people of the country are being trampled mercilessly and without remorse by all those responsible for bringing the country to the brink of collapse. They are still settling personal vendettas against each other, fully charged with settling the score at the expense of the country’s financial and economic health and making the people struggle to make ends meet. There will be no stopping the march to annihilation and total destruction. We are all aware that the solution to the country’s quagmire lies in keeping national interests supreme, which primarily lies in upholding the constitution regardless of what happens. This simple solution is too difficult and impossible to implement when decisions are made to protect personal interests at the expense of violating the constitution, putting the country in dire economic and financial straits with no way out. And perhaps this JIT is also a good tool for settling personal scores while ignoring the risk of sending the country into another dangerous spiral.

—The writer is the Former Press Secretary to the President Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France



## Briefs

PM terms  
Alvi's letter  
as PTI's PR

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defend the constitution and ensure that the fundamental rights guaranteed to the citizens of Pakistan were not violated. "However, our government is also determined to ensure that no one is allowed to violate the law, create unrest and attempts to cause irreparable harm to the state of Pakistan. I want to further assure you that our government will thwart any efforts to undermine the constitutionally elected government," he added.

Further responding to reference made in the president's letter of Article 46 of the Constitution and Rule 15 (5) of the Rules of Business, 1973 regarding holding of meaningful consultations between the president and prime minister, he said, the objection was out of place. Under clause (1) of the Article 48, the president, in exercise of his functions, must act on and in accordance with the advice of the cabinet or the prime minister, he added. The prime minister noted "In very limited instances, the President acts in his discretion under the Constitution. Article 46 and Rule 15 (5) (b) supra are what they ordain. That, is, keep the President informed. Nothing more and nothing less. These provisions or for that matter nothing else in the Constitution requires the Prime Minister to consult the President on the exercise of executive authority by the Federal Government."

Regarding the president's reference to holding of elections, the prime minister maintained that the ECP had announced October 8 as the new date for polls in Punjab after taking into account the ground realities. All the federal and provincial government authorities furnished the relevant information to the ECP, he said, adding being the constitutional body, charged with the duty to organize and conduct elections, it was ultimately, the ECP's decision to assess circumstances for organizing and conducting free and fair elections as required under clause (3) of Article 218.

PTI moves  
IHC to halt  
ECP action

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The PTI argued that the electoral body had denied the party an opportunity to present an effective defence by refusing to re-evaluate evidence and treating the show-cause action as an indivisible process. The petition highlighted that the commission was also requested to summon the witnesses who collected evidence. The PTI stated that the commission's decision to reject the petition concerning the legality of the show-cause notice violated the fundamental rights.

Russia to  
station  
nukes...

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Alexander Lukashenko had long raised the issue of stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. "There is nothing unusual here either," he said. "Firstly, the United States has been doing this for decades. They have long deployed their tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of their allied countries." Russia will start training crews to operate the weapons from next week. The construction of a storage facility for tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus will be completed by 1 July, President Putin added.

NATO slams  
'irresponsible'  
nuclear...

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and Ukraine called for a meeting of the UN Security Council in response. While Washington, the world's other nuclear superpower, played down concerns about Putin's announcement, NATO said the Russian president's non-proliferation pledge and his description of U.S. weapons deployment overseas were way off the mark. "Russia's reference to NATO's nuclear sharing is totally misleading. NATO allies act with full respect of their international commitments," a NATO spokesperson said in emailed comments to Reuters on Sunday.

Pressure growing on Netanyahu  
to pause judicial overhaul

Gallant's statement was welcomed by senior Likud lawmaker David Bitan and also a junior Likud lawmaker, Eli Dalal, who spoke last week in favor of suspending the legislation. But it was not clear if they or others in Likud might abstain in a ratification vote

## NEWS DESK

TEL AVIV: Top lawmakers from Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party have backed the regime's minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant's call to halt the controversial judicial overhaul, fearing that the parliamentary majority could be eroded.

On Sunday, Yuli Edelstein, a Likud lawmaker who chairs the Knesset's Foreign Affairs Committee, called on the cabinet to slow down the legislative push to enable discussion and revisions. "We don't want to bury the reforms, but bringing it to a vote before it is clear that there is support for it would be adventurism that is best avoided," Edelstein said. On Saturday, Gallant called

on the regime's far-right cabinet to halt the legislation for several weeks, saying the bitter dispute it has caused is posing a threat to the occupying regime itself. Gallant said Netanyahu needs to hold talks with the opposition and asked it to wait until after the Jewish Passover holiday, which begins on April 5, before pushing ahead with the judicial changes. His statement indicated the first crack in Netanyahu's coalition, the most right-wing cabinet in Israel. A stance that received public support from two other Likud politicians and the reported backing of a third, while others in the party castigated him and National Security Minister, Ben Gvir, demanded that he be fired. Gallant's statement was welcomed by senior Likud lawmaker David

Bitan and also a junior Likud lawmaker, Eli Dalal, who spoke last week in favor of suspending the legislation. But it was not clear if they or others in Likud might abstain in a ratification vote. "As I already said several weeks ago, the legislation should be stopped and immediate negotiations should be started and broad agreements should be reached. I back the words of my friend the defense minister," Bitan said. Earlier Saturday, it was reported that Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter spoke with Netanyahu and other Likud MKs, asking to stop the judicial overhaul bills until after April 26. With a solid majority of 64 out of 120 in parliament, the coalition would still have enough votes without Gallant and three others, unless more lawmakers back

down from the proposed changes. Moreover, on Thursday, Netanyahu said that he would get personally involved in the controversial package of measures to overhaul the country's judicial system. He also said it would vote to pass next week the bill to put key Supreme Court appointments, including its presidency, directly in coalition control. He also vowed that his cabinet remained determined to "responsibly advance the ... reform that will restore the proper balance between the authorities." Netanyahu, who returned early on Sunday from a visit to London, did not immediately comment on the dissent in his party. Mass protests have gripped the Zionist regime since it announced its proposed judicial reforms in January. Tens of thousands of

demonstrators have faced off against police in the streets weekly. The latest protest against the plan saw tens of thousands rally in Tel Aviv on Saturday. Local media estimated 200,000 people turned out for the demonstration. The Israeli regime has been pushing for changes that would limit the Supreme Court's powers to rule against the legislative and executive branches of government and give coalition lawmakers more power in appointing judges. Critics say the changes will weaken the courts and hand unbridled power to the regime, endangering rights and liberties with catastrophic effects on the economy. They also fear Netanyahu wants to leverage the judicial push to freeze or void his trial on corruption charges, which he denies.

'Will Imran  
accept  
results if...

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the elections. The PML-N stalwart said that there is no other way to steer the country out of the crisis but the holding elections for political stability. She also reiterated that the elections will be held only after the scales of justice are balanced. Berating the former prime minister — who was ousted via a parliamentary vote in April last year — Maryam claimed that Khan was brought into power through "facilitators". Those who brought him into power, later realised they committed a big mistake, she added. Turning her guns towards the judiciary, she said that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted from office for not taking salaries from his son. In July 2017, Nawaz Sharif stepped down as the prime minister after being disqualified from holding public office by the Supreme Court in a landmark decision on the Panama Papers case. Announcing its verdict, the five-member bench unanimously disqualified Nawaz for failing to disclose his un-withdrawn receivables constituting assets from UAE-based Capital FZE in his nominations papers for the 2013 General Election, stating that this meant he was not 'honest' and 'truthful', as per the Constitution.

PTI slams  
PM's 'ill  
response'...

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rally on Saturday night adding that the entire country was standing beside PTI chief Imran Khan. "All ways leading to Minar-e-Pakistan were blocked using containers and we cannot find an equivalence to this government's oppression", he added. People were being captured from Lahore and termed "missing persons", he said, and FIA was serving notices on them. He alluded that he had not witnessed the worse treatment of political workers adding that women were being harassed inside their homes. "We cannot tolerate such ill-treatment", he added. He went on to say that so far six persons had died in the pursuit of obtaining subsidized flour bags imploring where they [the government] had brought this country to. "The incumbent government will drag down the country to the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list again", he added. Oil prices had decreased in the international market, he said, but they increased in Pakistan. He said politics was defined as trekking forward after looking into others' arguments adding that the way the government was moving forward had given rise to a big crisis in the country. "You are so afraid that you are distancing yourself from elections and all eyes are on the Supreme Court", he added.

Palestine  
condemns  
Israeli...

FROM PAGE 01

Al-Haram Al-Sharif is place of Muslim worship, protected and preserved by the historic and internationally recognized status-quo and under sole authority of the Islamic Waqf and the custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Israel is an occupying Power and has no rightful claim or sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem, including its Holy Sites. Worshipers have the right to pray in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif, whenever and in accordance with Islamic practices. Israel's militarization and attempts to upend hundreds of years of Islamic traditions is clearly aimed at spatial and temporal division of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and to impose its control. Israel's criminalization of Ramadan celebrations and social and cultural assemblies in Jerusalem is an attack on Palestinian polity and existence. We call on the international community to ensure that Israel, the occupying Powers, adheres to its obligations under international law. We also call on international community to reaffirm its rejection of and non-recognition of any Israeli claims of sovereignty over any part of Palestine, including in Jerusalem, and over its Holy Sites.

Rybakina rallies past Badosa,  
Potapova upsets Gauff

MIAMI: : Elena Rybakina kept her "Sunshine Double" hopes alive as she battled from the brink to beat Paul Badosa in the Miami Open third round on Saturday, while Russian Anastasia Potapova upset Coco Gauff in three sets. Wimbledon champion Rybakina, fresh off her Indian Wells triumph last week, calmly saved a match point on serve in the second set and fired 60 winners, including a dozen aces, as she earned a gutsy 3-6 7-5 6-3 win. Rybakina, who also had to go the distance in her opening match against Anna Kalinskaya, struggled to find her rhythm on serve in the opening set but wrestled back momentum in the second. After being broken four times in the first set, Rybakina held her serve in all but one game in the remainder of the contest and confidently closed out victory in two hours and 31 minutes. "It didn't start well in the first set but in the end I just found some energy," Rybakina said. "I was trying to push more on the serve and started to move better on the court. It was a really tough battle. "I was trying to focus on every point because the first set didn't go my way. But it was just a few mistakes here and

there. Overall, I played well. Paula was serving well. Just happy that I was able to manage in three sets." Russian 27th seed Potapova produced some of her best tennis to see off world number six Gauff in a 6-7(8) 7-5 6-2 win and set up a meeting with China's Zheng Qinwen. Potapova mounted a stout defense to fend off 10 of 13 break points and grinned widely as she fired down an unreturnable serve to secure the win. Up 5-2 in the first set, it looked as though it might be an easy day for Potapova. But Gauff turned the tables when she converted break point chances in the ninth and 11th games and closed the tiebreak with a lethal backhand. Potapova regained her composure in the second set and pummeled her opponent with her mighty forehand as she broke serve in the penultimate game and dropped only one first-serve point as she won the final five games. On the men's side, Indian Wells runner-up Daniil Medvedev breezed past Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena 6-1 6-2 in just over an hour to reach the third round, where he will face Alex Molcan of Slovakia. — APP

MIAMI: Britain's top ranked duo Cameron Norrie and Dan Evans have been knocked out of the Miami Open in the second round. British number one Norrie, ranked 12th in the world, suffered a 6-3 6-2 defeat by France's world number 65 Gregoire Barrere. Evans, seeded 23 and ranked 30 places higher than Lorenzo Sonego, was beaten 6-4 3-6 2-6 by the Italian. They were among a number of seeds who went out of the tournament on Saturday in both the men's and women's draws. Alex de Minaur and Matteo Berrettini exited, but the biggest casualty was women's sixth seed Coco Gauff, who lost to Russian

Anastasia Potapova. Australian De Minaur, the 15th seed, suffered an agonising 6-7 (5-7) 7-6 (7-3) 7-6 (10-8) defeat by Quentin Halys, the world number 79 from France. Italian Berrettini, seeded 19, had a similar close encounter, losing 7-6 (10-8) 7-6 (7-5) to American Mackenzie McDonald. Italian Lorenzo Musetti was the third of the men's top 20 seeds to

fall as he was beaten 6-4 6-4 by in-form Czech Jiri Lehecka. Norrie's opponent Barrere will face Christopher Eubanks in the third round after the American qualifier, ranked 119th in the world, recorded the biggest win of his career by knocking out Croatian Borna Coric, seeded 17, 3-6 6-4 6-2. In the women's singles, Belarussian Victoria Azarenka,

seeded 14, was beaten 7-6 (7-3) 2-6 6-4 by Poland's Magda Linette. Meanwhile, fourth seed Daniil Medvedev, who lost last week's Indian Wells final to Carlos Alcaraz, cruised past Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena 6-1 6-2. Poland's eighth seed Hubert Hurkacz saved five match points before beating Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-7 (12-10) 7-6

(9-7) 7-6 (8-6) in a match lasting three-and-a-half hours, while 12th seed Frances Tiafoe came from a set down to beat Japanese qualifier Yosuke Watanuki 6-7 (7-5) 7-6 (7-3) 6-4. Canadian fifth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime progressed with victory over Brazil's Thiago Monteiro on two tie-breaks, while women's third seed Jessica Pegula swept aside fellow American Danielle Collins 6-1 7-6 (7-0). Kazakhstan's recent Indian Wells champion Elena Rybakina continued her fine form with a 3-6 7-5 6-3 victory against Spain's Paula Badosa, having saved a match point in the second set. — Agencies

Norrie, Evans out as  
seeds fall in Miami

## Francesco Bagnaia wins Portuguese MotoGP sprint

"I spent a lot of energy. It was only 12 laps, but we did an extraordinary job today," said Marquez, whose career has stalled after undergoing four surgeries in recent seasons

## DNA

PORTUGAL: World champion Francesco Bagnaia said winning MotoGP's first ever sprint race at a bruising Portuguese Grand Prix on Saturday was "quite fun" but 2021 title winner Fabio Quartararo blasted the new format as "dangerous" and a "jungle". Bagnaia came home ahead of fellow Ducati rider Jorge Martin with Honda's pole-sitter Marc Marquez in third. This was the inaugural sprint in an innovation that will see the riders contest a fast and furious 12-lap race for half the points awarded for Sunday's showpiece event. A sprint will precede every

race of the 21-event calendar in 2023. "It was quite fun," said 26-year-old Bagnaia. "It was more intense as it was shorter than a race. We had new tyres, fewer laps so you can push more." "I am happy for today as it was a target to finish in the top three so it's a good feeling." However, Yamaha rider Quartararo, who became France's first ever MotoGP world champion in 2021, predicted more crashes over the forthcoming season. "I don't like it at all, it's dangerous but if we're not aggressive, we lose places," said Quartararo. "It's a jungle, we're not in cars where it's much safer and where contact is less

of a problem. Physically it's going to be tough, in (a full race distance) 25 laps you have a little bit more time." This first sprint race in Mo-

toGP history was marked by a shuddering collision between Italian riders Enea Bastianini of Ducati and Luca Marini of the satellite

Ducati-VR46 team. Bastianini, 25 and nicknamed 'The Beast', suffered a broken collarbone and will sit out Sunday's season-opener and next weekend's Argentina race. Honda's Joan Mir, the 2020 world champion, was also a non-finisher on Saturday after clashing with Quartararo who ended the day in 10th spot. The crashes came a day after Spanish veteran Pol Espargaro was hospitalised with "severe spinal trauma" following a crash in practice. The high-speed crash suffered by 31-year-old Espargaro on his KTM Tech3 GASGAS bike caused a long interruption to the session which eventually finished around two hours late.

Marquez, a six-time MotoGP world champion, had surprisingly started from his 64th career pole position ahead of Bagnaia and Martin having struggled in Friday practice where he also crashed out. "I spent a lot of energy. It was only 12 laps, but we did an extraordinary job today," said Marquez, whose career has stalled after undergoing four surgeries in recent seasons. "Tomorrow is the most important race of the weekend, it will be more difficult." Despite his reservations, Marquez will still start Sunday's race from pole position where he will seek his 60th premier class victory but first since October 2021.





## Briefs

At least 23  
dead after  
storms in US

WASHINGTON: At least 23 people died after powerful storms and a tornado swept across the U.S. state of Mississippi, authorities said on Saturday. "We can confirm 23 dead, dozens injured, four missing due to last night's tornadoes," the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency tweeted. "Unfortunately, these numbers are expected to change," the agency wrote, adding that numerous local and state search and rescue teams continued to work this morning. Thunderstorms battered Mississippi late Friday night, with a tornado reported in the area of Silver City and Rolling Fork, according to the U.S. National Weather Service (NWS). "Cleanup is already underway as devastating storms impacted the south overnight," the NWS tweeted Saturday morning. "Please be wary that dangers remain even after the storms move on." Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves said the state has activated medical support in order to supply more ambulances and other emergency assets for those affected. "Search and rescue are active," Reeves continued. —APP

Hungary sick  
of West's  
criticism: FM

BUDAPEST: Hungary is sick of western critique, the country's foreign minister has said. In an interview with the AP, Hungarian FM Peter Szijarto said the West's criticism of democratic and cultural issues in Hungary hampers cooperation, especially on NATO and Russia. Budapest and Brussels have crossed swords on several issues in recent years, with the ruling far-right Fidesz party accused of taking an authoritarian turn, misusing EU funds and subverting the bloc's policy towards the Ukraine war. On Friday, Szijarto said Hungary has not voted on whether to allow Finland and Sweden to join NATO because Hungarian lawmakers are fed up with their comments about its domestic affairs. Hungarian MPs plan to vote in favour of Finland's request to join the western military alliance next week, despite "serious concerns" about the "very disrespectful behaviour of the political elites" in Helsinki and Stockholm, he said. —DNA

2,000 ram  
heads  
unearth in  
Egypt temple

CAIRO: Archaeologists in Egypt have discovered more than 2,000 ancient mummified sheep heads left as offerings in a temple to the pharaoh Ramses II, the tourism and antiquities ministry said Sunday. Mummies of dogs, goats, cows, gazelles and mon-gooses were also exhumed by a team of US archaeologists from New York University at Abydos, a site in southern Egypt famous for its temples and tombs. Sameh Iskandar, head of the American mission, said the ram heads were "offerings" indicating "a cult to Ramses II celebrated 1,000 years after his death". Ramses II reigned over Egypt for nearly seven decades, from 1304 to 1237 BC. —APP

Turkmenistan stages  
parliamentary elections

Turkmenistan remains one of the world's most closed-off countries, and according to Reporters Without Borders ranks 177th out of 180 countries for press freedom; No election has been judged free or fair by Western poll observers

ASHGABAT: Parliamentary polls were held on Sunday in Turkmenistan, a gas-rich nation ruled by one family for nearly two decades that does not tolerate political dissent or a free press. The vote is the first under the Central Asian nation's new president, who took power following a hereditary succession in March 2022, and comes after the abolition of the legislature's upper house and the creation of a supreme body. Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic, is one of the world's most repressive, secretive states and little is known about how the

regime makes day-to-day decisions. No election has been judged free or fair by Western poll observers. President Serdar Berdimukhamedov reassured voters, saying: "These elections will take place according to democratic principles, in line with local legislation and international law." But with no opposition taking part in the vote, voter enthusiasm appeared limited. "I don't know the platform of the candidates," admitted retired 65-year-old Agamurad Biachimov before the ballot. "Unfortunately I've not seen posters anywhere urging people to

vote," he told AFP in Ashgabat. It is difficult to find information about any policies, just the biographies of the 258 candidates listed in the "Turkmenistan Neutral", the successor newspaper to the old communist party daily in Soviet times. Achir Ovezov, who works at Ashgabat's market, said he would not be voting. "I have to work day and night to feed my family and I don't know the candidates," he said. But his absence is unlikely to stop the official turnout nearing 90 percent. Former dentist and health minister Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov came to power

in 2006, succeeding the country's founding president Saparmurat Niyazov after his death. Berdimukhamedov, who established a strong cult of personality during his tenure, handed the reins over to his son Serdar last year after a token snap election, but kept his position as chair of the upper house of parliament. "I watched the inauguration of the president, a lot of people were expecting major reforms from the new president," said entrepreneur Maksat Redjenov. "We expected new factories to be built, the country to open up,

the arrival of tourists, that state control would ease," he told AFP. In January, Berdimukhamedov senior, aged 65, proposed abolishing the upper house – created at his request in 2021 – and set up after a unanimous vote "a supreme representative body of people's power", the Halk Maslahaty or "People's Council". Also called Arkadag or "Protector", he was named head of the new body and observers say he remains the real power. The new council's remit covers the main directions of Turkmenistan's domestic and foreign policy, overshadowing the unicameral na-

tional assembly and its 125 members. Since stepping down, Berdimukhamedov has met several foreign leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin last year, and a new city is being built in his honour. Turkmenistan remains one of the world's most closed-off countries, and according to Reporters Without Borders ranks 177th out of 180 countries for press freedom, ahead of Iran, Eritrea and North Korea. Officially the nation recorded not a single case of Covid-19. Its economy depends hugely on gas exports to China and to a lesser extent Russia and Iran. —APP

Greece stresses 'positive  
turn' in relations with Ankara

## DNA

ATHENS: Greece underlined a recent "positive turn" in relations with Türkiye in the wake of disasters in both countries. This new reality is reflected in the countries' joint statement following the fourth Meeting of the Positive Agenda in the Turkish capital Ankara on March 22 and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's recent meet-

ing in Brussels with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias, said Dendias. Speaking to Greek daily Proto Thema, Dendias said the rapprochement in bilateral ties was caused by Ankara's new attitude towards Athens. Though the Greek government is fully aware of the difficulties in relations, he said: "We have an obligation to respond to such Turkish behavior accordingly."

"It would be unforgivable on the Greek side

not to attempt to utilize this change," Dendias said, adding: "Greece has an absolute duty to step through the door Türkiye has opened." Greece was among the first countries to convey condolences and offer aid on Feb. 6, when twin quakes struck 11 southern Turkish provinces. Likewise, Türkiye was the first country to offer condolences and aid following a Feb. 28 train accident in northern Greece that left at least 57 people

dead. After the accident, Türkiye allowed the transfer of a Greek prisoner to Greece to attend his son's funeral. On March 20, Cavusoglu and Dendias met in Brussels and agreed that Türkiye will support Greece's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2025-2026 and Athens will support Ankara's candidacy for secretary general of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Russia took  
Minsk as 'nuclear  
hostage': Kyiv

KYIV: Kyiv on Sunday said Russia took Minsk as a "nuclear hostage" after President Vladimir Putin announced the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, bringing the arms to a country at the gates of the European Union. Putin, who has issued thinly veiled warnings that Russia could use nuclear weapons if threatened, said the move was similar to the United States transferring weapons to allies. "The Kremlin took Belarus as a nuclear hostage," the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, wrote on Twitter. He added that the move was "a step towards the internal destabilization of the country". On Saturday, Putin announced Russia would station tactical nuclear weapons to neighbour and ally Belarus "without violating our international agreements on nuclear non-proliferation". Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak on Sunday accused the Russian leader of breaching such obligations. "Putin admits that he is afraid of losing and all he can do is scare" people, Podolyak also said on Twitter. Strongman Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power in Belarus for almost 30 years, is a key Putin ally. Back in February 2022, Minsk allowed the Kremlin to launch its invasion of Ukraine from Belarusian territory. Fears have since risen that Belarus may join its ally's offensive, but Lukashenko said he would do so "only if attacked". In an interview broadcasted Saturday, Putin said the move to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus was "nothing unusual". "The United States has been doing this for decades. They have long placed their tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of their allies," Putin said. Putin said he spoke to Lukashenko and said "we agreed to do the same." Russia will start training crews on April 3 and plans to finish the construction of a special storage facility for tactical nuclear weapons by July 1. Putin has previously said nuclear tensions were "rising" globally but that Moscow would not deploy first. The Russian leader said renewed discussions with Lukashenko on the issue were spurred by a British official's suggestion to send depleted uranium weapons to Ukraine. Russia will respond if the West supplied Ukraine with such ammunition, he added. —APP

US declares  
emergency in  
Mississippi

NEW YORK: US President Joe Biden on Sunday issued an emergency declaration for the state of Mississippi after the destruction wreaked by deadly tornadoes and severe storms. At least 25 people were killed and dozens more injured as powerful tornadoes and storms ripped through Mississippi on Friday night. One more person was killed in the neighboring state of Alabama. A White House statement said Biden's decision will make "federal funding available to affected individuals in the counties of Carroll, Humphreys, Monroe, and Sharkey." The four counties were the worst-hit areas and account for all of the fatalities reported, according to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. Biden has appointed John Boyle, coordinating officer of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to "coordinate federal recovery operations in the affected areas," the statement said. "Damage assessments are continuing in other areas, and more counties and additional forms of assistance may be designated after the assessments are fully completed," it added. —DNA

Kenya police  
bans new  
opposition  
protests

NAIROBI: Kenya's police chief announced a ban on fresh opposition demonstrations called for Monday, after protests last week degenerated into riots. "We will not allow violent demonstrations," Inspector General of Police Japhet Koombe told reporters on Sunday. "The demonstrations they plan tomorrow (Monday) are illegal and will not be allowed," he said, adding that his force was ready to keep the peace and would arrest anyone carrying offensive weapons. But veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga, who has called for people to take to the streets on Monday and Thursday against President William Ruto over the high cost of living, remained defiant. "I am asking our supporters and all Kenyans to come out and join the peaceful demonstrations," he said at a church service on Sunday. "I want to tell Mr Ruto and the IG Koombe that we are not going to be intimidated," he said. "We are not going to fear tear gas and police." Last Monday's demonstrations – which were also not authorised by police – descended into violence, with riot police firing tear gas and water cannon at people hurling rocks and setting tyres ablaze. A university student was killed by police fire while 31 officers were injured in running battles in Nairobi and opposition strongholds in western Kenya, according to police. More than 200 people were arrested, including several senior opposition politicians, while Odinga's own convoy was hit with tear gas and water cannon. "You all saw what happened last week and we won't allow that to happen again, where hooligans come to town to loot and destroy people's property and businesses," Koombe said. It was the first major political violence since Ruto took office six months ago after beating Odinga in an election his rival claims was "stolen". Many Kenyans are struggling to put food on the table, battling high prices for basic goods, a plunging local currency. —Agencies

Armenia intentionally  
jeopardizing peace push

BAKU: Azerbaijan has accused Armenia of trying to "purposefully disrupt the peace process" and endangering regional stability, as tensions grow over Armenian military movements in Karabakh. An Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry statement on Saturday said its military has taken "appropriate control measures" near the Lachin road to prevent illegal Armenian activities and "potential provocations." "The recent provocations by Armenia demonstrate that in order to prevent illegal activities in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan, it is necessary to establish a border control checkpoint between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the end point of the Lachin road," the ministry said. It reiterated that Armenia has "intensified" military movements, including transport of personnel, weapons and other equip-

ment, through Azerbaijani territories where Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed. "In addition, in the last days, the activation of illegal road construction works by Armenians on the Khankendi-Khalfali-Turshu road and Khankendi-Kosalar-Mirzeler-Turshu road that passes north of this route was recorded by relevant means of surveillance," the statement said. "Despite numerous appeals from the Azerbaijani side and discussions held in this regard, no necessary measures have been taken to prevent the transportation of weapons and other military equipment." The ministry also referred to the March 5 killing of two Azerbaijani soldiers, who were shot dead by Armenian forces when they tried to stop vehicles for an inspection on the Khankendi-Khalfali-Turshu road. —Agencies

SBP warned of further  
jump in key policy rate

## NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) on Sunday warned the Central Bank of any further jump in the key policy rate in the upcoming Monetary Policy next month, as the economic crisis continued to deepen due to wrong economic policies amidst record highest markup rate in the region.

FPCCI former President and Businessmen Panel (BMP) chairman, Mian Anjum Nisar said that already unprecedented inflation and high mark-up rate have drastically reduced private sector borrowings during the first quarter of

the current fiscal year. He said that the central bank raised its key interest rate by 300 basis points, exceeding investor expectations, as the cash-strapped country attempts to encourage the International Monetary Fund to release critical funding. The key rate of the State Bank of Pakistan now stands at 20%, its highest level since October 1996. Now there are reports that the SBP would raise the interest rate by another 2 percent at the upcoming meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to unlock the stalled IMF loan program. The Businessmen Panel (BMP) chief suggested the Central Bank to adopt an accommodative monetary policy stance, asking the finance minister

to fulfill his commitment of reining in inflation besides cutting interest rate and strengthening the undervalued local currency against dollar. Demanding competitive interest rate at regional countries' level, he said that the SBP's stance of keeping monetary policy rate at 17% was already high compared to the markup rate of China, India and Bangladesh. Yet, the central bank jacked up the key policy rate by another 300 basis points to 20% in last monetary policy, leading to the crash of economy, which will remain bearish until announcement of next Policy announcement. The hike in the interest rate by 300 basis points by the State Bank during the auction of T-bills has increased

investors' problems. In addition, there is a fear of further hike in the interest rate in the monetary policy announcement on 2nd April because of which there is constantly selling pressure in the market, he added. He said that expectation of further monetary tightening and high current account deficit had sparked panic selling across the board, leading to the capital market's massive tragedy. Mian Anjum Nisar said that the SBP had brought forward its policy meeting from an original date of March 16, saying the rate hike was a key requirement to get the IMF funding released. In its last policy meeting in January the bank raised the rate by 100 bps to 17%.

## MoU signed to protect environment in CPEC

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to protect environment in CPEC-related projects, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. It will help strengthening research, technical support and policy influencing to take into consideration the ecological, biodiversity protection and environmental concerns in development projects under the CPEC. The cooperation between SDPI and WWF-Pakistan also aimed to bridge the gaps in policies of environmental protection, and ecological and biodiversity conservation during the planning and execution of infrastructure projects and reinforce green transition



in infrastructure development in CPEC projects. Dr Shafqat Munir, Deputy Executive Director, SDPI said that the cooperation between SDPI and WWF stems from the keen interest of both organizations in environment and conservation strategies. He expressed that the formalization of this cooper-

ation will pave new ways for both organizations to collaborate in different areas of research and extend technical support to public institutions. He further said that energy, transport and agriculture contribute the major carbon footprint and both organizations can play a critical role in advocating the case of climate finance

onwards to COP28 and beyond to support the green transition in these areas. Rab Nawaz, Senior Director of Conservation and Biodiversity, WWF-Pakistan said that "Pakistan is at the crossroads of climate change and today's actions will determine if Pakistan is going to emerge as the Climate Champion.

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# Briefs

# IMF chief warns risks to financial stability have increased

DNA

NEW YORK: International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Kristalina Georgieva warned on Sunday that risks to financial stability had increased and stressed "the need for vigilance" following the recent turmoil in the banking sector. Speaking at a forum in Beijing, the IMF managing director said she expected 2023 "to be another challenging year", with global growth slowing to below 3.0 per cent due the war in Ukraine, monetary tightening and "scarring" from the pandemic. "Uncertainties are exceptionally high," with the outlook for the global economy likely to remain weak over the medium term, she told the China Development Forum.

"It is also clear that risks to financial stability have increased," she added. "At a time of higher debt levels, the rapid transition from a prolonged period of low interest rates to much higher rates – necessary to fight inflation – inevitably generates stresses and vulnerabilities, as evidenced by recent developments in banking sector in some advanced economies."

Imran's  
nephew  
handed over to  
Punjab police

QUETTA: A local court in Quetta on Sunday handed over Hassan Khan Niazi, the nephew of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan, to the Punjab Police on transit remand. After the court passed the order, the Punjab Police took the PTI chief's nephew and reportedly left for Lahore. The Punjab home department had written a letter to the Balochistan home department for the extradition of Niazi. Imran's nephew was then produced before the judicial magistrate. Talking to the media, Niazi's lawyer Iqbal Shah told the media that the party chairman's nephew was granted bail a day earlier, stating "under what law has he been sent to jail?" "We had submitted surety bonds and kept waiting at the jail gate, but Niazi was not released," he added. — DNA

## DNA

**ISLAMABAD:** The friendly countries are expected to materialize their commitments with Pakistan that would pave the way to close the deal with the IMF and revive the economy. This was said by Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Finance Minister while addressing as Chief Guest an Iftar Dinner hosted by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry in honor of foreign diplomats. Ishaq Dar said that in 2016, Pakistan was a rising economy as it was expected to become the world's 18th-strongest economy, but is now facing serious economic challenges. He said that Pakistan would not default and the government is making all possible efforts to steer it out of a difficult situation in order to put it on the path of sustainable economic growth. He lauded the initiative of ICCI for hosting an Iftar Dinner for diplomats.

Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the government should ensure consistency in economic policies that would enable the business community and investors to invest in Pakistan with confidence. He assured that the business community would fully support the government in its efforts to revive the economy. He highlighted the business and investment opportunities in Pakistan for diplomats.

He said that Pakistan is a huge market of over 220 million consumers and offers great investment opportunities in various sectors of its economy. He said that the foreign investors should transfer technology to Pakistan and explore IYs and investment in areas of interest.

# Tunisia migrants: At least 29 die off coast

## WEB DESK

**MILAN:** At least 29 migrants have died after at least two boats sank off Tunisia's coast within hours of each other, officials say. The sub-Saharan migrants were trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Italy. It is the latest in a string of migrant boat capsize off Tunisia's coast in the last few days, with five others sinking in the past four days. This comes after Tunisia launched a campaign against undocumented African migrants.

Meanwhile, Italian officials on the island of Lampedusa say they are overwhelmed, after a record 2,500 migrants arrived in the last 24 hours. The Italian far-right Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, has warned Europe risks seeing a huge wave of refugees arriving on its shores.

Tunisia has become a hub for migrants who wish to make it to Europe, with UN figures showing at least 12,000 migrants who landed on Italy's shores this year left from Tunisia. That figure was just 1,300 in the same time period last year. However, the Tunisia coast guard say they are taking steps to stop the migrant crossings, having halted around 80 vessels headed for Europe in the past four days, according to the Reuters news agency. It also says it has detained more than 3,000 migrants, the same agency reports.

# China opens ties with Honduras, Taiwan decries monetary demands

**NEWS DESK**

BEIJING: China established diplomatic ties with Honduras on Sunday after the Central American country ended its decades-long relationship with Taiwan, while Taiwan's foreign minister accused Honduras of demanding exorbitant sums before being lured away by Beijing.

The ending of ties with Taiwan had been expected after the Honduran foreign minister travelled to China last week to open relations and President Xiomara Castro said her government would start ties with Beijing.

China said its foreign minister, Qin Gang, and Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina signed the deal on diplomatic recognition in Beijing, ending relations with Taiwan dating back to the 1940s.

In a brief statement late on Saturday, the Honduran foreign ministry said it recognised the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate government that represents all of China and that Taiwan is an "inseparable part of Chinese territory".

China claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory with no right to state-to-state ties, a position Taipei strongly rejects. China demands that countries with which it has ties to recognise its position.

Speaking in Taipei, Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said Castro, who took office early last year, and her government had "always had illusions" about China and China's "luring" had never stopped.

"The foreign ministry and embassy grasped the relevant information and handled it carefully. However, the Castro government also asked us for billions of dollars in huge economic assistance and compared prices for assistance programmes provided by Taiwan and China," Wu said.

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"The foreign ministry and embassy grasped the relevant information and handled it carefully. However, the Castro government also asked us for billions of dollars in huge economic assistance and compared prices for assistance programmes provided by Taiwan and China," Wu said.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said in a video statement that Taiwan will not compete with China in "meaningless" dollar diplomacy.

# Trump casts 2024 contest in apocalyptic terms

**NEWS DESK**

WACO: Donald Trump used his first election rally in Waco, Texas, to cast the 2024 presidential vote in apocalyptic terms, slam his leading Republican rival Ron DeSantis and rail against prosecutors pursuing him with criminal investigations he likened to a "Stalinist Russia horror show." Speaking to several thousand of his diehard supporters, some flashing signs saying "WITCH HUNT", Trump spent much of his nearly two-hour speech attacking multiple investigations that have put him in legal peril as politically motivated.



**ISLAMABAD:** President ICCI Ahsan Zafar presenting souvenir to Finance Minister Ishaq Dar while diplomatic from various countries look on. – DNA

Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, former Federal Minister said that the government is determined to promote ease of doing business and hoped that the current difficult phase would be over soon.

Faaz Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan needs experts to overcome its foreign exchange crisis and hoped that the foreign diplomats would fully cooperate with Pakistan in realizing this goal.

Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI thanked the chief guest, diplomats and all participants for par-

ticipating in the Iftar Dinner. He said that if the government creates a more conducive business environment, the private sector would be able to improve the health of the economy.

Ch. Junaid Afzal, Chairman, Nova Group said that with the efforts of Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI, Nova Group is working out on an attractive discounted package of residential and commercial plots for the members of the business community. He said that Nova Group would cooperate with ICCI for the establishment of an industrial

park in the region.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI said the business community is hopeful that Finance Minister Ishaq Dar would soon conclude a deal with the IMF that would enable Pakistan to cope with its current economic crisis. He said that the government should now work hard to end the country's reliance on foreign loans and make it self-sufficient and assured that the business community would fully support in achieving this goal.

H.E. Atadjan Movlamo Ambassador of

Turkmenistan, H.E. Yerzhan Kistafin Ambassador of Kazakhstan, H.E. Khazar Farhadov Ambassador of Azerbaijan, H.E. Ulanbek Totuiae Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, H.E. Dr. Mehmet Pacaci Ambassador of Turkey, H.E. Adam M. Tugio Ambassador of Indonesia, Dr. Ramez Al-raee, Ambassador of Syria, and diplomats of many other countries including Saudi Arabia, Australia, Malaysia, Poland, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Republic of Turkish Northern Cyprus attended the Iftar Dinner. They appreciated ICCI for hosting a magnificent Iftar Dinner for them.



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# India summons Canadian envoy over Sikh protesters

MUMBAI: India summoned Canada's High Commissioner on Sunday to "convey strong concern" over Sikh protesters in Canada and how they were allowed to breach the security of India's diplomatic mission and consulates. According to Canadian media reports, hundreds of protesters gathered in front of the Indian consulate in Vancouver on Saturday over demands for an independent Sikh state, a simmering issue for decades recently triggered again. Canada has the highest population of Sikhs outside their home state of Punjab in India. "It is expected that the Canadian government will take all steps which are required to ensure the safety of our diplomats and security of our diplomatic premises so that they are able to fulfil their normal diplomatic functions," India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. The statement follows Indian police on March 21 launching a hunt for Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who has revived talk of an independent Sikh homeland and stoked fears of a return to violence that killed tens of thousands of people in 1980s and early 1990s. Police have accused Singh and his supporters of attempted murder, obstruction of law enforcement and creating disharmony and said he had been on the run since last week when officers tried to block his motorcade and arrest him. Indian police also opened an investigation last week into a protest at its High Commission in London, where protesters with "Khalistan" banners took an Indian flag down from a first-floor balcony of the High Commission to denounce recent police action in India's Punjab state. — **Agencies**

# Fresh clashes rock France as protests shift to water dispute

**SAINTE SOLINE:** French police again clashed with protesters Saturday as campaigners in the southwest sought to stop the construction of giant water storage facilities, the latest flashpoint as social tensions erupt nationwide. The violent scenes at Sainte-Soline came after days of unrest over President Emmanuel Macron's pensions reform, which forced the cancellation of a visit by King Charles III of the UK. The protest movement against the pension reform has turned into the biggest domestic crisis of Macron's second mandate, with police and protesters clashing daily in Paris and other cities over the past week. At Sainte-Soline, several protesters and members of security forces were injured in Saturday's confrontations at the banned protest. Campaigners there are trying to stop the construction of giant water "basins" to irrigate crops, which they say will distort access to water amid drought conditions. A long procession of activists set off late morning for the site, numbering at least 6,000 people according to local authorities – around 30,000 according to the organisers. – APP

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