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Sweden must take concrete action to join NATO alliance

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France's Macron arrives in Beijing on 3-day trip

Detailed News On Page-07



Lukaku grabs late draw for Inter at Juve

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

Khan slams martial law threats

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan on Wednesday said the threats of martial law are unconstitutional and added that the days of invoking martial law are over now. In an interview, Imran Khan termed threats of imposition of martial law in Pakistan unconstitutional. Khan said that if the Supreme Court's decision is not accepted, it means that the law in Pakistan is over and we are moving toward the law of the jungle. The PTI chairman said that if the elected govt did not have authority and that authority was elsewhere then no administrative system could work.

'Selective justice' not acceptable

NAZIR SIYAL

GAMBAT: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari said on Wednesday no justice ever heard the case of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's "murder". Addressing the inauguration ceremony of Pakistan's first liver transplant centre at PIMS Gambat and the ceremony of laying foundation stone for the health city and medicine unit, he said courts that put Muslim world leader Bhutto on gallows were lecturing on who Sicilian mafia was. "Justice is not served in this country," he added. He went on to say that these institutions were oblivious to [provide justice to] former president Parvez Musharraf, adding that an incompetent prime minister had been imposed on us who brought the financial crisis to country.

Sehr, Iftar Timing



Ramazan 15, 1444
Sehr: 04:23 am
Iftar: 06:36 pm
Fique-Jafria
Sehr: 04:13 am
Iftar: 06:46 pm

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Punjab Elections

Polling on May 14, ECP announces

The ECP took the decision in an emergency meeting held for consultations

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Amid controversy over the Supreme Court ruling that declared the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) order to postpone elections in Punjab as "unconstitutional", the electoral body on Wednesday announced the holding of polls on May 14 as directed by the top court. The ECP took the decision in an emergency meeting held for consultations on SC verdict. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja chaired session. The Supreme Court on Tuesday voided the ECP's decision on Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) elections. A three-member SC bench comprising Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Mumtaz Akhtar and Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan announced the decision in open court and declared the ECP's decision to hold polls on October 8 as "unconstitutional". The apex court directed the ECP to reinstate its previous election schedule under which polls were to be held and extended it by 13 days. The Supreme Court also clarified that the ECP could not go beyond the 90-day stipulated time and stated that 13 days were wasted because of the ECP's unlawful decision.

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PTI celebrates 'Youm-e-Tashakkur'

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: After the Supreme Court issued its verdict in favour of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the election delay case a day earlier, the former ruling party Wednesday announced celebrating "thanksgiving day" across the country's four provinces. PTI Chairman Imran Khan, taking to Twitter, wrote that his party will celebrate Youm-e-Tashakkur in over 75 cities across the four provinces after Isha prayer tonight. The country's top court, on Tuesday, in its unanimous verdict declared the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision on the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) election null and void, ordering the electoral authority to hold snap polls issuing May 14 as the date for Punjab.

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Maryam lambasts judiciary's role

"Never a court dares challenge a dictator. Rather it lends its support to the dictator"

MAHNOOR ANSAR

RAWALPINDI: Lashing out at judiciary, Maryam Nawaz has questioned its role which she claimed has never stood against a dictator, rather it only went after the politicians. Addressing a lawyers' convention in Rawalpindi on Wednesday, PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz said that she came to the lawyer fraternity to save Pakistan. In her hard-hitting speech, Maryam castigated judiciary saying that it could only subdue a democratic prime minister. She said she and her family were implicated in the wrong cases. She said that Justice Waqar Seth's name will always be remembered in the history of Pakistan as he showed guts to convict a dictator. She said that in the entire 76-year-old history of Pakistan, never a prime minister completed his constitutional term. "Never a court dares challenge a dictator. Rather it lends its support to the dictator." She said that 3-4 judges are standing with

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Allies mull filing reference against three judges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal government allies parties suggested and stressed for taking a confrontational path, setting aside the apologetic attitude over the Supreme Court verdict that put ruling rainbow coalition in the backfoot over their stance to hold polls at same day across the country. PDM chief Maulana Fazl ur Rehman suggested to adopt the path of confrontation for the supremacy of the Parliament, media reported quoting sources. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and PMLN Chief Organizer Maryam Nawaz insisted on filing a reference against the judges included in the bench, sources claimed. The government allies told PM Shehbaz that justice was murdered by not making a full court on Punjab and KP elections delay case. Political leaders opined that Parliament should

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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini calls on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu. - DNA

Iranian envoy meets PAF chief

Pakistan values its ties with Iran, says Air Chief

The meeting between Chief of the Air Staff and Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a testament to the deep-rooted friendship and unwavering commitment between two nations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E Mr Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force in his office today. The meeting was focused on areas of mutual interest and regional developments. During the meeting, Chief of the Air Staff shared broad contours of PAF's modernization plan which includes smart acquisitions from allied countries, upgradation of infrastructure and revamping of training. The Air Chief reiterated his unwavering commitment to enhancing the existing bilateral ties in military-to-military cooperation and the training domain.

He also emphasized that Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, economic and defence relationship with Iran which is based on convergence on all important issues relating to regional peace, security and stability. The Iranian Ambassador lauded the exceptional progress made by Pakistan Air Force through indigenization and expressed his admiration for the professionalism of PAF personnel. He pledged to play his role in further improving the existing bilateral military ties in various fields of training, emerging technologies and mutual cooperation in the aviation industry. The meeting between Chief of the Air Staff and Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a testament to the deep-rooted friendship and unwavering commitment between the two nations to work towards a peaceful and stable region.

Forces kill 8 terrorists

A soldier embraced shahadat during operation



NEWS DESK

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces conducted an Intelligence Based Operation in general area Shinwarsak, South Waziristan District. During the conduct of the operation, intense fire exchange took place between own troops and the terrorists. Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists location and 8 x terrorists including terrorist commander Jan Muhammad alias Chargh were sent to hell. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the

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Arshad Sharif murder SC hints at forming judicial commission

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan hinted at forming a judicial commission in the murder of senior journalist Arshad Sharif. As per details, the Supreme Court has issued the written verdict of last hearing of the Arshad Sharif murder sou motu case. Unmute. The written verdict stated if the court is not satisfied with the investigation, then a judicial

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Saudi Arabia signals funding of \$2 billion

Minister of Finance Ishaq Dar before his US visit on April 10, will also contact the UAE leadership

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's economy is set to receive a much-needed boost as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has given the green signal for funding worth \$2 billion. The development comes amidst significant progress in financing worth \$3 billion from friendly countries. Sources in the finance ministry confirmed that Saudi Arabia has given the green signal of financing \$2 billion to Pakistan. Minister of Finance Ishaq Dar before his US visit on April 10, will also contact the UAE leadership, sources said.

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Foreign Office concerned over UK minister's remarks

Pak also expresses concerns at the alarming rise in violence against Muslims in India

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Condemning the British Home Secretary Suella Braverman's 'discriminatory and xenophobic' remarks against Pakistani men, the Foreign Office (FO) on Tuesday warned of the serious repercussions of such comments. The British minister has been accused of peddling extremist far-right lies about Pakistanis after she singled out British Pakistani men over concerns about grooming gangs as she accused authorities of turning a "blind eye" to signs of abuse involving young people.

In a recent interview, the UK minister said that the "systematic and institutional failure to safeguard the welfare of children when it comes to sexual abuse" was one of the biggest scandals in British history. "What's clear is that what we've seen is a practice whereby vulnerable white English girls, sometimes in care, sometimes who are in challenging circumstances, being pursued and raped and drugged and harmed by gangs of British-Pakistani men who've worked in child abuse rings or networks," she had stated. Braverman's comments, tantamount to racist and bigoted generalisation of Pakistanis, have been condemned

India creating hurdles in SCO participation

The SCO defence ministers meeting is scheduled to be held later this month in Delhi while the foreign ministers' huddle will take place in May in Goa

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan may be considering to attend the key ministerial meetings of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in India but initial internal assessment suggests the Modi government may create a situation to make it difficult for the country to send its delegates. Official sources familiar with the development told media that Pakistan was considering the invitation India extended as the president of SCO for the upcoming meetings of defence and foreign ministers. The SCO defence ministers

meeting is scheduled to be held later this month in Delhi while the foreign ministers' huddle will take place in May in Goa. India extended the invitations for both the meetings. However, there is a sense within the Foreign Office that India may not be interested in Pakistan attending those high-profile meetings because of the Modi government's policy. "We haven't yet arrived at a final decision. However, there is a feeling that even if Pakistan intends to send its ministers, the Modi government may create a situation where it will become difficult for us to attend the SCO ministerial meetings," a source with knowledge of the closed-door consultations said.

widely and she has been urged to apologise to Pakistanis for putting their lives in danger and for increasing the threat of racist attacks on them after her unfounded allegations. Responding to the discriminatory remarks, FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch - in press briefing - warned that such comments would give "rise to dangerous trends". Braverman had also been warned by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) that sexual predators do not just come from "one background" and that a focus solely on race could create new "blind spots" when tackling child abuse. The NSPCC had criticised the UK home secretary and expressed its shock at her hatred towards Pakistanis and for singling out Pakistanis. During the briefing, Baloch also expressed concerns at the alarming rise in violence against Muslims in India. "On this Ram Navami, anti-Muslim violence was reported in at least eight states of India as extremist outfits organised public rallies to celebrate the festival," she revealed. The FO spokesperson mentioned that a number of mosques and other Muslim-owned buildings were attacked. A seminary was burned down in the

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Pak-Qatar agree on exploring new avenues for co-op

The meeting was held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere, reflecting the strong ties between Qatar and Pakistan. Both sides expressed their commitment to further deepen and diversify their bilateral relations in the years ahead

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Qatar to Pakistan Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani held a meeting with Chairman Senate, Sadiq Sanjrani at the Parliament House in Islamabad on Wednesday.

The meeting was aimed at discussing the strengthening of bilateral relations between Qatar and Pakistan, and exploring new avenues

for cooperation in various fields of mutual interest. The Qatari Ambassador delivered a letter of appreciation to Chairman Senate, expressing gratitude on behalf of Hassan bin Abdullah Al-Ghanim, Speaker of the Shura Council of the State of Qatar, for the Senate's unanimous resolution congratulating Qatar and its leadership on its historic achievement of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022, the largest and most renowned

global sporting event ever hosted by a Muslim country. During the meeting, Ambassador Al-Thani conveyed Qatar's keenness to further enhance collaboration with Pakistan in the areas of trade, investment, energy, and culture. He emphasized the importance of expanding people-to-people contacts and deepening cooperation in the education and tourism sectors. Chairman Senate, acknowledged the significant role played by Qatar in pro-

moting peace and stability in the region. He expressed Pakistan's readiness to strengthen its relations with Qatar and assured the ambassador of his full support in promoting bilateral cooperation in all fields. The meeting was held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere, reflecting the strong ties between Qatar and Pakistan. Both sides expressed their commitment to further deepen and diversify their bilateral relations in the years ahead.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani exchanging views with Sheikh Saoud Bin Abdul Rehman al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Pakistan, at Parliament House.— DNA

LHC declines plea to stop JIT from work

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday declined a plea to stop the joint investigation team (JIT), constituted by the Punjab government to probe cases against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership and workers, from work.

The division bench comprising Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh and Justice Farooq Haider heard the petition filed by PTI leader Mussarat Jamshed Cheema challenging the formation of the JIT.

The petitioner's counsel argued before the court that a JIT had been constituted to investigate 10 cases registered against PTI leadership and workers for allegedly attacking police and creating law and order situation outside party chairman Imran Khan's Zaman Park residence. He submitted that the JIT was constituted illegally. He pleaded with the court to set aside the notification for formation of the JIT. However, a provincial law officer contended that the JIT was constituted for transparent investigation of the cases and representatives of all relevant departments were part of it.

At this stage, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry requested the bench to stop the JIT from work. However, the bench declined the plea to stop the JIT from working and observed it would seek comments from the provincial government on the petition.—APP

80% development work on BEZ completed

PESHAWAR: Bannu Economic Zone (BEZ) is near completion as 80% of construction work has been completed on the project and the remaining work will complete soon.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC), Javed Iqbal Khattak said while talking to APP here on Wednesday.

Enveloping the vast land of 408 acres, Bannu Economic Zone is geographically located in close proximity to districts Lakki Marwat, North Waziristan, Karak and D.I.Khan. Construction work on road infrastructure, water supply, and boundary wall and security gate has been completed. He said that as many as 260 industrial units will be established in the economic zone wherein over 25000 youth of the districts Ban-

nu, Karak, Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan would be provided employment. The zone is specified for mineral and agricultural sector units especially chromites, copper and PVC pipe manufacturing units. With 80.5% literacy rate of Bannu Division, the zone has the potential to set the fast growth trajectory of the district ablaze with provision of skilled labour from native population of 1.2 million. BEZ holds an anchoring ability for foreign investment in the division, which will not only boost the economy of Bannu rather also the surrounding districts of Lakki Marwat, Karak and Waziristan.

He said that the proximity of the Indus Expressway with BEZ also adds a better deal of value to the strategic importance of the economic zone connecting his part of the region with Afghanistan through the Ghu-

lam Khan border. He said that provision of developed land, integrated infrastructure, business friendly environment for sustainable industrial growth, process innovation according to international standards and dedicated facilitation office at the zone are key features of the Bannu Economic Zone. The zone has an easy access via N-55 highway and N-5 Bannu link road to make it an ideal vantage point for investors from Peshawar, D.I. Khan and Divisions, whose accessibility will be further enhanced after the construction of the western route of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Target markets of the industrial products from Bannu Economic Zone can potentially be in high demand at local markets of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian States.—APP

IGP for joint operations in 'Katcha Areas'

KARACHI: Inspector General of Police IGP Sindh Ghulam Nabi Memon on Wednesday directed the officers concerned to conduct joint operations in 'Katcha areas'. Presiding over a meeting, he instructed the

SSPs of Ghotki, Shikarpur and Kashmore to specially focus on proper utilization of available manpower and resources. The SSPs of Ghotki, Shikarpur, Kashmore briefed separately on prevention of

kidnapping for ransom and other police measures. IGP Sindh asked to accelerate the intelligence based operations. Secret intelligence network should be further strengthened for operations.

He said the three SSPs should coordinate with each other as well as with other law enforcement agencies. Ghulam Nabi Memon ordered provision of all facilities to the police pickets established in Ghotki, Shikarpur, Kashmore.—APP

Second phase of Polio vaccination drive continues

ISLAMABAD: The second phase of the Polio vaccination drive continued on Wednesday in 12 districts of Balochistan and 26 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well.

During the five-day campaign, more than 4.12 million children will be vaccinated in both provinces.

Federal Minister for Health Abdul Qadir Patel urged parents and caregivers to ensure that their children receive the life-saving polio vaccine so that they remain protected from poliovirus, which has been found circulating in environmental samples.

"The presence of wild polio

in the environment shows that the virus is circulating in our communities and posing a serious risk to our children," said Abdul Qadir Patel, the minister. "With Ramazan around the corner, population movements can increase the risk of further spread, therefore, it is critical that parents and caregivers vaccinate their children in this and every campaign," said the minister.

"We have specifically designed this March campaign to reach areas where population movement is not just frequent but also expected during Ramazan and Eid festival," said Dr

Shahzad Baig, National Emergency Operations Center.

"It is essential that we reach as many children as possible with the vaccine now to curb polio transmission," he added. No human case has been reported in Pakistan since September 2022 when a polio outbreak paralyzed 20 children - all of them in southern KP districts. Wild poliovirus was detected for the first time this year in sewage samples collected from two separate sites in Lahore in January. Two more samples have since then tested positive

for polio - wild polio has been detected in a sample collected from D.I. Khan and variant poliovirus has been detected from Ghotki. The polio programme has taken all efforts to ensure the vaccination of children to keep them safe from this highly infectious disease in the context of positive environmental samples detected in some places. The Sehat Tahafuz Helpline 1166 and 24/7 WhatsApp Helpline 0346-777-65-46 will be available to assist parents and caregivers in reporting missed children and providing related information.—APP



Rawalpindi: Christmas worship was conducted at St. Joseph Catholic Cathedral Church Lalkurti which was led by Bishop Dr. Joseph Arshad, all the priests of Islamabad Rawalpindi participated in worship.—DNA

Officials visit Panja Sahib

ATTOCK: Deputy Commissioner Attock Rao Atif Raza and District Police Officer Dr Sardar Ghyas Gul Khan visited Gurdwara Sri Panja Hassanabdal. DSP Syed Kazim Abbas also accompanied them. Talking to APP, DC & DPO said the security of any religious festival is the first duty of District Management to provide foolproof security to all Sikh pilgrims from home and abroad on the occasion of Baisakhi Mela.

DC & DPO reviewed the security arrangements and route security arrangements for all Sikh pilgrims coming from abroad and domestically on the occasion of Baisakhi Mela 2023 and issued instructions for foolproof security. DC and DPO checked the control room of Gurdwara Sri Panja Hassanabdal and directed that all CCTV cameras should be in working position at all times.—APP

Agriculture in dire straits

PESHAWAR: President Kisan Ittehad Khaleed Khokhar Wednesday said that today agriculture in Pakistan is in dire straits and as an agrarian country we are importing vegetables, wheat and pulses by spending millions of dollars foreign exchange. "I am very hurt that my mothers and sisters are giving their lives for 10kg of flour as people across the country are dying," Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said while addressing a press conference here at Peshawar Press Club.

He said every year we are adding 5.5 million people to our population and did not care for the food as per needs rather the politicians are busy fighting for their own interests. "People are martyred in lines for Rs 1000 worth of flour," Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said. According to the UNICEF report, eight out of ten children do not have access to food, Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said, adding, the people are being defamed in parliament and there is no one to defend Pakistan. After becoming a nuclear power, despite international sanctions, the country was run by agriculture, Khalid Mahmood Khokhar said. He said ironically colonies are being built on agricultural lands, but no legislation is being made in this regard.—APP

Excise authorities to focus on 100% targets

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Haji Manzoor Khan Afridi on Wednesday said that it was the need of the hour to bring the government machinery on modern lines. The performance and role of the Excise and Taxation Department in serving the masses should be clearly visible, he stressed. The minister was talking to the new Excise Secretary Ehsanullah at his office Civil Secretariat Peshawar, who took guidance from the provincial minister regarding his new assignment and had a detailed discussion to deal with the problems and challenges faced by the department. Haji Manzoor Afridi said that the litmus paper of the importance of any government department was to see whether its efficiency and effectiveness are visible at the public level.—APP

Speakers' emphasis need of institutions' restraint

PESHAWAR: Political experts here Wednesday underlined the need of institutions' restraint and initiation of grand political dialogue for ensuring free and transparent election imperative for sustainable democracy and revival of economy in the country. Talking to APP, Professor DR A.H Hilali, former Chairman, Political Science Department, University of Peshawar told APP that all state institutions including legislature, executive and judiciary derive strength from the constitution and the country's can move forward when it work under its constitutional domain. Underlying the need for in-

stitutions' restraints after SC verdict in KP and Punjab election case, he said people as well democracy suffer in case of misunderstanding among state institutions. He said democratic governments that came into existence through transparent and free elections enjoyed people's overwhelming support enabling them to take quick decisions for their wellbeing and socioeconomic development of the country. He said democracy was the process of political evolution and it strengthened its roots after free and transparent elections. Dr Hilali said political unity and dialogue was imperative among political parties ahead of general elec-

tions so that no one can raise a finger on polls' results. Dr Hilali said a politically stable government guarantees sustainable economic development, national security and social harmony, transparency and capitalisation of resources, freedom of expression and pragmatic foreign policy.

To achieve these key goals, he said the 1973 constitution empowered all political parties to serve their countrymen for five years after winning the election and implement its manifestoes, adding that in democracies, people have the power to decide about the future of political parties through power of votes.—APP

Focusing on agri, livestock can strengthen economy

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Abdul Haleem Qasuria on Wednesday said that if special attention is given to agriculture and livestock, it will have a good impact on the country's economy and will play a very important role in eliminating unemployment and creating employment opportunities. He expressed these views while presiding over the meeting held in his office Civil Secretariat, regarding the development projects of the Agriculture, Livestock and Fishery departments. Director Generals of all wings of the department and other officers participated in the meeting.

The minister was given a detailed briefing regarding the development projects. He said that establishment of various projects for the development of the fisheries department, water management besides various projects, embankments for water conservation, silt conservation projects to conserve rainwater and bring it to agricultural land use, date palms planting in Dera Ismail Khan, supply of seeds and fertilizers in the province is initiating. He said that steps have been taken to develop olive cultivation in the integrated tribal districts, ensuring vegetables and fruits in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa like the Punjab government, and establishing a hostel for women in ATI. A detailed briefing was given on the restoration of the cooperative bank, the establishment of the handicrafts centre and other important projects. On this occasion, Abdul Haleem Qasuria directed the relevant authorities to cooperate fully with the farmers and cattle herders, as most of the village's people's employment is related to agriculture and livestock. It is among the priorities of the caretaker provincial government to give more benefits to the people in a short period of time, he added.—APP



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For further information please contact the following.

Maj (r) Sabih Ur Rehman
Mobile: 0300 8553342

Briefs

Services exports increased by 6.48% in 8 months

ISLAMABAD: Services sector exports from the country during the last eight months of the current financial year grew by 6.48 percent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year. During the period from July-February, 2022-23, the services exports were recorded at \$4.779 billion as compared to the exports of \$4.487 billion in the same period of last year, according to the data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). Meanwhile, the imports of services into the country decreased by 32.95 percent and were recorded at \$5.119 billion as compared to the imports of \$7.635 billion in the same period last year. During the last eight months of the current financial year services trade deficit narrowed by 89.19 percent as it went down from \$3.147 billion in July-February, 2021-22 to \$340.39 million in the same period of the current financial year. On year on year basis, the services trade deficit shrank 90.57 percent in February 2023 and it was recorded at \$38.77 million as against \$410.98 million in the same month of last year. In February 2023, services valuing \$547.15 million were exported as compared to the exports of \$543.16 million and it was up by 5.71 percent, whereas services imports decreased by 35.76 percent as it was registered at \$612.92 million against \$954.14 million of the same month of last year. On month on month basis, the services trade deficit decreased by 316.68 percent and it was recorded at \$38.77 million in February 2023 as against \$17.89 million in January 2023. In the month of February 2023, services valuing \$574.15 million were exported as compared to the exports of 608.98 million in January 2023, whereas services worth \$612.92 million were imported as against the import of \$592.09 million of the last month of the current financial year.—APP

Speaker for strict action against Ministries

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly, Raja Pervez Ashraf on Wednesday directed strict disciplinary action against the ministries neglecting the House orders to send their BPS-20 or above officials to attend the Assembly proceedings. The speaker expressed his displeasure for not replying to the queries raised by members of the Assembly (MNAs) related to the Planning Division and termed it an "unacceptable conduct". He added that as per the rules, any division or ministry was bound to present a cogent and valid reason in detail for not sending proper replies to the MNAs' queries. The speaker sent the matter to the Privilege Committee for further deliberations. Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Javed Abbasi told the speaker that the Parliamentary Secretary for Planning wanted to attend the session to respond to the queries but was not able to attend the meeting.

Police held four POs wanted in different crime cases

RAWALPINDI: Police on Wednesday arrested four Proclaimed Offenders (POs) wanted in various crime cases. According to a police spokesman, Bani and Waris Khan police in a joint operation arrested two accused namely Waqar Ahmed and Tahir Mehboob, wanted in different crime cases of heinous nature. Rawalpindi district police rounded up two accused namely Sajid and Jahanzaib, wanted in two cases registered in Wah Cantt and Saddar Wah police stations. The spokesman said that the operations would continue and all the POs would be sent behind the bars.—APP

Govt. working hard to put economy back on track: Baligh ur Rehman

Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh Chairman NA Standing Committee on Finance & Revenue, former Senator Lt. Gen. (Retd) Abdul Qayyum, H.E. Jemal Bekir Abdula, Ambassador of Ethiopia, Muhammad Ahmed President Islamabad Industrial Association, Khalid Iqbal Malik and Zafar Bakhtawari former Presidents ICCI also addressed the Iftar Dinner.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The economy of Pakistan was achieving good growth in 2013 and work on CPEC projects was going well, but after 2018, the work on CPEC projects slowed down due to which the economy suffered. However, the current government is working hard to put the economy back on track in order to stabilize it. The opening of Khunjareb Pass is a good sign for a better economic future of Pakistan. This was said by Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman, Governor Punjab while addressing an iftar dinner hosted by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry in his honor. Many dignitaries including Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh Chairman NA Standing Committee on Finance & Revenue, former Senator Lt. Gen. (Retd) Abdul Qayyum, H.E. Jemal Bekir Abdula, Ambassador of Ethiopia attended the iftar dinner. Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman said that the business community has a key role in



the economic development of the country and the government is determined to support them. He said that countries are run through taxes and lauded the role of the business community in paying taxes and contributing towards the welfare activities to help the poor and needy. He said that it is very important to facilitate the business community that would help create more jobs, improve tax-to-GDP

ratio, reduce poverty and stabilize the economy. He said that the construction of Rawalpindi Ring Road, repair of Kahuta Road and completion of IJP road should be expedited. He assured his cooperation to ICCI for the establishment of a new industrial zone in the region. Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce &

Industry said that ICCI is working for a new industrial zone in the region and the Punjab Government should cooperate in identifying a suitable land for this important project to promote industrialization. He said that the pace of work on IJP Road should be expedited for its timely completion. He said that Rawalpindi Ring Road is very important to address the traffic congestion issues in the

twin cities and stressed that the Punjab Government should expedite this important project. He said that the Punjab Government should arrange early repair of Kahuta Road to facilitate the industries of Kahuta Industrial Triangle. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President, ICCI said that Pakistan needs to boost exports to improve its forex reserves, but the SBP has further increased inter-

est rate to taking it to 21 percent that would create more problems for industrial sector and urged that the SBP should reduce interest rate to facilitate the private sector. Engr. Muhammad Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that the private sector is the backbone of the economy and the government should engage it in consultation for revival of the economy that would

yield win-win outcomes. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh Chairman NA Standing Committee on Finance & Revenue, former Senator Lt. Gen. (Retd) Abdul Qayyum, H.E. Jemal Bekir Abdula, Ambassador of Ethiopia, Muhammad Ahmed President Islamabad Industrial Association, Khalid Iqbal Malik and Zafar Bakhtawari former Presidents ICCI also addressed the Iftar Dinner.

Pakistan exports to Afghanistan increase 17.02% in 8 months

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's export of goods and services to Afghanistan witnessed an increase of 17.02 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported. The overall exports to Afghanistan were recorded at US \$346.522 million during July-February (2022-23) against exports of US \$296.109 million during July-February (2021-22), showing growth of 17.02 percent, SBP data revealed. On a year-to-year basis, the exports to Afghanistan also increased 60.49 percent

from US \$38.222 million in February 2022, against the exports of US \$61.345 million in same month this year. Meanwhile, on a month-on-month basis, the exports to Afghanistan also surge 82.58 percent during February 2023 as compared to the exports of US \$33.598 million in January 2022, the SBP data revealed. Overall Pakistan's exports to other countries witnessed a decrease of 9.65 percent in the eight months, from US \$ 20.632 billion to US \$ 18.639 billion, the SBP data revealed. On the other hand, the imports from Afghanistan into the country during the pe-

riod under review were recorded at US \$ 13.540 million against US \$119.328 million last year, showing a decline of 88.65 percent in July-February (2022-23). On a year-on-year basis, the import for Afghanistan witnessed also decreased by 98.89 percent from US \$13.723 million in February 2022, against the imports of US \$0.151 million in February 2023. On a month-on-month basis, the imports from Afghanistan into the country increased by 11.02 percent during February 2023, as compared to the imports of US \$0.136 million during January 2022,

according to the data. The overall imports into the country witnessed a decrease of 21.02 percent, from US \$47.336 billion to US \$37.388 billion, according to the data. Based on the trade figures, the trade of goods and services with Afghanistan witnessed an increase of 88.35 percent in surplus during the period under review as against the corresponding period of previous year. The surplus was recorded at US \$332.982 million against US \$176.781 million during last year, showing growth of 88.35 percent, the data revealed.

Pak textile merchants explore Chinese market



DNA

ISLAMABAD: "Pakistan has been exporting cotton and yarn to China for 40 to 50 years and we are trying to develop exports of fabrics and ready-made garments," said Usman Saeed, head of the China operations of a 38-year-old Pakistani textile company. Talking to Gwadar Pro at the Intertextile Expo held in Shanghai, Usman said the international textile exhibition provided a platform to showcase Pakistani products. Pakistani exhibitors can also benefit from the state-of-the-art technologies and trends from their Chinese counterparts, he added. Usman hoped that more Chinese enterprises would participate in the upcoming 4th International Textile Expo to be held in Karachi next month for technical and professional exchanges. There will be

products ranging from raw materials to finished goods at the expo that are competitive in price and quality all around the world, he added. Pakistan is a leading textile country with production capacity spanning the whole industrial chain. Most of its textile products are exported to Europe and America. Usman's company has also contributed to Pakistan's textile exports by manufacturing for international sports brands. Believing that China's large population, with its diverse tastes, could make room for many products, the company started its business in China in 2016 by opening an office in Dongguan, Guangdong. Usman sees a golden opportunity to tap the Chinese market, where dying and processing policies are becoming more stringent. With the development of high technology, the rising labor cost in China has challenged the development of labor-in-

tensive textile manufacturing industry. Pakistan's men's garments export to China increased by nearly 33% in 2022 and its T-shirt export to China reached \$ 5.53 million in the first two months of 2023, up 106% compared with the same period in 2022. The figures boost confidence in Pakistan's ailing textile industry, which is teetering on the brink of default, and highlight its pillar status and potential, said Usman. It only takes seven days to export textiles by land from Pakistan to China with zero tariff. Usman and his team are working hard to make the most of these huge benefits. "We have Chinese technicians working with us in our Pakistani factory to produce fabrics that meet Chinese standards. We hope that in the near future, more fabrics and garments produced by Chinese standards can be exported to China and around the world," Usman added.

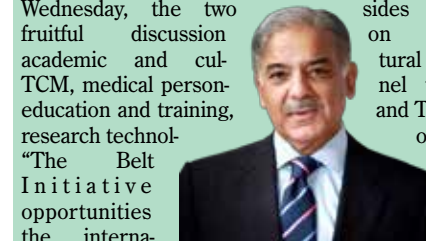
Imran distracting public: Javed Latif

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Mian Javed Latif Wednesday said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan was trying to damage the democratic system of the country as his main moto was to distract the public from the right path. Talking to a private news channel he said, Imran Khan had given a protest call so that the system could be brought to a standstill, adding that the law enforcement departments would intervene to prevent any violation in that regard. No one would be allowed to disrupt peace and security in the country, he warned. In reply to a question about talks with the PTI, he said Imran Khan was not willing to hold dialogue with the coalition government. He categorically stated that the country's economic and security situation didn't render any plausible justification to hold elections at this point in time. He said all the coalition partners including Pakistan Peoples Party had agreed unanimously to hold elections in October.—APP

China, Pakistan to step up medical cooperation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Muhammad Shahbaz, President of China-Pakistan Medical Association, and Prof. Zhang Xianbin, Vice President of the Association, led a delegation to the Affiliated Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine of Guangzhou Medical University to discuss future cooperation between hospitals of the two countries. According to China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday, the two sides launched a fruitful discussion on strengthening academic and cultural exchanges of TCM, medical personnel training, TCM theory and research technology innovation. "The Belt and Road Initiative provides opportunities for the internationalization of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which is a durable and effective method of improving health," said Dr. Muhammad Shahbaz, President of China-Pakistan Medical Association. He expressed the hope that through the communication and with acupuncture as a bridge, the two sides will strive to promote medical exchanges and cooperation between the two countries, help build a health corridor, provide better medical services for the Pakistani people, and create a new model of China-Pakistan people-to-people bond. "Traditional Chinese medicine is gradually warming up in Pakistan, which has promoted the mutual learning and complementarity between Chinese and Western medicine, and also brought diversified and effective medical treatment options for local patients. The people of Pakistan are more and more interested in traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture, and there is much more space for cooperation in the future," said Dr. Muhammad Shahbaz. After the meeting, the delegation of China-Pakistan Medical Association visited different departments of the hospital, the acupuncture rehabilitation clinic, and acupuncture training base. Shahbaz further states that China and Pakistan are traditionally friendly neighbors, and 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. "This exchange aims to give full play to the unique advantages of Chinese acupuncture and moxibustion, promote the participation of Chinese medicine in the construction of the 'Belt and Road initiative', and promote the internationalization of Chinese medicine."



ISLAMABAD: Meta has partnered with the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) at the nonprofit Poynter Institute, to create a free introductory fact-checking course serving journalists in the Asia Pacific region, including Pakistan. Composed of three modules focusing on fact-checking, verification and debunking health mis- and disinformation, the course will prime journalists on how to find fact-checkable claims, the methodology for fact-checking and tools and techniques to assist in their journey. This self-paced course is currently available in 15 languages, including English and Urdu, and is designed to be completed in 2 to 3 hours. Journalists, academics and aspiring fact-checkers throughout the region are encouraged to participate. All participants who successfully complete the course will receive a certificate honoring their commitment to improving the global information ecosystem. "Fact checking is an essential pillar of our work to address misinformation at Meta, and we believe upskilling people in Asia Pacific with courses like this, is critical to help develop and strengthen the entire system," said Aya Lowe, Meta's Integrity Partnerships Manager for the Asia Pacific region.—DNA

Fact-checking course for journalists

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Tajikistan's ambassador calls on Dastgir

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to Pakistan Mr. Ismatullah Nasruddin called on Federal Minister for Power Division Engineer Khuram Dastgir Khan here on Wednesday. The minister appreciated the mutual cooperation and efforts of the Tajik government in the power sector, said a press release. The Tajik ambassador assured his government's support for innovation in the power sector, it was further said. Khuram Dastgir also extended an invitation to his Tajik counterpart to visit Pakistan through the ambassador.

Motorway Police returns lost phone to owner

ISLAMABAD: The Motorway Police on Wednesday found a lost mobile phone worth Rs 45,000 and returned it back to the owner. According to Spokesperson Motorway Police, a man named Mohsin sought help from the Motorway Police near Burhan, and said that he had forgotten his mobile while changing the tire of his car. To which the nearest police mobile was informed. They reached the spot and found the mobile phone and it was handed over to the owner.—APP

ANF recovers over 14 kg drugs; arrests two

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in two operations managed to recover over 14 kg drugs and arrested two accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that ANF in an operation near Quetta Kuchlak area conducted a raid and recovered 14 kg charras from the possession of an accused resident of Qilla Abdullah. In another operation at Islamabad International Airport, ANF recovered 87 heroin-filled capsules from the possession of a Bahrain-bound passenger resident of Mandi Bahaudin, going on flight no. PK-187. He said that separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.—APP

Dr Ellinor Zeino called on Law Minister Tarar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Ellinor Zeino Director Regional Programme Southwest Asia at Konard Adenauer foundation based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on Wednesday called on Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar. The Konard foundation has been working for years for the promotion of parliamentary relations and rule of law in Asian countries, said a press release. Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar talked about the Germany-Pakistan relations and the need for strong collaboration in areas of education, student exchange programs, and rule of law in order to foster strong Germany-Pakistan relations.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar exchanging views with Director Konard Adenauer foundation, Dr. Ellinor Zeino.—APP

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NATO major source of global instability

For Finland, formally joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the world's largest military alliance, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all, would seem to provide the sense of security it desires given the situation in Europe after Russia launched its "special military operation" against Ukraine more than a year ago.

Finland, a relatively small Nordic country of 5.5 million people, clearly feels it needs shoulders to lean on as the situation in Europe has become increasingly volatile and uncertain. "From now on, we can rely on getting outside help should things get tough," Finnish Defense Minister Antti Kaikkonen said in Brussels on Tuesday as the country became the 31st member of NATO.

Yet whether its accession to NATO actually makes Finland more secure is questionable. Although it fought a war against Soviet Union at the beginning of World War II, Finland has enjoyed peace along the 1,340-kilometer border with its giant neighbor over the past eight decades, thanks mainly to its military non-alignment policy and maintaining friendly relations with Moscow, even throughout the Cold War. Given Russia's firm opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement and the fact that it has territorial disputes with Finland, the latest move by NATO to give it membership could be seen as a provocation and another squeeze on Russia, especially because it will double the length of the US-led alliance's land border with Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry immediately warned that "it will be forced to take military-technical and other retaliatory measures" to a move that marks "a fundamental change in the situation in Northern Europe, which had previously been one of the most stable regions in the world". This obviously does not augur well for the security of Finland as well as Europe at large. As a product of the Cold War, NATO should have been consigned to history books with the end of the Cold War and the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact. Yet it has nearly doubled the number of its members over the past more than 30 years to serve the hegemonic objectives of the United States. The argument that it is solely a defensive alliance and it is not a threat to any country was already disproved by its military interventions in Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya in 2011. Now that Europe wants China to help hasten the end of the Ukraine crisis - European Union executive head Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron are reportedly going to discuss the issue with the Chinese leadership during their visit to Beijing this week - it should at least start rethinking the NATO policy of seeking absolute security at the expense of others, which has become the main source of global instability.



Pandora's box of political polarization opened

Donald Trump's appearance in a Manhattan criminal court on Tuesday afternoon, in which the former US president pleaded not guilty to all 34 felony charges against him, has once again put the spotlight on the political polarization in the United States, with a debate raging between the Republicans and the Democrats over the legitimacy of the lawsuit. As the next in-person hearing is scheduled for December, the lawsuit, which is expected to last for a long time, will necessarily exert an influence on the 2024 US presidential election. Considering Trump's talents for turning adversity into opportunity, and that 63 percent of surveyed US voters think the litigation is out of political purposes, he will undoubtedly seize the chance to turn the case into political capital for his run at the White House. Something he has already begun doing. "The only crime that I have committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it," said Trump calling the criminal charges against him "an insult" to the US. The unusually heavy security measures around the Manhattan court, the big rallies of his staunch supporters outside his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, where he flew to immediately after leaving the court, and the close watch both Democrats and Republicans are keeping on the fast-changing situation all speak volumes that no matter whether Trump is found guilty or not, the US society will continue to be torn apart by political polarization stoked by partisan politics. Be they substantiated or not, in their details, the dozens of charges the prosecutors have laid against Trump point to the extent to which money talks in US politics today, manipulating public opinion and bending rules and laws.

As shown by the fact that attention is focused on the political influence of the lawsuit rather than the charges themselves, the trial is being taken as an opportunity to make it more regulated and predictable for money to talk in US politics, so as to lower the collateral damage for both parties in the future should it be exposed by stepping-over-the-line ambition. That being said, the result of the litigation will be a new compromise between the two parties on the future rules for their struggle as they will both have a direct legal reference - given the scale of the charges against Trump that encompasses almost all fields of the election politics and power exercise - on how far they can go in their tug-of-wars in the future. With about 91 percent of US congressional elections today being won by the candidates with the most money, it is almost predictable that the governance of the world's most powerful country, as well as its diplomacy, will continue to be the exchange of interests among the rich who are becoming increasingly tacit in colluding with each other in creating divisions at home and beyond and speculating on them.

Govt has no option but to implement SC's ruling

Qamar Bashir



The government should also be aware of the international implications of defying the Supreme Court's decision, which could be interpreted as a violation of the rule of law and human rights, leading to criticism from other countries and international organizations and harming the government's reputation on the international stage. It may also face economic sanctions or other measures imposed on a government, which could have serious economic consequences, such as lost trade and investment and harm to the country's financial stability. It may also face diplomatic isolation from other

Before refusing to obey the Supreme Court's order to hold Punjab Assembly Elections on May 14, the government should consider the Supreme Court's overarching jurisdiction and powers as granted by the constitution. It should be aware that the Supreme Court of Pakistan is the country's highest appellate court and the court of last resort, the last word on the law and the Constitution which are binding on all other courts in the country, and all executive and judicial authorities. Furthermore, the Constitution entrusts the Supreme Court with the unique responsibility of maintaining harmony and balance between the three pillars of the State. The Supreme Court is not only an appellate forum, but it also has original, appellate, and review jurisdiction to settle intergovernmental disputes between the Federal and Provincial Government(s) or Provincial Governments inter se, and it can also exercise original jurisdiction to enforce fundamental rights if the case involves a public issue. A government's refusal to disobey a Supreme Court decision can have significant legal, constitutional, and political ramifications. Legally, refusing to accept the orders is a violation of the law, and will result in legal action against the government, including contempt of court charges and further directions from the Supreme Court to enforce its decision through kinetic elements of the state. The constitutional implications are far more serious. Supreme Court decisions are binding on all branches of government, and failure to obey is a violation of the constitutional order, which may result in death or life imprisonment. A public official who violates the Constitution may be impeached, removed from office, or subjected to other disciplinary measures. The Supreme Court can also declare a government action or law unconstitutional and order it to be repealed or modified. Politically, disobedience could harm the government's credibility and legitimacy, sparking a public backlash and resulting political unrest, providing the opposition and civil society groups with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to mobilise the masses against the government, eventually leading to a constitutional crisis, prompting other branches of government or even international organisations to intervene. The government should be aware that the war between the executive and the judiciary always favours the courts. President Richard Nixon refused to comply with a Supreme Court order to release secret White House tape recordings related to the Watergate scandal in United States v. Nixon (1974). This resulted in a constitutional crisis and, eventually, Nixon's resignation. Brown vs. Board of Education: Several southern states rejected the Supreme Court's decision to desegregate public schools. This created a legal and constitutional crisis, necessitating federal government intervention to enforce the court's decision. Cooper v. Aaron (1958): Yousaf Raza Gilani was removed as Prime Minister of Pakistan on June 19, 2012, after the Supreme Court of Pakistan found him guilty of contempt of court. Gilani was

automatically barred from holding public office for five years under Article 63(1)(g) and was later removed from the premiership. In India, the Indian government passed a law in 2016 allowing Jallikattu, a traditional bull-taming sport in the state of Tamil Nadu that had been banned by the Supreme Court in 2014, sparking protests and legal challenges, and the matter was eventually remanded to the court. In Sri Lanka, President Maithripala Sirisena attempted to dissolve parliament and call new elections in 2018, despite a Supreme Court ruling that the move was unconstitutional. The decision was widely protested and condemned internationally as a threat to the country's democratic institutions. The government should also be aware of the international implications of defying the Supreme Court's decision, which could be interpreted as a violation of the rule of law and human rights, leading to criticism from other countries and international organizations and harming the government's reputation on the international stage. It may also face economic sanctions or other measures imposed on a government, which could have serious economic consequences, such as lost trade and investment and harm to the country's financial stability. It may also face diplomatic isolation from other countries and international organizations that refuse to engage with it on specific issues, and international law may provide mechanisms for holding governments accountable for violations of human rights and could include referral to international courts or tribunals, as well as other forms of international legal action. The government may be considering using parliament to overturn the Supreme Court's decision, but it should think thousands of times before doing so. In democracies such as Pakistan, the parliament does not have the authority to overturn a Supreme Court decision or interfere with the judiciary's decision-making process. A Supreme Court decision is typically regarded as final and binding, and its interpretation of the law is regarded as the last word on a legal issue. Other institutions should not even consider defying the Supreme Court's order, as this would constitute contempt of court, which can result in fines or imprisonment. The Supreme Court may issue an injunction prohibiting an individual or institution from taking or refraining from taking certain actions; noncompliance would result in a fine or imprisonment. The Supreme Court may issue a writ of execution, which directs law enforcement to carry out the court's decision. The Supreme Court may review the constitutionality of laws or the actions of government officials, and if the court finds that a law or action is unconstitutional, the law or action may be struck down or declared invalid. The government may additionally have looked at declaring a state of emergency to avoid implementing the Supreme Court's decision because, while the government can suspend certain legal and constitutional protections in response to a crisis or threat to public safety or national security, it cannot use it as a tool to subvert the

rule of law or avoid compliance with a Supreme Court decision. Furthermore, it could have serious consequences, both domestically (undermining public trust in the government and the judiciary, leading to protests and unrest) and internationally (damaging the country's reputation and leading to diplomatic isolation). Above all, According to Article 232 of the Constitution, the President may declare a state of emergency if he believes that a grave threat to Pakistan's or a portion of its security exists, whether from war, external aggression, or internal disturbance. Within 30 days, the declaration of emergency must be laid before both houses of Parliament and approved by a two-thirds majority. Because the government lacks a president and a two-thirds majority in parliament, this option is out of the question. The government appeared to be out of option for sending reference to the Supreme Court, despite the fact that Article 186 of the country's constitution allows the President or Governor of a province to seek the Supreme Court's opinion on any question of law or public importance. However, the government should be aware that a referral is not the same as an appeal. A reference is a nonbinding request for the Supreme Court's opinion on a specific question of law or public importance. The Court may accept or reject the reference, and its decision is not enforceable in the same way that a court judgment is, but the government must comply with a Supreme Court decision while a reference or appeal is pending. Furthermore, they must overcome the most significant impediment: only the president has the authority to file the reference, which we all know the President will not do. The government has two options in this situation. It is now pledging not to accept or implement the decision, vowing to overturn it through a parliamentary act, considering nullifying it by declaring a state of emergency and referring the matter to the Supreme Court to reconsider its decision. All of these options are doomed to fail, bringing the government more indignation and humiliation. Accepting the decision with dignity and character is the second option. It has no choice but to comply with the ruling without delay in order to demonstrate its respect for the rule of law and the Supreme Court's authority. The government should publicly acknowledge and respect the decision, even if they disagree with it to gain public trust. It should communicate clearly with the public about the decision and how it plans to implement it to avoid confusion and misunderstandings. It should collaborate with the judiciary to ensure that the ruling is carried out in accordance with the law and the Constitution. This will enable it to reclaim some of the political capital it is rapidly losing and prevent Shabbaz Sharif from following in the footsteps of Yousaf Raza Gilani.

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

This is karma and it won't help Trump win 2024

Andrew Mitrovica

The wailing MAGA hats can take some solace in knowing that Trump has finally joined dozens of the thousands of surplus-store camouflage enthusiasts who, on his rhetorical command, breached the Capitol on January 6, 2021: The insurrectionist-in-chief has, like them, been indicted. Meanwhile, enlightened Americans and I will take happy solace in celebrating this glorious day that, for too long, seemed beyond reach and will always be fixed in history and memory

Whoopie! The crook got booked. To be fair, I suppose I should have written, the "alleged" crook got booked. But when has Donald Trump, the former United States president and career meanie, been fair to anyone, at any time? That is, of course, a rhetorical question meant to prick the fragile sensibilities of "Don" Trump's legion of seething followers, who think the idea of civic duty is to parade around in cheap, gaudy T-shirts urging each other to "make a liberal cry" while riding in the cab of flag-draped monster trucks. Well, liberals and millions of enlightened Americans were, I suspect, crying with unbridled joy and relief as the MAGA ("Make America Great Again") misanthropes tuned in to Fox News to watch their equally seething and illiterate leader enter a not-guilty plea on a remarkable, pristine, blue, Tuesday afternoon sky in New York City. The wailing MAGA hats can take some solace in knowing that Trump has finally joined dozens of the thousands of surplus-store camouflage enthusiasts who, on his rhetorical command, breached the Capitol on January 6, 2021: The insurrectionist-in-chief has, like them, been indicted. Meanwhile, enlightened Americans and I will take happy solace in celebrating this glorious day that, for too long, seemed beyond reach and will always be fixed in history and memory: Trump is the first US president to be arrested - and on 34 felony counts, to boot. Hip, hip, hooray! Oh, what a marvellous sight it was as Trump scurried into a midtown court to be arraigned in connection with a not-so-hush-hush scheme to pay a porn star \$130,000 to keep mum about a now-historic one-night stand with the philandering presidential candidate. The aim of the cascading cover-up was, according to Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, to help Trump get elected. Gone was the trademark tough-guy bravado. Instead, Trump scowled and was silent, even as he attempted to raise his fist in a show of defiance. For once, his big, vile mouth was shut. What a gift and a blessing. For that alone, Bragg should be rewarded with some kind of medal or the key to the city. I remember when Trump and his stunt-addicted allies urged their dupes to invade New York to protest the un-

folding "witch hunt". A few dupes showed up and vented, on cue, their ingrained anger. But most stayed home, knowing the last time "Don" Trump wanted them to do his violent, coup d'état bidding, they ended up in the FBI's crosshairs and the clink. By my count, the QAnon quacks who travelled to Dealey Plaza in Dallas last November, waiting for JFK Junior's resurrection, outnumbered the quacks who made it to New York yesterday. Speaking of jail, "Don" Trump is on a wonderful track to join a host of his "family" members who have been indicted, convicted and shipped to prison. The rogues' gallery includes Trump's ex-campaign manager, Paul Manafort, Trump Organization's ex-chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg and Trump's ex-consigliere-turned-cooperating witness, Michael Cohen. But perhaps the most delicious irony of all lies in the fact that Trump was ushered, reportedly, into the same courthouse to face a judge that five innocent Black and Latino teenagers - known as the Central Park Five - were once hauled into in shackles. There, they were coerced into false confessions by corrupt police and headline-thirsty prosecutors. In 1989, the youths were wrongly convicted of assaulting and raping a white woman in Central Park. At the time, Trump took out a full-page ad in the New York Times, demanding, in effect, that the teenagers be executed. In 2002, all five were exonerated after enduring nine years of prison. True to odious form, Trump has never apologised for the racist-tinged admonition. Last week, one of the Central Park Five, Yusef Saleem - a candidate for New York City council - issued this delightful and succinct response to Trump's prosecution on Twitter. "For those asking about my statement on the indictment of Donald Trump - who never said sorry for calling for my execution - here it is: Karma." Sure, a string of US presidents should have suffered Trump's shame and indignity, too. They earned indictments at home and abroad. Still, Trump being held to true and stiff account goes some way in making up for those egregious failures. And there is the prospect of a slew of charges to come stemming from "Don" Trump's central role in the cacophonous events of January 6, his leaning on Republicans in Georgia to "find" 12,000 votes to overturn the

presidential election, and his hoarding of state secrets at Mar-a-Lago. So, his legal comeuppance may, in the months ahead, be even more complete and sweet. Hip, hip, hooray! Trump is also being challenged in court by a determined woman, E Jean Carroll, a former magazine writer who swears that he sexually assaulted her in a New York department store dressing room in the mid-1990s. Carroll is suing Trump for defamation after he denied the assault, saying "she's not my type", and insisted she made the claim to boost sales of her book. Despite the litany of litigation Trump faces, one perpetually dour essayist is convinced that Trump's indictment is the product of his courageous challenging of America's imperialist war-mongering and neoliberal fiscal doctrine. "He is being targeted because he is deemed dangerous for his willingness, at least rhetorically, to reject the Washington consensus regarding neoliberal free-market and free-trade policies, as well as the idea that the US should oversee a global empire," the essayist wrote at the end of March. This is where ideology and blindness merge. My goodness, man, Trump is a 100-percent-proof fascist who has made it plain that if he returns to the Oval Office, he will use the powers that come with the job to make Generalissimo Francisco Franco look like a mild-mannered centrist. Trump returned to Florida and said something about being indicted. I didn't watch since, I'm sure, he went on and on and on with his imbecilic, school-yard taunts and incoherent, recycled tirade against his "deep-state" enemies. Wah, wah, wah. Finally, a parting word of advice to the familiar roster of cable-news pundits poo-pooing the indictment and worrying that Trump will leverage Tuesday's unprecedented events into securing another term in the White House: There's no need to wet your designer pants. You bunch were convinced that Democrats were going to be walloped in the midterm Congressional elections by Trump's hand-picked acolytes. Enlightened Americans proved you wrong in 2022. They will prove you wrong again in 2024.

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Briefs

Polling on May 14, ECP announces

FROM PAGE 01

The court also directed the caretaker government in Punjab to assist the ECP and instructed the commission to inform it if the government refused to do so. The Constitution and laws of the election commission did not allow an extension of the date, it added. According to the decision, candidates would be able to submit nomination papers from April 10, the electoral body would publish the list of candidates on April 19, and electoral symbols would be issued by April 20. The court also directed the government to release Rs21 billion for elections in Punjab by April 10 and told the ECP to submit a report on the matter in court the same day. In the case of non-provision of funds, the court will issue an appropriate order, it added.

PTI celebrates 'Youm-e-Tashakkur'

FROM PAGE 01

The court's judgement came as a result of a plea filed by the PTI against the ECP following the party's persistent demand of conducting polls, particularly in Punjab and KP – where the PTI had ended their government after dissolving the provincial assemblies.

Foreign Office concerned over UK...

FROM PAGE 01

Nalanda district of Bihar, resulting, inter alia, in the burning of around 4,500 books, including the Holy Quran. "The terrifying rise in Islamophobic and hateful acts against Muslims in India is a consequence of the pursuit of a majoritarian Hindu agenda and anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric rife in Indian politics," she said. Baloch welcomed the statement of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) expressing its concern on rising anti-Muslim incidents in India and urge India to take firm action against the extremists for fomenting communal violence and hatred against Muslims. "India must take demonstrable steps to curb the rising tide of Islamophobia, to provide protection to Muslims for practising their faith and account those responsible for such hateful acts. "We reiterate our concerns about the safety and well-being of Kashmiri leaders and human rights defenders who are under incarceration in prisons across Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IoJK) and India.

Maryam lambasts judiciary's role

FROM PAGE 01

PTI Chief Imran Khan. "Imran gets bail in just two hours," she raved. She said that except these 3-4 judges, the rest of judges are with the people. "A jackal who calls himself a leader, when he comes out of his house, he covers his head with a black box. Imran and his facilitators know that he is guilty," she said vociferously. Maryam wondered that never a court gave an epithet of Sicilian mafia to any dictator, nor did it disqualify a dictator. "Whenever a court disqualified a ruler, it was anelected prime minister," she lamented. The PML-N leader said that the PTI people keep on humiliating judges. They reach courts in the form of groups, she added. She said that she is not afraid of disqualification, she had been disqualified for six years. Maryam said that five-member bench announced that Imran Khan violated the constitution. "Is it a minor crime to violate the constitution?" she wondered. Earlier, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief organizer Maryam Nawaz arrived at Rawalpindi Judicial Complex. A large number of lawyers also arrived at the judicial complex.



ISLAMABAD: Motorists are on their way at Jinnah Avenue as people are leaving back to their houses as per Notification of Establishment Division the public offices under the Federal Government timings are 7:30 AM to 01:30 PM, in Federal Capital. – Online

Sweden must take concrete action to join NATO: Cavusoglu

Turkish and Russian delegations will discuss commerce, energy and bilateral relations as well as the conflict in Syria, the Russia-Ukraine war, the need to increase humanitarian aid to Syria after the Feb. 6 earthquakes and the Karabakh issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia

DNA

BRUSSELS: Sweden needs to take concrete steps in order to secure Türkiye's ratification for its NATO membership bid, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said Wednesday, a day after Finland officially joined the bloc. "The steps Sweden has taken so far are insufficient; they must cooperate on the fight against terrorism," Çavuşoğlu told reporters at a news conference on the sidelines of the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels, adding that Turkish and Swedish officials discussed the steps Stockholm must implement at their meetings during the summit. "We have expressed from the start that Türkiye had fewer problems with Finland and they have taken action to that end," Çavuşoğlu said. "And Türkiye's ratification of Finland's NATO membership is essentially proof of our support to NATO's open-door policy."

Finland became the 31st member of the NATO military alliance Tuesday in a historic policy shift brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Nordic country got its blessing from Türkiye, the last NATO member to approve its membership after the Turkish Parliament ratified it last week following months of disputes that left Sweden behind. Several sticking points, largely Ankara's concerns over the harboring and tolerance of PKK/YPG and Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) terrorists in Sweden, have held up the process. Türkiye demands their extradition and effective cooperation against these groups to greenlight Stockholm's bid. Çavuşoğlu on Wednesday further revealed he had discussed Sweden's NATO bid and the issue of the U.S. selling F-16 fighter jets to Türkiye during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Ankara's request from Washington for 40 F-16 fighter jets and modernization kits has been hog-



ged due to several reasons, chiefly Türkiye's decision to acquire Russian-made S-400 air missile defense systems and objections from the U.S. Congress over their potential usage by Turkish forces. The Turkish diplomat also commented on a recent controversy between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and U.S. Ambassador to Ankara Jeffrey Flake who drew the president's anger for meet-

ing with main opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who is challenging Erdoğan in May 14 elections. "It's unacceptable for an ambassador to meet a standing candidate. Their meeting was contrary to diplomatic practice as Türkiye faces elections in less than two months," Çavuşoğlu said, echoing Erdoğan who on Monday accused Washington of covertly backing his opposition and declared he wouldn't receive Flake anymore. "Flake mustn't appear as though he's taking sides. No matter which country they belong to, an ambassador shouldn't do this. I've conveyed to Mr. Blinken my thoughts about this, as well," Çavuşoğlu said. Turning to Ankara's thawing relations with Egypt, Çavuşoğlu further revealed he agreed in principle to meet with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Türkiye this month. Last month, Çavuşoğlu and Shoukry spoke on the phone to schedule his visit to Türkiye.

The two also gave each other best wishes for the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Turkish diplomatic sources said. Earlier last month, Çavuşoğlu and Shoukry met in the capital Cairo, where the two discussed bilateral relations and regional and international issues, and agreed to maximize diplomatic ties. Diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Egypt have been at the level of charges d'affaires on both sides since Egypt's 2013 military coup, which overthrew then-President Mohammed Morsi. Çavuşoğlu went on to express "strong condemnation" of Israeli police raids at Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem, saying that Israel had "violated" the sanctity of the compound during Ramadan and "took a step that would disrupt its historical status." On Wednesday, Israeli police said they detained 350 Palestinians from the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, with witnesses saying they used excessive force, including tear gas.

Lukaku snatches late draw for Inter at Juve

TURIN: Romelu Lukaku netted a last-gasp leveller in Inter Milan's dramatic 1-1 draw at Juventus on Tuesday which left their Italian Cup semi-final all square after the first leg. Belgium striker Lukaku rolled in from the penalty spot deep in stoppage time to keep both teams level ahead of the second leg in Milan later this month, before then being sent off following his celebrations in front of the home fans. Lukaku, who was already on a booking for a late foul on Federico Gatti, put his finger in front of his mouth and told the crowd to "shut up" as his joyous teammates swamped him. Reports that the 29-year-old had been racially abused by some home supporters as he prepared to take his penalty were not confirmed by either Inter coach Simone Inzaghi or his Juve counterpart Massimiliano Allegri.



Juan Cuadrado thought he had given Juventus a lead to take to the San Siro in the 83rd minute of an intense match between bitter rivals in Turin which featured few goalscoring chances and ended with both teams at each other's throats. Cuadrado and Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic were both sent off following the final whistle after a scuffle which continued as the teams went into the tunnel at the Allianz Stadium. "What happened was misunderstood, as he always celebrates like that," said Inzaghi to Mediaset. "We were on top without being able to score, but I can't criticise my players, it was a good performance." Lukaku's spot-kick is good news for Inzaghi who is under

pressure after a poor run of results which has led to them dropping to fourth in Serie A. Angel Di Maria was unlucky not to put Juve ahead just after kick-off with a low drive which was brilliantly tipped away by Mattia Perin. Inter grew into the game and were probably the better team after the break, with Henrikh Mkhitaryan dragging a great chance a whisker wide in the 64th minute after a spell of pressure from the away side. Juve should however have taken the lead in the 77th minute when Arkadiusz Milik somehow failed to poke home Cuadrado's mishit shot with the goal at his mercy. Cuadrado then found what he thought was the decisive goal when he collected Adrien Rabiot's diverted cross and finished well past Handanovic before doing a victory jig on the sidelines. – Agencies

Mehtab Chawla Floodlights Veterans Hockey Tournament

KARACHI: The second Mehtab Chawla Flood-Lights Ramadan Veterans Hockey Tournament will start from April 6 at the Olympian Islahuddin and Dr Muhammad Ali Shah Hockey Academy. According to Olympian Islahuddin and Chairman of Dr Muhammad Ali Shah Hockey Academy, Olympian Islahuddin, eight teams are participating in the tournament, including Pakistan Veterans Hockey Club (Green), Pakistan Veterans Hockey Club (White), Nazimabad Mujahid Hockey Club, Noor XI Hockey Club, See Hawks Hockey Club, Baldia Hockey Club, Central Fitness Hockey Club and Karachi Fitness Hockey Club are included. The opening match of the tournament will be played between Pakistan Veterans Hockey Club (Green) and Nazimabad Mujahid Hockey Club at 11 pm on April 6, the semi-finals of the event will be played on April 8 and the final on April 9. Olympian Islahuddin and Dr Muhammad Ali Shah Hockey Academy Vice Chairman Olympian Syed Sameer Hussain provided tips to the managers of all eight teams on Tuesday and also presided over the manager's meeting. Lataft Hussain Shah has been appointed as the tournament director, while former international Hockey Player Mubasher Mukhtar will be the assistant tournament director, Syed Sagheer Hussain will be the organizing secretary, former umpire Masood ur Rehman has been appointed as the umpire manager of the event. Tariq Khan, Farhan Ahmed and Mohammad Wahid Hussain are included in the technical officials whereas, Nadeem Saeed, Uzeer Ahmed, Umair Ahmed and Talha Ghorri have been appointed as umpiring. – APP

Allies mull filing reference...

FROM PAGE 01

recognize its supremacy. "If you still take an apologetic attitude, there will be a lot of loss," government unity said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing the allies parties meeting on Wednesday announced to bring another solution in the parliament on the Supreme Court verdict that tasked ECP to hold elections in Punjab on May 14.** Shehbaz Sharif said nation's fate is going to be decided in the upcoming political scenario. Commenting on the Supreme Court verdict that suspended the ECP decision to postpone the Punjab elections, PM said cabinet meeting held twice along with parliamentary meeting of allies' parties in the National Assembly as well in which Law Minister briefed on the decision of apex court. The premier said Lower House of the Parliament already passed the resolution. He briefed allies parties that he has been holding meeting with legal team. "4-3 verdict was ignored and all judges who recused themselves became part of the verdict," he added. Shehbaz Sharif condemned the SC circular that declared null and void Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

Saudi Arabia signals...

FROM PAGE 01

In the last week of March, China rolled over its safe deposit of \$2 billion on the existing terms as the country's foreign exchange reserves remain stabilized. Sources said that the deferment of payment has been done for a year. Earlier this week, Minister of State for Finance and Revenue, Ayesha Ghous Pasha, stated that the IMF was verifying external financing from friendly countries such as China, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Notably, the IMF remains concerned about Pakistan's economic policies, with objections to the annual subsidy of Rs900 billion and insistence on further interest rate increases to keep pace with inflation. Additionally, sources informed that the IMF is demanding the collection of Rs850 billion rupees under petroleum levy and has called for a reduction in the import of petrol and diesel.

Forces kill 8 terrorists

FROM PAGE 01

killed terrorists. The killed terrorists remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces and killing of innocent citizens. However, during intense exchange of fire, Sepoy Hamid Rasool (age 31 years, resident of District Rawalpindi) having fought gallantly, embraced shahadat while another four personnel including two officers got injured. Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

SC hints at forming judicial...

FROM PAGE 01

commission will be constituted. The counsel of Arshad Sharif's family Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui has raised objections to the court proceedings, he said that the Supreme Court can monitor and investigate matter cases related to basic rights but cannot monitor the investigation of JIT. The court said that Attorney General informed the court about the bilateral cooperation from the Kenyan side but they did not respond on the legal cooperation with the Pakistani officials. The written verdict further stated that the court has granted three more weeks to JIT to conduct the investigation abroad. The SC can constitute a judicial commission, as the murder of prominent journalist Arshad Sharif is a matter of basic human rights as well. Furthermore, the court has received more than 5000 letters for the investigation of the Arshad Sharif Murder case. Case will now resume in the month of April. Earlier, CJP regretted over no-progress in Arshad Sharif murder case.

Wasteful Chelsea held by Liverpool

"These have been emotional days and the players have been able to keep focused

LONDON: Chelsea wasted a host of chances to beat Liverpool as the troubled Blues were held to a 0-0 draw on Tuesday in their first Premier League match since Graham Potter's sacking. Potter was axed on Sunday after the former Brighton manager's disastrous reign climaxed with a wretched home defeat against Aston Villa. Chelsea are seeking their third permanent manager of the campaign, with Potter hired in September following Thomas Tuchel's shock dismissal. In the meantime, Bruno Saltor, a member of Potter's backroom staff, made his managerial debut as Chelsea's interim boss. Bruno managed to coax a

lively performance from Chelsea, but – as was so often the case under Potter – they paid the price for a lack of cutting edge. Chelsea remain 11th, leaving them with an uncertain future despite the massive investment in new signings made by Chelsea owner Todd Boehly since he took over last year. "These have been emotional days and the players have been able to keep focused. It's a difficult season for them. To come back from what we have had in the last few days is incredible," Bruno said. "I have asked the players to play with their hearts and I think we saw that on the pitch. We create chances and I think we deserved

to win." Liverpool hardly looked much better as a third successive league game without a win damaged their faint hopes of finishing in the top four. Eighth-placed Liverpool are seven points behind fourth-placed Tottenham in the race to qualify for the Champions League. "I saw a lot of great challenges, people flying into tackles and that's what we need," Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp said. "That's what we have to build on. If things don't go your way you have to fight through this and make steps. Sometimes smaller ones, sometimes bigger ones. This was a smaller one." In response to Liverpool's dismal 4-1 defeat

at Manchester City on Saturday, Klopp dropped Mohamed Salah and Trent Alexander-Arnold as the Reds boss made six changes. It was Chelsea who made the stronger start of the two troubled teams and Mateo Kovacic's shot was blocked on the line by Ibrahim Konate. Reece James saw his fierce finish disallowed for offside against Enzo Fernandez, while Wesley Fofana was narrowly off target with a headed chance. Chelsea's Kai Havertz dragged a good chance wide from N'Golo Kante's pass. Darwin Nunez and Joe Gomez forced good saves from Kepa Arrizabalaga as Liverpool finally threatened just before half-time.

Kovacic blazed a glorious chance over soon after the interval, while Havertz's effort was disallowed for handball when the German's shot hit Liverpool keeper Alisson Becker and rebounded into the net off his arm. Leicester's first game since Brendan Rodgers' departure on Sunday ended in a 2-1 defeat against Aston Villa at the King Power Stadium. The Foxes, led by caretaker bosses Mike Stowell and Adam Sadler after Rodgers' exit by "mutual agreement", have now gone seven league games without a win and sit second bottom of the table. Ollie Watkins put Villa ahead in the 24th minute and although Harvey Barnes equalised after

35 minutes, Leicester's Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall was sent off in the 70th minute for a second booking. Bertrand Traore's 87th-minute curler, his first goal for Villa since 2021, piled on the misery for Leicester. Leeds climbed out of the relegation zone with a 2-1 win against fellow strugglers Nottingham Forest at Elland Road. Orel Mangala bagged his first goal in English football to fire Forest ahead. But Jack Harrison equalised eight minutes later with a close-range finish after Keylor Navas spilled Marc Roca's shot. Luis Sinisterra put Leeds in front in first-half stoppage time, cutting inside and curling his shot into the far corner. – Agencies

Briefs

NATO values ties with Indo-Pacific partners

GENEVA: NATO "highly values" the partnership with the Indo-Pacific partners, including Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan, the alliance chief said on Wednesday.

Berlusconi hospitalized in intensive care

ROME: Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is in intensive care at Milan's San Raffaele hospital for some respiratory problems, Italian news agency ANSA reported on Wednesday.

PLA vows to safeguard sovereignty

BEIJING: Ahead of a planned meeting between Taiwan regional leader Tsai Ing-wen and US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California on Wednesday, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command vowed to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, with multiple land, naval, air exercises focusing on amphibious landing missions underway.

Israeli occupational forces attack worshippers in Al-Aqsa raid

Tension has already been high in occupied East Jerusalem and West Bank for months. There are fears of further violence as important religious festivals – the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and the Jewish Passover – converge

NEWS DESK

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM: The Arab League is set to hold an emergency meeting to discuss an Israeli police raid on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem that left at least 12 Palestinians injured, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was working to "maintain the status quo" at the holy site.

ing – before Israelis were allowed in under police protection. The League had earlier condemned the attack, with Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit saying in a statement: "The extremist approaches that control the policy of the Israeli government will lead to widespread confrontations with the Palestinians if they are not put to an end."

Arab countries condemn storming of Al-Aqsa

DOHA: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Jordan on Wednesday denounced Israeli police raids at Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem and the subsequent arrest of Palestinians. The Israeli police on Wednesday said they detained 350 Palestinians from the complex, with witnesses saying they used excessive force including tear gas.

ple were transferred to hospital. It also said in a statement that Israeli forces prevented its medics from reaching Al-Aqsa. The raids continued until Wednesday morning when Israeli forces were once again seen assaulting and pushing Palestinians out of the mosque compound and preventing them from praying, before Israelis were allowed in under police protection.

stones. "When the police entered, stones were thrown at them and fireworks were fired from inside the mosque by a large group of agitators," the statement said, adding that a police officer was wounded in the leg. In a statement issued later on Wednesday, Netanyahu said that he was trying to calm the situation at Al-Aqsa.

Chinese friendship enjoys broad political support in Pakistan



Beijing: Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal meeting IDPCP Minister Liu Jianchao in Beijing. —DNA

BEIJING: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal said that friendship and strategic partnership with China enjoyed broad political support in Pakistan and acknowledged the International Department of Communist Party of China (IDPCP)'s role in promoting better understanding and deepening relations between the two countries.

appreciated his personal contributions in cementing bilateral ties as a true friend of Pakistan. The minister admired the role of CPEC in a peaceful rise and economic development in China. Extending warm felicitations on the successful conclusion of the annual Two Sessions, the minister paid tribute to the vision of President Xi for launching initiatives like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI) and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI)

which were contributing in creating a peaceful and harmonious world. Hailing CPEC as the shining example of BRI cooperation, Minister IDPCP appreciated the Planning Minister's role in nurturing and developing CPEC in his current and earlier tenures. Both reaffirmed CPEC's importance as the flagship project of BRI and decided to add further impetus to CPEC cooperation along with marking the completion of one decade as an important milestone. Recalling the successful visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Beijing in

November 2022, the two sides agreed to work out modalities of IDPCP support for capacity-building through special training of Pakistani young political leaders and professionals, and experience sharing on CPC governance model for rural development, youth empowerment, poverty alleviation, economic growth, use of technology, enhancement of exports and industrialization. Ahsan Iqbal also extended an invitation to Minister IDPCP to visit Pakistan to continue the discussions and cooperation for deepening bilateral ties.

Dar Ishaq wins defamation case in UK

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Ishaq Dar has won a defamation case filed against a private TV channel with a court in the United Kingdom over false allegations of "money-laundering, criminal activities, opening fake accounts and running away in Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's plane."

Keep climate change out of politics: Ardern

AUCKLAND: Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern urged lawmakers to take politics out of climate change during her valedictory speech to the parliament on Wednesday. "I called it (climate) our nuclear moment - I believed it then and I believe it still now," Ardern said in her final farewell speech to parliament, shedding light on other issues during her tenure as premier, including the 2019 terrorist attack on a mosque and COVID-19, according to Radio New Zealand.

France's Macron arrives in Beijing on 3-day China trip

BEIJING: French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Beijing on Wednesday on a three-day state visit to China, state media reported. Macron is leading a large delegation that will stay in China until Thursday. "President Xi (Jinping) will hold talks with him (Emmanuel Macron) to jointly chart the course for China-France relations and exchange views on major international and regional issues," Hua Chunying, spokeswoman for China's Foreign Ministry, said on Twitter. "China and France are both permanent members of the UN Security Council and major countries in the world. China is ready to work with France for new deliverables as we advance a close and enduring comprehensive strategic partnership," she said late Tuesday.

and National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Zhao Leji. The China-France trade volume has risen to over \$74 billion last year. Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye has said former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, President of the French Constitutional Council Laurent Fabius, ministers, lawmakers, and over 60 leaders of large enterprises will accompany Macron during his third visit to China, which is also his first during his second term as the French president. French musician Jean-Michel Jarre, and movie director Jean-Jacques Annaud, are also reportedly accompanying Macron for the cultural aspect of the visit. He is also scheduled to visit the city of Guangzhou in southeast province of Guangdong. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is also scheduled to pay an official visit to China on the same dates and will also separately meet Xi. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. — Agencies

Malaysian PM calls for dialogue over South China Sea

The Bank Negara Malaysia has also made a proposal to pioneer the said method in matters of trade during visits to China using Malaysian currency ringgit and Chinese official currency renminbi, he went on to say

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has called for a dialogue to resolve the longstanding dispute over the South China Sea, observing that the problem is not "insurmountable." There is no easy solution to the overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea, nor is the problem insurmountable as long as there is dialogue, Ibrahim, who visited Beijing last week, said in an interview published Tuesday by the Chinese English daily China Daily. Stressing that the South China Sea issues should not be "that contentious," Ibrahim called for dialogue with other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states that also claim a stake in the rich resources of the sea to resolve the differences. "I believe that there is no easy solution to that problem. As we think of each other as friends, we continue to have dialogue, this problem is not insurmountable," he added. He expressed satisfaction that the Chinese leadership had agreed to take the position of engaging in dialogues and promoting proper understanding of



Asian region should continue to be led by the 10-member ASEAN with its policy of neutrality and as a zone of peace while having good relations with all countries. The mineral-rich warm waters of the South China Sea have long been the subject of contention between China and some regional countries, with the US siding with countries opposing China's claims.

the issue. "I would say the things that we agreed upon is 95 per cent, and the five (per cent) we disagree, it should not cause problem," he added. He also highlighted that the Southeast Asian region should continue to be led by the 10-member ASEAN with its policy of neutrality and as a zone of peace while having good relations with all countries. The mineral-rich warm waters of the South China Sea have long been the subject of contention between China and some regional countries, with the US siding with countries opposing China's claims. Washington has frequently sailed its warships and flown its fighter jets over the warm waters of the South China Sea under the so-called "freedom of navigation," which Beijing has repeatedly denounced as a violation of its territorial integrity. ASEAN members Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam all have coastlines on the South China Sea. Taiwan, which Beijing claims is part of China, is also a claimant. China and ASEAN signed the "Declaration on the Conduct" – an agreement on the South China Sea – in November 2002, marking Beijing's first acceptance of a multilateral agreement on the issue. China's claims are based on its so-called "nine-dash line," which are purple dashes on official Chinese maps that represent Beijing's historical claims to the sea.

Sastaticket.pk offers consumers a range of benefits

KARACHI: Sastaticket.pk, one of the leading e-ticketing platforms in Pakistan, is proud to offer consumers a range of opportunities and benefits when booking their travel and event tickets online, including tickets for airlines such as AirSial, SereneAir, Air Blue and Saudi Airlines. With the growing popularity of e-ticketing platforms in recent years, Sastaticket.pk has emerged as a preferred choice for consumers, offering them easy and convenient booking, a wide range of ticket options, competitive pricing, real-time updates, and secure and safe transactions.

Through Sastaticket.pk, consumers can book their tickets from the comfort of their homes or offices, without the need to visit a ticketing office or stand in long queues. The platform offers a wide range of tickets for various travel modes, such as airlines like AirSial, SereneAir, Air Blue and Saudi Airlines, as well as buses. It also offers bookings for hotels, giving consumers a variety of options to choose from. Sastaticket.pk uses the latest encryption technologies and security measures to protect consumers' personal and financial information, ensuring that their transactions are safe and secure.

Soaring prices dampen UK Ramadan celebrations

LONDON: Despite the enticing produce in their windows, Muslim-owned retailers on east London's Brick Lane are unusually quiet as a cost-of-living crisis bites into Ramadan earnings. The historic street is the hub of London's Bangladeshi community, and normally a vibrant destination for shoppers during the Islamic holy month, which in Britain started on the evening of March 22. But this year, Muslim and other customers are paring back on non-essentials, according to Taj Stores co-owner Jamal Khaliq, who has had to put up his prices to keep pace with double-digit inflation. "This makes it a bit more difficult for people already suffering from high costs of living," said the 51-year-old, who sells everything from fresh produce and halal meat to South Asian sweets and snacks. — Agencies

Briefs

Iran appoints ambassador to UAE

DNA

TEHRAN: In a major development, Iran has appointed an ambassador to UAE for the first time in eight years. Reza Ameri, the newly appointed ambassador, has formerly served as the director general of the Iranian expatriates' office in the foreign ministry. The development comes weeks after Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations and reopen embassies after years of tensions between the two countries, including a devastating attack on the heart of the kingdom's oil production attributed to Tehran. The deal, struck in Beijing this week amid its ceremonial National People's Congress, represented a major diplomatic victory for Chinese as Gulf states perceive United States' sudden withdrawal from wider Middle East.

US flies bombers as tensions soar with N Korea

SEOUL: The United States has flown nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to the Korean Peninsula in a show of strength against North Korea as concerns grow that Pyongyang might conduct a nuclear test. The long-range bombers took part in joint aerial drills with US and South Korean fighter jets over the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said. Wednesday's deployment was the first of US B-52 bombers to the peninsula in a month. The drills "show the strong resolve of the [South] Korea-US alliance and its perfect readiness to respond to any provocation by North Korea swiftly and overwhelmingly", Lieutenant General Park Ha-sik, commander of the South Korean air force operation command, said in a statement. - APP

Man kills four children in Brazil

DNA

SAO PAULO: At least four children have been killed by a man wielding a hatchet in a kindergarten in the city of Blumenau in southern Brazil, local officials say. Another four children were injured by the 25-year-old man who entered the creche at around 09:00 local time (12:00 GMT) on Wednesday. Hospital officials said those injured were all under the age of three. Police told local media that the attacker had surrendered and that he had been taken into police custody. Firefighters said that around 40 children had been inside the creche at the time of the attack. They added that the assailant had jumped over a wall in order to gain entrance to the building and had apparently targeted the victims at random. Parents ran to the kindergarten as news of the incident spread.

Trump arrest plunges WH race into uncharted territory

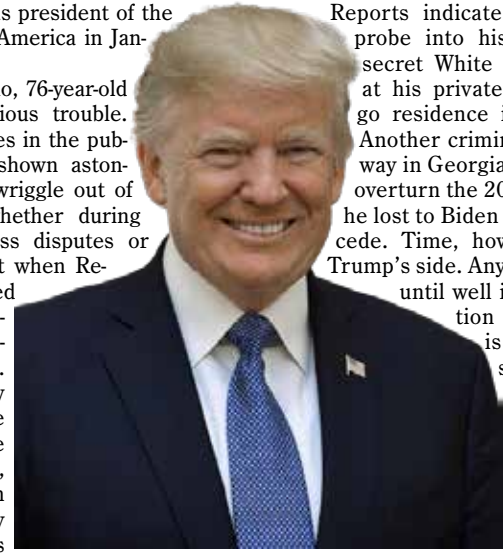
Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to 34 felony charges linked to alleged attempts to silence damaging personal information during his triumphant 2016 race for the White House

WASHINGTON: US voters woke Wednesday after Donald Trump's arraignment in New York to a uniquely uncertain 2024 presidential election landscape, where the leading Republican candidate faces trial and the incumbent, Joe Biden, has not even confirmed he's running. Trump pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to 34 felony charges linked to alleged attempts to silence damaging personal information during his triumphant 2016 race for the White House. The man who went from 1980s playboy real estate magnate, to TV reality show star in the 2000s, then far-right populist president, has now made history as the first serving or former commander in chief under criminal indictment. But what some might have seen as a moment of supreme shame, the Trump team immediately turned into a battle cry. While he had to go through the humiliating process of arrest for Tuesday's hearing, polls still show Trump is by far the strongest Republican candidate. In fact, his numbers have only improved as his legal scandals grow. Trump attorney Todd Blanche said his client is "upset." But "I'll tell you what: he's motivated and it's not going to stop him and it's not going to slow him down." Trump flew back home to Florida and delivered a rambling, conspiracy theory laden tirade to gathered supporters, painting himself as the victim of a "Trump-hating judge"

and "massive election interference." Meanwhile, his election campaign did not wait for the Manhattan court hearing to be over before merchandising a T-shirt with a fake mug shot of the former president over the words 'NOT GUILTY' in exchange for \$47 donations. Representative Elise Stefanik, a Trump loyalist in Congress, predicted boldly: "President Trump will defeat this latest witch-hunt, defeat Joe Biden, and will be sworn in as president of the United States of America in January 2025." For all the bravado, 76-year-old Trump is in serious trouble. During his decades in the public eye, he has shown astonishing ability to wriggle out of legal corners, whether during his many business disputes or even as president when Republicans acquitted him in an unprecedented two impeachment trials. But Trump is now in the hands of the New York state court system, where Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is

mounting an aggressive prosecution. "We cannot and will not normalize serious criminal conduct," Bragg said of the felony charges alleging that Trump falsified business records to "conceal criminal conduct that hid damaging information from the voting public during the 2016 presidential election." Even if some analysts have questioned the strength of the New York case, Trump's real problems may lie elsewhere. Reports indicate that a high-level probe into his hoarding of top secret White House documents at his private Florida Mar-a-Lago residence is gathering pace. Another criminal probe is underway in Georgia over his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden but refused to concede. Time, however, may be on Trump's side. Any trial may not start until well into the 2024 election season and there is nothing to stop someone under indictment from seeking office. Back in 1920, Eugene V. Debs even famously ran for president - entirely legally - as

a Socialist from a jail cell. Biden appears content to sit back and watch the fall of a man he has branded a "toxic presence." Last week, Biden went out of his way to take questions about Trump from reporters - only to stress to every single question that he was not going to comment. On Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre also made a point of rising above the fray. Asked if Biden, like millions across the country, was watching live coverage, she insisted the president was instead working for Americans. He might "catch part of the news when he has a moment," she said, but "this is not something that's a focus for him." While Trump has injected a giant note of uncertainty into the 2024 race, Biden brings question marks of his own. His age is a constant source of concern, even to allies. Now 80, he would be 86 by the time he left office after a second term. And he has yet to confirm he is running at all. Last year, word was that Biden was looking at a family Christmas holiday in the Caribbean as the moment to take a final decision. But the weeks and months passed, with no word, even if Biden has said on several occasions that he intends to run. According to a report from Axios, the announcement may now only land in July or even later. - APP



IHC rejects FIA's plea to cancel Imran's bail

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday rejected the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) plea to cancel the bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan in the prohibited funding case, stating that allegations made in the first information report (FIR) had nothing to do with Imran or Tariq Shafi. A division bench comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri issued a detailed decision rejecting the petition for the cancellation of Imran's bail. The court raised questions regarding the evidence of the case and said that there was "no proof" that the money sent by Arif Naqvi was linked with criminal activity. It added that the former premier had not signed any bank documents. According to the IHC, the banking court had rightly said that all the evidence in the case was documentary and an arrest was not necessary.

Gold rate jumps to all-time high in Pakistan

KARACHI: Gold price surged to an all-time high in Pakistan and jumped past Rs215,000 per tola after the rupee fell to a new low against the US dollar in the interbank market. The surge was in line with the rupee movement - which plunged to an all-time low of Rs287.85 against the US dollar in the interbank market - and an uptrend in the global markets. According to the data released by All-Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association (APSGJA), the price of gold (24 carats) soared by Rs2,500 per tola and Rs2,142 per 10 grams to settle at Rs217,000 and Rs186,042. Gold is often hailed as a hedge against inflation-increasing in value as the purchasing power of the dollar declines. - APP

Govt denies 24-hour gas supply to consumers

KARACHI: Minister of State for Petroleum Musadik Malik said Wednesday that the masses cannot get gas 24/7, attributing a drop in the commodity's reserves as a major reason. Pakistan is highly reliant on natural gas for energy, and with rising demand and insufficient supply, loadshedding has become a daily occurrence in many areas of the nation. This scenario worsens during Ramadan when Pakistanis use more gas for cooking and other reasons, especially during sehri and iftar timings. But the minister, in conversation with journalists in Karachi, without giving an exact time, said the gas loadshedding would end during sehri and iftar. "We cannot provide gas 24 hours as our reserves have dropped." The issue of gas starvation in Karachi caught Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's attention recently, and he directed relevant officials to ensure an uninterrupted supply of the commodity. He said the process of supply of gas should be supervised and no negligence should be tolerated. Owing to the widening gap between gas supply and demand, the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) last week announced its decision to suspend supplies to captive power plants and industries. - DNA

Palestine condemns Israeli attack on worshippers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The State of Palestine condemns in the strongest terms the brutal attacks of Israeli occupation soldiers against Palestinian worshippers at the Holy Aqsa Mosque Compound/Al-Haram Al-Sharif; IOF illegally invaded Al Aqsa, barbarically assaulted men, women, and children, unlawfully de-

PM condemns Israeli attack on Palestinian worshippers

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday strongly condemned Israeli police raids at Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem. "I strongly condemn Israeli police attack on Palestinian worshippers in Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem," he said in a tweet. He said the brutal attack was a violation of the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. "Impunity granted to Israel has emboldened Tel Aviv to violate basic human rights with abandon," he added. - DNA

es, and settler terrorist militias, have no sovereignty whatsoever over any part of Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound; Palestinian worshippers have the absolute right to freely and safely pray in and around the holy compound, whenever and at any time, without any obstruction or violence; Israel's aggression against the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound is an egregious assault on the basic right of Palestinians to worship freely in their holy sites, especially during this holy month of fasting and religious introspection; In grave violation of the tenets of international law, Israel, the occupying Power, is imposing arbitrary limitations on when and how Palestinians can worship while inviting and encouraging settlers to carry out highly provocative.



ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Ishaq Dar chairs a meeting of Economic Coordination Committee. - DNA

Ukraine-bound cargo ship sinks off Turkish coast

ANKARA: A Guinea-Bissau flagged cargo ship with 14 crew members on board sank off Turkey's Mediterranean coast on Wednesday, killing at least three of them. Five people were rescued while efforts continued to find the other missing crew, officials and news reports said. The Joe 2 sank off the coast of Kumluca, in Antalya province, while heading to Ukraine from the Turkish port of Iskenderun, said Gov. Ersin Yazici said. It was transporting aluminum, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency. The cause of the ship sinking was not immediately clear. An investigation has been launched by the chief prosecutor's office for Kumluca. The Turkish Coast Guard Command said it received a distress call at 3:47 a.m. and dispatched a vessel, several boats and two helicopters. Two crew members were rescued by the coast guard helicopters while three others were saved by other vessels in the area, it said. All of the crew were Syrian nationals. - Agencies

Five arrested over human sacrifice at Indian temple

WEB DESK

NEW DELHI: Indian police have arrested five men accused of conducting a human sacrifice, nearly four years after the discovery of the

victim's headless body at a Hindu temple left officers baffled. Shanti Shaw, 64, was killed and decapitated with a machete in 2019 after visiting the temple in Guwahati, a city in India's remote northeast. Police made no headway in the case until Shaw's body was finally identified in January, sparking a renewed investigation that tracked down several culprits, with others still at large. "The five planned the killing of the woman," Guwahati police commissioner Diganta Barah told reporters late Tuesday. "A total of 12 people took part."

Taliban ban UN Afghan female staff, UN says

WEB DESK

KABUL: A Taliban order has barred Afghan women from working for the United Nations, the organisation has said. The UN said the Taliban had informed them verbally but there had not yet been written communication of the move. The UN has told its Afghan staff - men and women - not to report to work for 48 hours, until it has clarity on the matter in meetings with the Taliban. There has been an increasing clampdown on women's freedoms since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021. "This is the latest in a disturbing trend undermining the ability of aid organisations to reach those most in need," a UN spokesman said, adding that it "cannot operate and deliver life-saving assistance without female staff". The UN has called the Taliban order "unacceptable and frankly inconceivable". Female workers play a vital role in on-the-ground aid operations, particularly in identifying other women in need. The UN has been working to bring humanitarian aid to 23 million people in Afghanistan, which is reeling from a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. Foreign female workers are exempt from the ban. But if implemented, this would be the most significant test of the future of UN operations in Afghanistan, and the

relationship between the organisation and the Taliban government. The UN has said that in eastern Nangarhar province, local Taliban authorities prevented Afghan women from going to work at UN facilities on Tuesday. In response, Secretary General Antonio Guterres tweeted: "I strongly condemn the prohibition of our Afghan female colleagues from working in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. If this measure is not reversed, it will inevitably undermine our ability to deliver life-saving aid to the people who need it." Unless it is overturned, the order means the UN is no longer exempt from a ban on women working for all NGOs - save for those in the healthcare sector - implemented in December. Female workers in the health sector are expected to still be allowed to work, but only if they report directly to health facilities, not to offices. Since the Taliban's return to power, teenage girls and women have been barred from schools, colleges and universities. Women are required to be dressed in a way that only reveals their eyes, and must be accompanied by a male relative if they are travelling more than 72km (48 miles). And last November, women were banned from parks, gyms and swimming pools, stripping away the simplest of freedoms.

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