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WHO chief urges China to cooperate in Covid-19 probe

Detailed News On Page-08

Turkiye calls for end to Ukraine war

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Alem Dar gets guard of honour

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Briefs

PM launches mental health app

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on Friday the launch of the government's "first dedicated mental health app and helpline". The development comes as the world celebrates World Health Day. This year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is celebrating its 75th anniversary. "On this World Health Day, I am pleased to announce the launch of government's first dedicated mental health app #Humraaz & helpline. Citizens' well-being and especially mental health is paramount for our society's improvement," the premier said on Twitter.

Another case against Imran Khan

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Another case was registered against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan in Islamabad on Friday. The case against Imran Khan has been filed in the Ramna police station on the government's complaint on the allegations of inciting rebellion and tarnishing reputation of officers. The FIR stated that Imran Khan had hurled accusations against the officers of the state institutions and tried to defame them by taking the names of some of them.

Constitution ensures resolution of all challenges

APP

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervez Ashraf has said that the 1973 Constitution is a democratic and consensus-based document which provides solutions to all challenges being faced by the country. He said that golden jubilee celebration of the Constitution would commence on April 10, said a news release issued here Friday. He expressed these views while addressing the delegation of Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE), All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS) and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA).

Sehr, Iftar Timing

Ramazan 17, 1444
Sehr: 04:20 am
Iftar: 06:37 pm
Fiqae-Jafria
Sehr: 04:10 am
Iftar: 06:37 pm

Holiday Notice

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

- Editor

Punjab polls verdict

Govt says CJP 'partial', wants his resignation

Illegal use of powers cannot be accepted, says information minister

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday demanded that Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial must step down as his position has become controversial, especially after Justice Athar Minallah's note in the Punjab polls case. "Justice Athar Minallah has made a major decision. Following this decision, the majority of judges have reached a conclusion. The decision made by Justice Minallah raises questions about the judicial process," Marriyum Aurangzeb said while addressing a press conference in Islamabad. She said that CJP's suo motu notice has already been dismissed with 4-3 vote. However, she added that a three-member bench was formed on petition that was already "dismissed". "When there was no petition, questions arise as to why the bench was formed and why a decision was made," she said. The information minister said that the four judges on the bench had urged to make a full court bench, adding that the political parties too were in favour of constituting a full bench so the people could accept the decision. "Political parties do not shy away from elections, but this is no longer just an election issue. It has become a matter of 'bench fixing'," she added.



Justice Minallah endorses judges Mandokhail, Shah

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: In yet another twist to holding provincial elections in the country, Justice Athar Minallah of the Supreme Court (SC) on Friday released his detailed note on the suo motu notice proceedings on the delay in holding polls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, saying that the case was dismissed 4-3. Signed by nine judges, the Feb 27 order of the bench stated that keeping in view the Feb 23 order, the additional notes attached by four judges, the CJP's direction to add questions raised by Justice Shah, Justice Afridi, Justice Mandokhail and Justice Minallah, as well as discussions/deliberations made in the anteroom of the apex court, the matter was referred back to the top judge. In response, the CJP reconstituted the bench comprising himself, Justice Shah, Justice Akhtar, Justice Mandokhail, and Justice Mazhar. On March 1, the SC, in a 3-2 verdict, directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to consult with

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PTI reiterates call for talks on polls

Justice Minallah recognizes polls within 90 days, claims Fawad

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry said that the "ideal" situation to deal with the crisis surrounding Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections is for the ruling parties, establishment, and the PTI to hold a meeting together. "The parties will have to sit together and bring a constitutional amendment with consensus to conduct elections at one time," said Fawad when asked if the PTI would agree to hold polls on another date rather than May 14. A day earlier, the former ruling party once again extended a dialogue offer to the coalition government to finalise a date for the 'national elections' after the National Assembly passed a resolution rejecting the three-member Supreme Court bench's "minority" verdict on the Punjab elections and made it binding on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his cabinet not to implement the decision. "The government rejected the Supreme Court's verdict, is not following the constitution and holding elections, this attitude by the government is not how a country is



run," said the former minister. Fawad said that the PTI dissolved the provincial assemblies so that the incumbent government would conduct national elections, but it turned out that the ruling coalition does not even follow the Constitution or the law. "We thought that the government would not break the Constitution, we did not think that this would happen. They resorted to brutality, put 10-year-olds in prison and inflicted torture. This reversal in a year is unimaginable," he said.

Terrorists in Pakistan using Afghanistan's US weapons

The US left behind weapons and equipment including firearms, communications gear, and even armored vehicles

ISLAMABAD: After the United States pulled out its troops from Afghanistan, it left behind military equipment and weapons worth \$7 billion which later boosted the military capabilities of the banned Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch separatist groups. According to a report by Radio Free Europe, the US left behind weapons and equipment including firearms, communications gear, and even armored vehicles which gave the militants a "vast war chest." Pakistan always desired not to indulge into blame game with Afghanistan and had repeatedly urged the IAG to establish its writ in the country. The RFERL report rejected Kabul's claims that TTP was not using Afghan soil against Pakistan as the presence

of TTP, ISKP and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan was an undeniable reality. The report said that using the US weapons and equipment, both the TTP and Baloch separatist groups, were waging insurgencies against the government in Pakistan, which has witnessed a surge in violence over the past two years. "These weapons have added to the lethality of such groups," said Asfandyar Mir, a senior analyst at the United States Institute of Peace. Experts say armed groups have obtained advanced US weapons and equipment like M16 machine guns and M4 assault rifles, night-vision goggles, and military communication gear. Abdul Sayed, a Sweden-based researcher who tracks the TTP, said the group's access to sophisticated combat weapons has had a "terrifying" impact, in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS), a think tank in Islamabad, the number of terrorist attacks in the country increased by 27 percent last year, as compared to 2021. At least 419 people were

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister chairs a meeting of National Security Committee. - DNA

CJP commits 'violations of law': Maryam

Says CJP's tilt towards PTI is glaring



DNA

LAHORE: The Chief Organizer of the ruling Janta-The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Maryam Nawaz Sharif Friday urged Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial to "RESIGN" as his tilt toward her rival party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of Imran Khan is glaring. She made two tweets on Friday soon after ending the National Security Meeting in Islamabad. In her first tweet, Maryam said, "CJP Umar Ata Bandial has committed flagrant violations of law & constitution to favour Imran Khan/Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf". This blatant abuse of authority has led to an unprecedented revolt-like situation in the SC of Pak. Judges of impeccable repute have raised serious questions on CJP's conduct & bias." Adding in the first tweet, she said in her second message, "No CJ has ever been accused of such misconduct. His tilt towards PTI is glaring, CJP Bandial must RESIGN." "This blatant abuse of authority has led to an unprecedented revolt-like situation in the SC of Pakistan," she added. She said "Judges of impeccable repute have raised serious questions on CJP's conduct and bias." On April 4, the top court voided the order of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding delay in elections in Punjab, ordering polls on May 14.

New resolve, vigour

NSC announces to start comprehensive anti-terror operation

A high-level committee has also been formed in this regard

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: The National Security Committee (NSC) Friday decided to kick start an all-out comprehensive operation against militant outfits to root out the menace of terrorism from the country. The development came after a two-hour-long NSC meeting — comprising the country's top security body comprising civil and military leadership — with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in the chair, a statement from the PM's Office said. Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Shamshad Mirza, federal ministers for defence, finance and information, and senior military leadership were in attendance. The gathering was held in continuation with the NSC meeting after the terrorist attack on January 2, 2023, in Peshawar Police Lines, which claimed the lives of more than 80 people, mainly law enforcers. "The meeting agreed to launch an

High value target arrested in Balochistan

CENTRELINE REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan army said Friday that in a high profile and a successful Intelligence Operation, Lead Intelligence Agency successfully apprehended a High Value Target (HVT) Gulzar Imam alias Shambay. An Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) statement said that Gulzar Imam has been a hardcore militant as well as founder and leader of the banned outfit Baloch National Army (BNA) which came into being after amalgamation of Baloch Republican Army (BRA) and United Baloch Army (UBA).

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Dar pulls out of WB-IMF spring meetings

Cites deepening political uncertainty, developing judicial crisis

COMMERCE DESK

ISLAMABAD: In a major development, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has cancelled his visit to the United States where he was scheduled to meet the International Monetary Fund management for the removal of bottlenecks in the way of the staff-level agreement regarding the revival of the stalled bailout package. Highly placed sources told media that Dar would not attend the spring meetings of the World Bank-IMF that were taking

place from April 10 to 16 in Washington. Dar, who is also leader of the house in Senate, was planning to land in Washington on Sunday. "I am not going due to the domestic state of affairs," the finance minister confirmed on Thursday. The deepening political uncertainty and developing judicial crisis were said to be the reasons behind the cancellation of the trip to Washington. Dar had a plan to address the financial and political worlds' concerns regarding the continuity of the government, future economic plans and bridging the once again trust deficit with the multilateral lenders. The sources said that Minister for

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APRIL 2023

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DC reviews arrangements for polio drive

KHYBER: Deputy Commissioner Abdul Nasir Khan on Friday chaired a meeting of all stakeholders at his office and reviewed arrangements and plan for the polio vaccination drive in the district. On the occasion, he was briefed about a comprehensive vaccination plan, security arrangements, challenges and other problems related to the vaccination drive. The DC directed all the stakeholders to focus on refusal cases by involving local elders, Ulemas and political leaders to convince parents for the vaccination of their children. He asked the police department to provide foolproof security to polio teams to avert any untoward incident, while the health department was asked to visit each and every house during the campaign and administer polio drops to every child under the age of five. The DC said it was high time to make the district polio-free and protect the coming generation from permanent disabilities, adding the government was very serious to eliminate the crippling disease from the country.—APP

Senator Zehri suggests grand dialogue

QUETTA: Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that as far as new elections are concerned in the country, for the sake of the integrity and the interest of the country, all the stakeholders should hold a grand dialogue. In a statement issued here on Friday, she said that the country's stability was lying in the supremacy of the Constitution, Pakistan cannot afford any political chaos and unrest. She said that the national and provincial assemblies' elections should be held at the same time. The government and the Opposition should sit together and make better decisions for the country, she said. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the solution to the current problems was only in dialogue. All problems can be resolved by sitting on the negotiation table. The elected members of the government and the Opposition should sit at a table and solve the country's problems through dialogue, she added. She further said that the elections of national and provincial assemblies should be held at the same time, as the country's economic situation cannot afford repeated elections.—APP

Court sends Gandapur to jail

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: A local court on Friday sent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Ali Amin Gandapur to Central Jail on six-day judicial remand, ensuring his presence in separate cases filed by Islamabad and Punjab police. The former federal minister and PTI central leader was produced before the judicial magistrate after he was arrested in Dera on Thursday. However, accepting his plea, the judicial magistrate Mazhar Ali rejected the two cases registered by Dera police against him. He also rejected the plea of Islamabad and Punjab police seeking physical custody of the PTI leader in separate cases registered against him. The judicial magistrate directed the representatives of both Islamabad and Punjab police to fulfill and complete the required documentation for further hearing proceedings. Strict security measures were made at the court premises where Ali Amin's brother, former provincial minister Faisal Amin, Tehsil Mayor Umar Amin and a large number of PTI workers were present.—APP

Health Organization at the School of Health Sciences, Peshawar here on Friday. The theme of this year's World Health Day is 'Health for All' means that health facilities should be provided at their doorstep for all individuals and families of the world without any discrimination so that a healthy society can be formed. SACM Prof. Dr. Riaz Anwar and World Health Organization Sub-Office KP Head Dr. Babar Alam were among the special guests of the event.

Provision of quality health foremost priority of govt

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to caretaker chief minister for Sports and youth affairs Dr Riaz Anwar on Friday said that provision of quality health-care facilities to people foremost priority of the government and said more than 2600 health centres have been established for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said this while addressing an event as chief guest organized in connection with the 75th annual World Health Day in collaboration with the World



ISLAMABAD: Volunteers of Jamia Masjid Rahmat-ul-Lil Aalameen are placing the grocery and clothes for Eid outside Mosque at Sector F-8 to load in trucks to supply in Sindh for the affected of Flood.—Online

Turkiye indebted to Pakistan for support, says Emir Ozbay

DNA

LAHORE: In order to celebrate presidential awards 2023 conferred to senior writers Altaf Hassan Qureshi and Mujeeb ur Rehman Shami, an Iftar-dinner reception was held amid gathering of senior diplomats from China, Turkey, Iran, academicians and media practitioners. Institute of International Relations and Media Research (IIRMR) chairman and Foreign Affairs Expert Muhammad Mehdi hosted the reception at his residence. On the occasion, Turkey Consul General Lahore Emir Ozbay said that Turkey always speaks high state of Pakistan and people of Pakistan due to their warm feelings and affection for Turkey. He heaped praise for Pakistan's overwhelming response and support in helping Turkey to deal with Earthquake catastrophe from rescue to rehabilitation work. Regionally and globally, he said, both brethren countries have full potential to grow and

thrive upholding the supremacy of law and democracy. Chinese Consulate Lahore Political head Mr Du said that such gatherings deepen the cause of people to people contact between China and Pakistan. Given the vision of President Xi Jinping, China gives an immense

importance to brethren and strategic relationship with Pakistan. Over last many decades, internationally multiple challenges impacted geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic landscapes, but Pak-China relations never unhurt, he added. In the backdrop of China's financial

assistance and loan rollover, He vowed that China will never Pakistan in lurch and will continue to support in all terms through thick and thin. Khana-e-Farhang Iran Lahore Director General Jafar Ronas said that despite many headwinds, Pakistan and Iran as robust Islam-

ic and neighboring counties can double down efforts to increase their mutual trade volume. He said as Pakistan stands with Iran, government of Iran also reciprocates. Illustrating both countries' strong ties, he underlined the need to keep enhancing mutual cultural activities between Iran and Pakistan. Provision of 100 MW electricity to Gwadar by Iran is manifestation of healthy gesture, he added. Muhammad Mehdi said that Pakistan always treasures relationships with China, Iran, Turkey and other friendly countries on the globe. Under the robust journey of joint development and prosperity, he said in categorical term that our bond will put far-reaching results on the changing dynamics of international politics and economy. He gave a big shoutout to Saudi-Iran Foreign Ministers' meeting in Beijing saying game-changing development will unleash positive results in the region as well as in the world.



Reimagine and restructure to retain valuable talent

ISLAMABAD: S&P Global, in collaboration with Nutshell Group, held a webinar on 'Career Development: Creating a Path for Employee Growth and Retention,' recently. Leading corporate executives and HR experts examined the impact of technological advancements and organizational changes on workplace relationships. The discussion revolved around the ideal culture of a workplace that is continuously evolving, making it critical for organizations to redesign and rethink their work structures to retain their best talent.

In his opening remarks, Mujeeb Zahur, Managing Director, S&P Global, said: "We at S&P Global spend our energies on developing clear goals, embracing continuous learning, networking strategically, seeking

feedback, and proactively developing leadership skills across the team." Mujeeb further stated that S&P Global has won many awards including Best Place to Work in 2019, Gold Award Top IT Exporter 2016-2018, Platinum Award BPO Services 2019, and Silver Award in Top IT Exporter 2019. These awards have helped in the evolution of the company as a peo-

ple-centric organization. Mujeeb added; "S&P Global is also taking part in Corporate Responsibility, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives, that include training of the female workforce. Under the Million Women Mentorship (MWM) program in collaboration with U.S.-Pakistan Women's Council, we have trained over 15,400 women for various STEM-related

skills. Our target is to train 20,000 women and we hope to achieve it soon." Talking of technologies, Mujeeb mentioned S&P Global's platform 'Edge' as a new venue for our team members. Edge offers enterprise learning to the team, offering courses ranging from personal and professional skills to industry hot topics and people leader development programs.

The webinar opened many perspectives of looking at the increasing need for retention and growth and how closely it is linked to leadership dynamics. Saquib Ahmad, Managing Director Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, SAP, emphasized the role of leadership, saying: "The overall phenomenon around workplaces has changed, and the employees know exactly.



GIKI, Chinese varsity sign MoU to develop partnership

PESHAWAR: Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology and Northwestern Polytechnical University (NPU), a leading Chinese research varsity signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Friday to develop partnerships in various mutually agreed fields of science and technology. The


MoU was inked by Prof Dr Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Rector GIK Institute and Dr Li Ziwei, Vice Dean (Deputy Director) of the Office of International Cooperation, NPU. The agreement came into force soon after the signatures and will remain in effect for a period of five years. The MoU is aimed to set out the general terms

of cooperation between the two universities to promote science and technology and to foster collaboration in relevant fields of education, research and technology on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefit. With the purpose of capacity building in advanced technology acquisition, both universities have agreed to cooperate through

short-term training; student cultivation programs, post-doctoral fellowships; establishment of joint research laboratories; joint workshops, symposia and lectures of matters of mutual interest; strengthening institutional collaboration; faculty and students exchange and any other areas of collaboration may be added from time to time with mutual consensus. Under the working mechanism, they agreed that research institutions affiliated with the two parties are encouraged to formulate.—APP

NA to commemorate golden jubilee of Constitution

ISLAMABAD: The Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervaiz Ashraf has said that a comprehensive one-month-long celebration will be organized in connection with the Golden Jubilee of the 1973 Constitution. In his remarks in the House, he said these celebrations will begin on April 10, 2023 (Monday) at 10:00 a.m. at the Parliament House in Islamabad. He said that a committee comprising Senators and Members National Assembly (MNAs) under the chairmanship of Senator Mian Raza Rabbani has prepared an elaborate program following which one-month celebrations are being organized throughout the country in this connection. These celebrations, he said, will formally start on April 10, 2023 (Monday) at Parliament House. The Speaker said a national constitutional convention is being organized in the House. Different segments of society including constitutional heads of the provinces, vice chancellors of universities, women, social and political workers and students have been invited to attend the convention.—APP



PAKISTAN RAILWAYS
TENDER NOTICE

Sealed bids are invited by the Divisional Superintendent Pakistan Railways Rawalpindi on item rates basis from the approved contractors of Pakistan Railways or any other Government Department, who are registered with Pakistan Engineering Council with relevant code of specialization and are also on Active Taxpayers list of FBR for the following work:-

S.#	Name of Works	Completion Period	Approximate Cost	Earnest Money
1	Supplying, stacking & loading into Railway wagons 1,000,000 Cr 2" size mechanically crushed stone ballast at Taxila Railway Station.	12 Months	Rs.42.640 million	2% of the offered bids

Bidding documents will be available for sale @ Rs.2500/- each in Works Accounts Branch of the Divisional Superintendent Office Pakistan Railways Rawalpindi from the date of publication of this notice during Monday to Thursday and Saturday from 08.00 to 15.00 hours and Friday from 08.00 to 13.00 hours upto 29.04.2023. The bids will be received upto 12.00 hours on 29.04.2023 and opened on the same date at 12.30 hours in the presence of the bidders or their representatives who may like to be present

The Railway administration may reject all bids at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid. The Railway administration shall upon request communicate to any contractor who submitted a bid, the ground for its rejection of all bids.

Note:- This tender notice is also available on PPRA web sites (www.ppra.org.pk).

No.71-W/45/TXL/2022
Dated /04/2023

(Mohammad Sohail Javed)
Divisional Engineer-I
for, Divisional Superintendent
Pakistan Railways
Rawalpindi

PID (I) No. 6190/22

Jl holds protest against Israeli aggression

PESHAWAR: Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan here on Friday organized a protest demonstration against the desecration of the First Qibla of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Israeli aggression on the Palestinians. Led by Deputy Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Maulana Hidayatullah, Naib Amir Jamaat-e-Islami District Peshawar Hamdullah Jan Badhani and others, the protesters carried banners and flags and chanted slogans in favor of Palestinian Muslims and against Israeli atrocities. Addressing on the occasion, Maulana Hidayatullah criticized the international powers and the United Nations for keeping a double standard and remaining silent on the issues of Muslims. He urged the Muslim rulers to follow the path of Jihad and support the oppressed Palestinian people. The protest was also participated by a large number of women who were injured in recent Israeli attacks on Palestine. The Jamaat-e-Islami vowed to continue its support for the Palestinians and also expressed solidarity with the people of Kashmir.—APP

APHC condemns raids by Indian troops

ISLAMABAD: All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has strongly condemned the raids by Indian forces and intelligence agencies on the residences of Hurriyat leaders, activists, journalists and human rights activists in the occupied territory. Illegally detained General Secretary of APHC Molvi Bashir Ahmad Irfani in a statement issued in Srinagar deplored that Indian forces and secret agencies were raiding the houses of the Hurriyat leaders and activists even during Ramadan which was highly condemnable. He expressed deep concern over the worst violations of human rights by India, including the forced eviction of Kashmiris from their homes and lands and the sale of their lands to non-state residents.—APP

Briefs

UNESCO awards funding to Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: UNESCO's International Fund for Cultural Diversity (IFCD) has awarded USD 83,496 to Beaconhouse National University to undertake a project titled "Improving Data Collection among National and Provincial Statistical Agencies to Strengthen Policymaking for the Cultural and Creative Industries". The IFCD is a multi-donor fund established under Article 18 of the 2005

Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Its purpose is to promote sustainable development and creative economic growth in developing countries that are Parties to the 2005 Convention. Since 2010, the IFCD has provided more than USD 10 million in funding for 140 projects in developing countries. This is the first time Pakistan has been awarded funding under the IFCD. Pakistan ratified the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in March 2022. The Convention supports the growth and development of cultural and creative industries, and provides a new framework for informed, transparent, and participatory systems of governance for culture. The project will be implemented by Beaconhouse National University, with technical guidance from the UNESCO Islamabad Field Office.

SECP registers 2,596 companies in March 2023

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) registered 2,595 new companies in March 2023. This shows an increase of 10% as compared to corresponding period of last year.

The total number of registered companies now stands at 190,161. Total capitalization (paid-up-capital) with regard to newly incorporated companies for the current month stood at Rs. 1.8 billion.

About 58 percent companies were registered as private limited companies, while 39 percent were registered as single member companies. About 03 percent were registered as public unlisted companies, not for profit associations and limited liability partnerships (LLP). Almost 99.69 percent companies were registered online. 159 foreign users were registered from overseas.—DNA

Weekly inflation surges by 0.92pc in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Consumer prices witnessed an increase in the outgoing week on the back of wheat flour, gas, diesel, eggs, onion, rice, cigarettes and bananas, taking the weekly inflation to 44.49% on an annual basis, the official data showed on Friday.

The short-term inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), for the current week ended on April 6, 2023 recorded an increase of 0.92%, said Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) in its report.

A major increase was observed in the prices of food items, including chicken (15.87%), sugar (13.48%), potatoes (5.11%), bananas (4.95%), wheat flour (3.10%), gur (2.12%), eggs (1.26%), milk fresh (1.24%) and non-food item, long cloth (1.95%).

On the other hand, decrease was observed in the prices of tomatoes (14.96%), onions (12.66%), LPG (3.73%), pulse gram (1.20%), vegetable ghee 2.5 Kg (0.71%), garlic (0.16%) and mustard oil (0.03%). During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 27 (52.94%) items increased, 07 (13.73%) items decreased and 17 (33.33%) items remained stable. The year-on-year trend depicted an increase of 44.49%. The increase was witnessed in prices of cigarettes (165.88%), wheat flour (131.72%), gas charges for Q1 (108.38%), diesel (102.84%), eggs (98.34%), tea Lipton—DNA



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi chairing the 4th meeting of the Senate of the Health Services Academy (HSA), at Aiwan-e-Sadr, Islamabad.—DNA

President for greater focus on preventive healthcare

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has called for a greater focus on promoting preventive healthcare in the country which is not only cost-effective but would help reduce the disease burden. He said that most of the diseases could be prevented by taking precautionary measures and Pakistan, being a developing country, could hardly afford to fully meet the healthcare needs of its over 220 million population through curative treatments due to limited resources.

The President gave these remarks while chairing the 4th meeting of the Senate of the Health Services Academy (HSA), at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. The meeting was attended by the members of the Senate of HSA. During the meeting, the President said that Pakistan needed to make goal-oriented and time-bound plans to improve its public health sector, adding that preventive healthcare should be the priority of the country's health policy. He highlighted that some countries had tremendously improved their health sectors by focusing on preventive health and investing in the intellectual development of their human resources.

The meeting was also briefed about the impacts of global warming and climate change which would likely increase the burden of diseases due to rising temperatures. The meeting stressed the need for exploring funding options from international donors for research and development in the public health sector.

It was also emphasised to develop a resource mobilization strategy to meet the future financial needs of HSA as well as the healthcare programmes in the country. The meeting also underscored the importance of devising a National Plan for Public Health to effectively address the challenges being faced by the country's health sector.

Human capital is vital to harness tech-driven economy

The speakers emphasized the need for Pakistan to diversify its economy by focusing on non-traditional sectors such as technology and self-sustainable models in light of the country's economic crisis

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A webinar on "Harnessing the Power of Technology for Economic Development in Pakistan: Opportunities and Challenges" was organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) Islamabad. The keynote address was delivered by Ahammad Farooq (Head, Cybersecurity Program IRS), Dr. Ali Raza (Chairman of the department of Mechatronics and Control Engineering, Human Centered Robotics Lab- UET, Lahore), and Ms. Kashoon Leeza (Policy Advocacy Lead P@SHA). Members of the think tanks, ambassadors from foreign offices, research scholars, and corporate representatives were among those present.

The speakers emphasized the need for Pakistan to diversify

its economy by focusing on non-traditional sectors such as technology and self-sustainable models in light of the country's economic crisis. They pointed out that the technology industry was the fastest-growing sector and, therefore, Pakistan should have invested in it to create jobs and boost the economy. The speakers also highlighted the importance of investing in human capital by improving education and training programs to develop a skilled workforce capable of contributing to the country's economic growth in these new sectors. They noted that this required a shift in focus from traditional industries to new, innovative sectors to move Pakistan towards a more sustainable economic future.

Ahammad Farooq in his introductory remarks highlighted the critical role of technology in econom-

ic development. He stated that Pakistan has immense potential for economic growth, which can be realized by harnessing the power of technology. He also emphasized the availability of a good workforce of freelancers and highlighted the need to invest in the tech sector to enable Pakistan's tech-driven economy.

Dr. Ali Raza emphasized several crucial points regarding the similarities and differences between Pakistan and Israel's tech economies. He pointed out that in the past, Israel spent a remarkable \$28,000 USD per capita on startups, while Pakistan only spent \$1 USD per capita. Additionally, Israel boasted of 6,000 startups, while Pakistan only had 800. Dr. Raza emphasized that Pakistan needed to invest more in human capital, promote a "Kar guryo mind-set," and embrace diversity to work

unitedly to boost technology. He also emphasized the importance of the slogan "Main Pakistan nahi chorunga" to stop brain drain.

Kashoon Leeza highlighted several critical points regarding Pakistan's economy in the past. Unfortunately, Pakistan was at risk of default due to its flawed economic model. Leeza emphasized that India had more tech-based policies than Pakistan and the policymakers' ban on imports was ultimately found to be useless. However, technology could bring in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and promote a self-sustainable model. Pakistan's tech industry had a trade surplus of 77%, and the country still lacked a Data Privacy law despite having the bill. Leeza believed that to capitalize on Pakistan's tech industry, a regulatory mindset was necessary, along

with ease of doing business. She also highlighted the importance of the government working with tech enthusiasts and focusing on product-based tech sectors rather than just service-based tech sectors. Boot camps and training sessions were the way forward to improve the skills of the workforce.

Ambassador Nadeem concluded the session on the note that Pakistan needed advanced technology to make progress. He stressed the need for an updated education system that focuses on skill-based and analytical learning. He also identified the importance of a stable governance system to utilize the country's youth and provide them with a comfortable working environment. Furthermore, he emphasized an innovative mindset and a better governance system to achieve progress in Pakistan.

ICCI calls for Pak-Ethiopia PTA to boost bilateral trade

Jemal Beker Abdula termed the visit of Pakistani business delegation to Ethiopia as Hijra Trade, which was very successful

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ethiopia has strong economic ties with Turkey & UAE and Ethiopia wants similar relations with Pakistan. China and India have good presence in Ethiopia and Pakistan should increase its presence in the Ethiopian market to explore the untapped land of Africa. Many Pakistani products including textiles, pharmaceuticals, cement have great potential in Ethiopia and the business community of Pakistan capitalize on this potential for exports. This was said by H.E. Jemal Beker Abdula, Ambassador of Ethiopia while addressing the business community during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI).

Jemal Beker Abdula termed the visit of Pakistani business delegation to Ethiopia as Hijra Trade, which was very successful. He said that after the visit of the Pakistani delegation to Ethiopia, he received calls from many African countries

including Somalia, Djibouti, and Kenya who showed interest in promoting trade ties with Pakistan. He said that Africa is endowed with great natural resources and close cooperation of Pakistan with Ethiopia would help it get better penetration in the African region for trade and exports. He said that a high-level delegation of Ethiopia is likely to visit Pakistan in near future that would further strengthen trade ties between the two countries.

Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry said that Pakistan and Ethiopia should sign a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) that would remove trade barriers and boost bilateral trade between Pakistan and Ethiopia. He said that the Ambassador should take up the PTA matter with Pakistan authorities and assured that ICCI would extend all possible cooperation in such efforts. He thanked the Ambassador and the Ethiopian author-

ities for giving warm reception and great hospitality to the ICCI delegation during its very successful visit to Addis Ababa from March 5-11, 2023. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that Africa is very important for Pakistan and the Pakistani private sector would like to develop strong business linkages with Ethiopian counterparts to get better access to the African market for business and investment.

Engr. Muhammad Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan has good potential to promote business relations with Ethiopia and hoped that the visit of the Ethiopian delegation to Pakistan would further expand trade relations between the two countries. Khalid Iqbal Malik Group Leader, Zafar Bakhtawari, Sheikh Ejaz, Humayun Kabir, Muhammad Shabbir, Akhtar Hussain and others also spoke at the occasion and gave useful proposals for improving Pak-Ethiopia trade and economic ties.

'Indus Water Treaty cannot be modified unilaterally by India'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Senate was informed on Friday that Pakistan Information Commission (PIC) established under Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, is conducting regular hearings and emphasizing on quick disposal of appeals.

Minister of State for Law Shahadat Awan told the House during Question Hour that the commission had disposed of 1300 appeals out of 2900 appeals it received. He pointed out that the Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioner were appointed by the federal government in January this year. On the request of the Senators, the Chair referred the matter regarding the functionality of Pakistan Information Commission to the Standing Committee concerned for further deliberation. Minister of State for Interior Abdul Rehman Khan Kanju told the House that the ratio of crimes had considerably decreased in the federal capital after the establishment of Eagle Squad which consisted of 260 motorcycles including 1114 police officers.

The Senate today passed a number of bills. These included: The National University of Pakistan Bill, 2023; the Publication of the Holy Quran (Eliminating of Printing and Recording Errors) Amendment Bill, 2022; the Federal Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance Amendment Bill, 2022 and The Pir Roshan Institute of Progressive Sciences and Technologies, Miranshah, Bill, 2023. Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman said that Indus Water Treaty cannot be modified unilaterally by India. Responding to a Calling Attention Notice in the Senate, moved by Leader of Opposition Shahzad Waseem and others, she stressed that the treaty cannot be changed until both the parties, Pakistan and India, agree to it.

'FO committed to improve performance of its diplomatic missions'

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly was informed on Friday that the Foreign Office was committed to improving performance of its diplomatic missions especially in the domain of extending consular services to Pakistani Diaspora. Responding to a question during the Question Hour in the House, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Syed Hussain Tariq said the missions extend assistance to prisoners in accordance with local laws of the host countries. He said our embassies sent consequent teams to different cities of the host country to provide consular services like attestation of documents and registration of work certificates. Besides, heads of Pakistan Missions abroad hold open and E-kachehris on a regular basis with the resident Pakistani community to solve their problems. The Parliamentary Secretary said the financial and legal assistance is provided to destitute Pakistanis who are either stranded or unable to travel on their own expenses.—DNA

Zoo closure violation of Basic rights : Baloch

Prime Minister and the Home Minister should restore the zoo immediately. Khalid Chaudhry

ISLAMABAD: Ajmal Baloch President Pakistan Anjman Tajran & Traders Action Committee Islamabad and Secretary and Convenor Traders Committee ICCI Khalid Chaudhry have said that the zoo was established in the federal capital in the seventies and throughout Pakistan. There are twenty-eight such zoos. But it was closed in the name of animal rights. The elephant was exported to Cambodia where it died due to climate change and the government lost millions of rupees. Lions were killed by fire on the way while shifting to Lahore, while 550 animals were stolen. If there can be zoos in other cities, why not in Islamabad? Apart from entertainment, zoos are also educational institutions for children and children also get information about animals. Apart from this, the zoo covering twenty-five acres of land was closed and dozens of employees were also unemployed. The then Chief Justice Athar Minullah had issued orders for the modern construction of the zoo, but due to unknown reasons, the construction has not been started and an NGO is trying to get possession of the land. The closure of zoos from Islamabad was a violation of basic human rights. Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and Chairman CDA Capt Retd Nurul Amin Mengal should be immediately reinstated on emergency basis.—DNA

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China outcompetes US in peace race

The foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met in China on Thursday, the first formal meeting between the two countries' top diplomats in more than seven years. The meeting was aimed at activating the terms of a deal reached between the two countries last month to resume their diplomatic ties. The two sides agreed to proceed with the necessary measures to open their respective embassies in Teheran and Riyadh, and to enhance their coordination to facilitate exchanges.

It is further confirmation that Teheran and Riyadh have agreed to end their diplomatic rift and re-establish ties, a reconciliation that was facilitated by the mediation of China. The meeting of Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian in Beijing is not only a testament to the two countries' resolve to mend their relations that have been strained by years of tension and conflict, but also the key role China is playing in promoting peace and development in the Middle East.

With Saudi Arabia and Iran reaching an accord, it has raised hopes that it will mark the start of a domino effect in the region, with other countries choosing to put aside their differences in favor of peace, stability and development. The Middle East was subject to colonialism and, divided by the imperialist powers, it has long been convulsed by conflicts, with countries played against each other to serve the ambitions and interests of the colonial powers in their competition for influence. After the Suez Crisis in 1956, the United States was for decades the main external factor in regional affairs, flexing both its diplomatic and military muscles in pursuit of its own agenda.

That has been the primary reason why the Middle East has been wracked by turmoil in recent decades. What the Middle East has needed is a round table, what the US has provided are the seeds of discord and weapons. The US Department of State even reported that US arms exports to the Middle East had risen by 49 percent to \$205.6 billion in fiscal year 2022.

The US always views China as a competitor, but the two are actually participants in different races. While the US is in self-started arms races with any nation it dislikes, China is in a race to bring peace and prosperity to every corner of the world.

Believing that the future of the Middle East should always be in the hands of the countries in the region, China has said that it looks forward to seeing closer communication between Saudi Arabia and Iran and stands ready to continue playing a positive and constructive role in facilitating dialogue between them and among other parties in the region which are at odds with one another. History will prove peace prevails over war.

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Child poverty

Ministers rarely talk about the growing number of children living in poverty in Britain. That is because it is a symptom of political failure. Progress made on tackling child poverty during the first decade of this century is being reversed. In 2021, an additional 350,000 children were living in relative poverty, defined as households that have 50% less than the average income. By 2027, child poverty is expected to be the highest since 1998. This should sound alarm bells in government. Recent research from the Child Poverty Action Group confirms the scale of destruction caused by Conservative policies. George Osborne led the charge with his two-child limit on benefits, which came into effect in 2017. This introduced a cap which meant that anyone with a larger family would go without child tax credit or universal credit for a third child or subsequent children. It was less a coherent reform than an assault on the perceived generosity of a system exploited by "scroungers". "Quite simply, we have been encouraging working-age people to have children and not work," David Cameron said in 2012.

On all counts, it has failed. The cap had minimal effect on the number of children born (a good thing, given Britain's dwindling fertility rate and the murky ethics of punishing the poor for having children). It has pushed larger families, more than half of whom are in work, into deeper poverty, affecting 1.5 million children. Mr Osborne's policy was premised on the notion that people who use benefits are a static group who respond to narrow financial incentives. Yet having a child is not a cost-benefit calculation, and the number of people who claim benefits is not fixed. Parents who were previously secure may need to apply for benefits after a redundancy, as happened during the pandemic. Moreover, so long as wages remain low, working additional hours won't plug the hole that this cap has blown in family budgets.

There is no reason to retain the cruel two-child policy. A related problem is the absence of any national strategy for tackling child poverty. The 2016 Welfare Reform Act, another brainchild of Mr Osborne's, repealed the earlier Child Poverty Act, including its goal of ending child poverty in the UK by 2020. As a result, the issue has drifted further from the minds of ministers, while euphemistic subcategories have taken the place of coherent definitions. New Labour lifted about 800,000 children out of relative poverty, an admirable achievement that is now being eroded. The gains made on child poverty during the early 2000s were fragile because they relied on large increases in cash transfers that were swept away after the Conservatives took power. A more generous benefits system is urgently needed, but any future Labour government should also look to insulate it from political caprice. That would mean raising wages in low-paid sectors, building an affordable childcare system so that parents can access employment, and providing a sustainable solution to escalating housing costs that are pushing renters into poverty. Poor children live in poor families – fixing this must take priority.

Israel's violence is open terrorism – stop calling it 'clashes'

Belén Fernández

Nor would one describe the United States's lethal 2015 bombing of a hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan as a "clash" between a medical facility and an AC-130 gunship. But while clearly unethical, the Western media's obsequiousness vis-à-vis the Israeli narrative is nothing new. Much of this has to do with the fervent backing of the US, in particular, for the Israeli point of view, which casts victimisers as victims and slaughter as self-defence. Perhaps the very founding of the state of Israel in 1948 – which saw thousands

Here we go again. The state of Israel is committing unchecked barbarism against Palestinians and the Western corporate media has decided it all comes down to "clashes". The latest round of so-called "clashes" – sparked when Israeli police decided to mark the Muslim holy month of Ramadan by repeatedly attacking Palestinian worshippers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque – has produced predictably disproportionate casualties.

Hundreds of Palestinians have been arrested and wounded as Israeli forces have once again flaunted their handiness with rubber bullets, batons, stun grenades and tear gas. In return, the police have suffered minimal injuries, while also undertaking to accompany illegal Israeli settlers into the mosque compound.

And apparently not satisfied with simply unleashing violence in Jerusalem, Israel has also launched a barrage of air strikes on the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon following reported rocket fire. As with all previous instances of Israeli-Palestinian "clashes", the media's choice to deploy such terminology serves to obscure the Israeli monopoly on violence and the fact that Israel kills, maims and mutilates at an astronomically higher rate than its supposed counterpart in "clashing". It also obscures the reality that Palestinian violence is in response to a now nearly-75-year-old Israeli policy defined by the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, the occupation of Palestinian land and the periodic perpetration of massacres – pardon, "clashes".

Take your pick of contemporary, Israeli military assaults and you'll find manoeuvres like Operation Protective Edge, the euphemism for the 2014 slaughter of 2,251 people in the Gaza Strip, including 551 children. Over a period of 22 days starting in December 2008, Operation Cast

Lead took the lives of some 1,400 Palestinians in Gaza; three Israeli civilians died. "Clashes" also abounded in 2018 when, in response to the Gaza border protests, the Israeli military killed hundreds of Palestinians and wounded thousands. And in May 2021, an 11-day Israeli rampage titled Operation Guardian of the Walls killed more than 260 Palestinians, approximately one-fourth of whom were children. As it so happens, this last operation was set off by – what else? – "clashes" at Al-Aqsa Mosque. This bit of trivia has prompted certain news outlets to fret about what the current "spiralling bloodshed" between Israelis and Palestinians may portend – another media catchphrase that ultimately whitewashes Israel's predominant role in the shedding of blood. It is difficult, of course, to find any linguistic or moral equivalent to the media obsession with reporting Israeli savagery as "clashes". One would not perceive an elk as "clashing" with a hunter's rifle, just as one would not perceive a "clash" between a human neck and a guillotine.

Nor would one describe the United States's lethal 2015 bombing of a hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan as a "clash" between a medical facility and an AC-130 gunship. But while clearly unethical, the Western media's obsequiousness vis-à-vis the Israeli narrative is nothing new. Much of this has to do with the fervent backing of the US, in particular, for the Israeli point of view, which casts victimisers as victims and slaughter as self-defence. Perhaps the very founding of the state of Israel in 1948 – which saw thousands of Palestinians massacred and more than 500 Palestinian villages destroyed – was in the end nothing more than one big "clash". To be sure, Israel's long-term propaganda campaign to conflate Palestinians with terrorism continues to pay considerable media dividends. This is the case even

among ostensibly more progressive venues that are willing to call out Israeli crimes but that still can't quite manage to place Palestinians on the same level of humanity as Israelis. In February of this year, for example, The New Yorker magazine's Lawrence Wright tweeted a video of Israeli soldiers shoving and kicking Palestinian peace activist Issa Amro while Wright was interviewing him in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron. The New Yorker writer's takeaway: "I can't stop thinking how dehumanising the occupation is on the young soldiers charged with enforcing it".

In other words: Israeli soldiers are victims of moral degradation and dehumanisation while Palestinians don't really ever get to be humans in the first place.

Now, as Israeli security forces proceed to dehumanise and be dehumanised in Jerusalem and Gaza, the whole jargon about "clashes" only validates the idea that Israel is fundamentally justified in its violence, which is cast as merely part of a fair, tit-for-tat competition between two equitable sides. In August 2022, a three-day assault by the Israeli army on Gaza killed at least 44 Palestinians, including 16 children – the bloodiest episode since Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021. Exactly zero Israelis were killed as a result of the August affair and yet, the Western media were still standing dutifully by with breathless reports of "clashes". As I noted in an article for Al Jazeera at the time, the online version of the Cambridge Dictionary defines terrorism as "(threats of) violent action for political purposes". And the more often we remind ourselves that Israel is literally terrorising Palestinians, the sooner, perhaps, we can put a stop to all this talk of "clashes".

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

The fallacy of a US withdrawal from the Middle East

James M. Dorsey

There is no coherent Indo-Pacific strategy that does not include the region's Western approach: the Arabian Sea with Oman, Yemen, Somalia, India, and Pakistan as littoral states. In other words, a continued US commitment to security in the Middle East or West Asia, however reconfigured, has to be part and parcel of any Indo-Pacific strategy. Mini-lateral alliances like I2U2 that brings together the United States, India, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel with a focus on economics and non-conventional security such as food production testify to the importance of the Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Moreover, the recent

America is in decline. Eclipsed by China's rise, it is shifting attention from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. That is one refrain in the analysis of three seemingly paradigm-challenging developments in the past month: a Chinese-mediated restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the kingdom's association with the China-led, security-focused Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and a possible Russian-facilitated revival of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Syria.

The geopolitical importance of these developments is too early to tell. While significant in and of themselves, they raise as many questions as they provide answers. Their ultimate impact remains uncertain. At the same time, these developments, although seemingly sidelining the United States, have not changed facts on the ground. Furthermore, they do not suggest tectonic plate shifting. Geography is one immutable fact. There is no coherent Indo-Pacific strategy that does not include the region's Western approach: the Arabian Sea with Oman, Yemen, Somalia, India, and Pakistan as littoral states. In other words, a continued US commitment to security in the Middle East or West Asia, however reconfigured, has to be part and parcel of any Indo-Pacific strategy. Mini-lateral alliances like I2U2 that brings together the United States, India, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel with a focus on economics and non-conventional security such as food production testify to the importance of the Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Moreover, the recent China and Russia-related developments did not happen in a vacuum. They reflect a global rebalancing of power rather than the eclipse of one power by another. Initially, the rebalancing towards a multipolar world involves the United States and China. However, it is only a matter of time before India emerges as the world's third-largest economy and claims its seat at the top table. In that multipolar environment, middle powers like Saudi Arabia determined not to be caught in a renewed Cold War in which they are forced to align themselves with any one side of the divide, are accruing increased agency and leverage as they play all sides against the middle. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman appeared to be flexing his enhanced muscles when he reportedly told associates late last year that he was no longer interested in pleasing the US saying he wants something in return for anything he gives Washington. Meanwhile, depending on the outcome of the Ukraine war, Gulf states may find that Russia is, at this point, a middle rather than a global power even if that is not how it seeks to project itself.

A frigate armed with hypersonic cruise missile, the Admiral Gorshkov, this week became the first Russian warship to dock in Saudi Arabia in Russia's latest projection of itself

as a global power. The vessel arrived after participating in exercises off the coast of South Africa and together with China and Iran in the Arabian Sea.

Even so, while Saudi Arabia and Iran may have had good reason to opt for China as the sponsor of their improved relations, it is not clear why the kingdom would need Moscow to restore its relations with Syria.

If Saudi Arabia and Syria reestablish relations and involve Russia, it would likely be a gesture at a time when the country is sanctioned by the United States, Europe, and some of their Asian allies rather than because Moscow had a substantial contribution to make. Earning Russian and Chinese brownie points makes complete sense. Rattled by a decade of statements by US officials and actions that cast doubt on America's continued commitment to Gulf security, Middle Eastern states seek to hedge their bets. They do so as much based on perceptions as on facts. The role of perceptions is magnified by the US's failure to clearly define its commitment to Gulf security and communicate that effectively. The US's failure to do so looms large as facts on the ground don't bear out perceptions. In a just published study, Christopher K. Colley, a security expert at the United Arab Emirates National Defence College, concluded that "America's forward military presence (in the Middle East) is not declining, nor even remaining stable, but in fact has increased over the past decade." Based on data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Mr. Colley noted that from 2008 to 2022, the US military increased its presence in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Djibouti. Nor has there been any significant shift in weapon sourcing by Middle Eastern states, according to Mr. Colley. Taking fighter jets as a measure, he calculated that upwards of 56 per cent of fighters in the air forces of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman are US-made with France making up much of the remainder. "The percentage of Russian and Chinese warplanes in those countries is zero," Mr. Colley said. "With the United States supplying an estimated 75 per cent of Saudi weapons systems, which require spare parts, repairs, and upgrades, the structural links between Washington and Riyadh are not only robust but create powerful economic, political, and security lobbies with vested interests in solving disagreements," Mr. Colley added. Mr. Colley concluded his study before the United States decided in late March to deploy ageing A-10 attack planes to the Middle East to replace more advanced combat aircraft that will be shifted to the Pacific and Europe. It's not clear what impact the replacement may have on Gulf and Chinese security consider-

ations. China is happy to let the United States shoulder security responsibility in the Gulf as long as its military projection is reliable and credible. Many Chinese analysts assume that the United States will maintain its commitment for the foreseeable future. The question is whether the replacement of warplanes reduces the commitment's credibility. For the moment, the replacement is unlikely to alter Chinese calculations. Nevertheless, with the rapid modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its navy, China has increasingly acquired the capability to deploy forces to the Middle East to secure its interests. Still, Mr. Colley suggested that "we are a long way away from the time when the Chinese military could directly take part in combat operations, such as missile defense, to protect one of its 'comprehensive strategic partners' from an attack." Even so, China's deployment considerations are as much political as they are military. With good relations on all sides of the region's divides, China fears that an enhanced security posture could force it to disrupt its carefully constructed balance if it is forced to take military action against any one party in case of a serious threat. It's a very different picture when it comes to Russia. Even without the growing cost of the Ukraine war and US and European sanctions, Russia's economy, far smaller than that of either the United States or China, would struggle to shoulder the brunt of regional security in the Middle East. In addition, the size of Russia's navy limits the country's ability to create a security umbrella far from its shores. Nor does it have the kind of air force that could provide cover on the open seas. For now, this means that there is no real alternative to the US security umbrella in the Gulf. But that doesn't stop Gulf states from diversifying their military suppliers. In the last year, for example, the UAE signed agreements to purchase substantial weapons systems from France, South Korea, China, Indonesia, Turkey, and Israel. Except for China, its more recent suppliers are all US allies or partners. At the same time, the sustainability of the American umbrella is less a question of US decline and more one of how the United States will define its interests and role in the world – rather than by its diminishing need for Middle Eastern oil and gas "A (US) pullout from the Middle East would essentially mean that Washington has abandoned its role" as a superpower and systemic leader. So, "a central question for the next 10 to 20 years is how much the United States will benefit from its security umbrella in the region relative to the gains of other states—primarily but not exclusively China," Mr. Colley said

Briefs

Govt says CJP 'partial', wants his resignation

FROM PAGE 01

Mariyum wondered what the need for "judicial facilitation" was and questioned why the judges distanced themselves from the issue. According to the minister, the decision is unprecedented in the history of the judiciary and the Constitution. She questioned why Justice Ijazul Ahsan was chosen for the three-member bench who, according to her, was a "controversial" judge. "If a constitutional crisis arises from the Supreme Court itself then it raises the question who will trust its decisions," she questioned. The federal minister stated that despite all the factors involved, a decision is made and imposed on the government to follow it. Mariyum said that political parties were present in court but their voices were not heard, adding that the lawyers from all political parties were present, yet none of them were given a chance to speak. "But Asad Umar was invited [to the court] and was asked to provide details about the economy." The minister raised the question of whether the reason for this was because former prime minister Imran Khan and PTI were seeking elections.

Justice Minallah endorses...

FROM PAGE 01

President Arif Alvi for polls in Punjab and Governor Ghulam Ali for elections in KP. The majority judgement, given by CJP Bandial, Justice Akhtar, and Justice Mazhar, however, allowed the ECP to propose a poll date that deviates from the 90-day deadline by the "barest minimum", in case of any practical difficulty. Justice Mandokhail and Justice Shah — who were among the four judges who had written additional notes in the Feb 23 order — dissented with the ruling. In a joint dissent note, the two top court judges said that the suo motu proceedings initiated by the CJP were "wholly unjustified", besides being initiated with "undue haste". In his 25 page-long note, Justice Minallah mentioned the various case proceedings that took place on the matter since the assemblies were dissolved in January. He has also mentioned the Lahore High Court's Feb 10 verdict where it ordered the ECP to immediately announce the date for elections in Punjab. Justice Minallah observed that petitions were filed seeking contempt of court proceedings to reinforce the LHC's order but that the Supreme Court had "no reason to doubt the ability and competence" of the former. He said that the written order of the hearing held on Feb 23 included a separate note from Justice Yahya Afridi, who had dismissed the petitions on the ground of maintainability. "The reasoning recorded in the short order was persuasive and I had no hesitation in concurring with the decision regarding dismissal of the petitions. I had reiterated my decision by recording my note in the order dated 24.02.2023.

"I have had the privilege of reading the detailed reasoning recorded by my learned brothers, Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Jamal Khan Mandokhail, JJ's and I agree with their opinion, particularly regarding the final outcome of the petitions and the suo motu assumption of jurisdiction by a majority of 4 to 3 because this was the understanding in the meeting held in the courtroom on 27.02.2023. It is noted that I had not recused nor had any reason to disassociate myself," he said.

Regarding Article 184(3) of the Constitution (matters of public importance), the judge said that invocation of jurisdiction under the article and the exercise of discretion relating to the constitution of benches and fixation of cases were crucial in the context of preserving public trust and confidence. "The process of constitution of benches and allocation of cases must be transparent, fair and impartial. The court must always show extreme restraint in matters which involve the political stakeholders.

Aleem Dar receives guard of honour in final Test

Dar also shed light on his journey as an umpire which included being voted for the ICC Umpire of the Year for three consecutive years between 2009 and 2011

SPORT DESK

DHAKA: Renowned Pakistani umpire Aleem Dar received a guard of honour after officiating in his last Test match as an ICC Elite Panel umpire during the fixture between Bangladesh and Ireland in Mirpur on Friday. Bangladesh won the match on the final day by seven wickets after successfully chasing down a target of 138 runs. Dar's exit from the elite panel after 19 years was confirmed by the ICC on March 16 in a press release. "Dar has had a long and celebrated career as an international umpire. He made his international debut in 2000 and quickly rose through the ranks, with his sound decisions in matches earning him acclaim from the players and fans," the ICC said. "Dar was appointed to the ICC International Panel of Umpires in 2002 and officiated at the 2003 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in South Africa. Dar continued his rise as he was appointed as a member of the Elite Panel of ICC Umpires in 2004. He was the first Pakistani to be appointed to the Elite Panel," it added.



Dar officiated a total of 438 international matches over the course of his illustrious career.

Lauding Dar's contributions, ICC CEO Geoff Allardice said: "Aleem's contribution to international cricket and to the ICC has been truly remarkable. Consistently elite performances over such a long period saw him enjoy enormous respect across all involved in international cricket. I wish Aleem all the best for the future and I am sure his involvement in the game will continue for many years to come." Dar also shed light on his journey as an umpire which included being voted for the ICC Umpire of the Year for three consecutive years between 2009 and 2011. "It has been a long journey, but I have enjoyed every bit of it. I have had the pleasure and honour of umpiring the world over and what I have achieved is something I did not even dream of when I started in the profession," Dar said. "Though I am still keen to continue as an international umpire, I felt it was now the right time, after 19 years on the road to step away from the Elite panel and provide an opportunity to someone from the International Panel. My message to umpires the world over is to work hard, maintain discipline and never stop learning," he added.

Pakistan vs NZ: PCB announce team management

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Friday announced national men's team management for the upcoming T20I and ODI series against New Zealand. Rehan-ul-Haq, the general manager of two-time Pakistan Super League (PSL) champions Islamabad United, has been appointed team manager. New Zealand's former Test cricketer Grant Bradburn will be the head coach with Abdul Rehman as his assistant. Andrew Puttick will come as batting coach followed by Umar Gul's extension as bowling coach. Reportedly, the team management has been appointed in the loop with a potential team director in the future, Mickey Arthur. The former head coach of the

national team is likely to be confirmed to take up the post after the home New Zealand tour. Bradburn and Puttick have been appointed for the New Zealand series and will arrive in Lahore on 11 April. The PCB will confirm the Pakistan team management for post-New Zealand series following the completion of the relevant recruitment processes, which are presently ongoing. Pakistani Squads T20I: Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Iftikhar Ahmed, Ihsanullah, Imad Wasim, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen

Shah Afridi, Shan Masood and Zaman Khan ODI: Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Abdullah Shafique, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Haris Sohail, Ihsanullah, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Salman Ali Agha, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood and Usama Mir. Reserves: Abbas Afridi, Abrar Ahmed and Tayyab Tahir Player Support Personnel Rehan Ul Haq (manager), Grant Bradburn (head coach), Abdul Rehman (assistant to head coach), Andrew Puttick (batting coach), Umar Gul (bowling coach), Cliffe Deacon (physiotherapist), Drikus Saaimon (strength and conditioning

coach), Talha Ijaz (analyst), Ahsan Iftikhar Nagi (media and digital manager), Major (ret'd) Azhar Arif (security manager), Ammar Ahsan (videographer), Dr Najeeb Soomro (team doctor) and Malang Ali (masseur). Series schedule (T20Is to start at 9pm; ODIs to begin at 3.30pm): 14 Apr — 1st T20I, Lahore 15 Apr — 2nd T20I, Lahore 17 Apr — 3rd T20I, Lahore 20 Apr — 4th T20I, Rawalpindi 24 Apr — 5th T20I, Rawalpindi 27 Apr — 1st ODI, Rawalpindi 29 Apr — 2nd ODI, Rawalpindi 3 May — 3rd ODI, Karachi 5 May — 4th ODI, Karachi 7 May — 5th ODI, Karachi.—APP

Klopp calls for Liverpool reaction against Arsenal

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp says his struggling Liverpool team must show "reaction after reaction" when they face Premier League leaders Arsenal at Anfield on Sunday. The Reds are 10 points behind fourth-placed Manchester United and face an uphill task to qualify for next season's Champions League. Liverpool have taken just one point from their past three games — all away — but have won nine of their 13 league matches at Anfield this season. "We are at home and still have to show reaction after reaction after reaction — we have to — and improvement," Klopp said on Friday. "That's what we will absolutely try on Sunday." A much-changed Liverpool side drew 0-0 at Chelsea in midweek after defeats at Bournemouth and Manchester City. "We have to change, we have to find a basis we can build on," said Klopp, whose side hammered Manchester United 7-0 in their last home game in early March. "First step: intensity, desire, passion. Good at Chelsea, really, that was good. The rest, not so much. But it's fine — let's go from there." Klopp, who admitted his team were low on confidence, said the Anfield factor could be crucial. "It's no secret that the combination of our people and the ground and then the boys is a pretty good combination.—APP

Afghan wheelchair-bound cricket team to visit Pakistan

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Wheelchair Cricket Council (PWCC) on Friday announced that Afghanistan's wheelchair-bound cricket team will visit Pakistan on next month to play three T20Is and two ODIs against Pakistan. Rookhsana Rajpoot, President of Pakistan Wheelchair Cricket Council said that it will be a momentous event as it will be for the first time in the history that an international wheelchair cricket team will travel to Pakistan for a series. She said it would also be for the first time in the history of wheelchair cricket that an international one-day match would be played between the two teams. "A new history will be made in the series. The event will be an important milestone as it will help promote wheelchair cricket in the region," she added. Rookhsana said preparations for hosting the series had started, adding that separate Pakistan teams would be formed for the ODI and T20 matches. "The final dates and venues for the series will be announced soon," she concluded.

England beat Brazil to win Women's Finalissima

LONDON: England beat Brazil 4-2 in a dramatic penalty shootout to win the first-ever Women's Finalissima at Wembley on Thursday, with Euro 2022 hero Chloe Kelly scoring the decisive spot-kick after a 1-1 draw. Sarina Wiegman's European champions were on course for a narrow win after taking the lead in a first half they dominated through a well-worked team goal finished off by Ella Toone. But Copa America Femina winners Brazil were transformed after the break and threatened to spoil the party when Andressa Alves fired home from close range in

the 93rd minute. With no extra time, the game went straight to penalties. Georgia Stanway, Rachel Daly and Alex Greenwood scored from the spot to put England 3-1 ahead. Kerolin kept the contest alive but Kelly — who scored the winning goal in the European Championship final at Wembley last year — slotted home coolly to seal the win. Wiegman said her team, preparing for the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, which starts in July, had not had much chance to practise penalties. "We practised yesterday and before the Euros we practised a lot," she said. "We just repeated it yester-

day in case. We knew what to do and we did good." The Dutch coach — yet to taste defeat as England boss — said she felt "privileged" to reach 30 games unbeaten. "I'm very happy working here," she said. "Such an incredible group. The team is so committed, they want to learn every day." England secured their place in the showpiece match by beating Germany 2-1 in the Euro 2022 final last year while Brazil beat Colombia 1-0 to win their eighth Copa America Femina title. The crowd of more than 83,000 and the players took part in a minute's applause to remember Brazil

great Pele, who died in December, before kick-off. England started strongly, playing with swagger and assurance and limiting the visitors, without injured record scorer Marta, to occasional breaks. Lucy Bronze stung the hands of goalkeeper Leticia from distance and at the other end Jess Carter made a crucial block to deny the lively Geysse. England got the reward they deserved in the 23rd minute when Manchester United forward Toone finished a flowing move down the right, connecting sweetly with a cross from Bronze.—Agencies

Arsenal brace for Liverpool test as relegation battle heats up Nottingham Forest owner Evangelos Marinakis said Steve Cooper would remain in charge of the struggling club but warned results must "improve immediately"

LONDON: Arsenal face a test of their Premier League title credentials against Liverpool this weekend as the scramble to avoid relegation intensifies. Manchester United and Newcastle will seek to consolidate their positions in the top four, while Frank Lampard takes charge for Chelsea's visit to Wolves after returning to Stamford Bridge as caretaker manager. AFP Sport looks at some of the key talking points ahead of the action.

Arsenal travel to Anfield on Sunday seeking an eighth consecutive Premier League win as they close in on a first English top-flight title for 19 years. On paper, a match against faltering Liverpool does not look the toughest of tasks but Jurgen Klopp's team are a tougher proposition at home than away, winning nine of their 13 league matches at Anfield this season. Klopp saw positives in the goalless draw against

Chelsea in midweek after three consecutive defeats in all competitions, praising his men for their attitude. "Now let's carry on," he said. "Anfield is waiting for us and we want to deliver. We have another 10 games to play and

the next one is Arsenal." The Gunners, who have not won at Anfield in the league since 2012, face a daunting set of fixtures in April, with matches against Manchester City and Chelsea to come later in the month.

But if they beat Liverpool, even defending champions City, eight points behind Arsenal with a game in hand, might begin to lose belief they can catch their title rivals. Marcus Rashford was once again the match-win-

ner in Manchester United's victory against Brentford on Wednesday, but Erik ten Hag is painfully aware that his side are over-reliant on the England forward. United's 1-0 win at Old Trafford, which lifted them back

into the top four, was their first in the Premier League since mid-February. Ten Hag finally ran out of patience with the blunt Wout Weghorst but despite their dominance, United were unable to add a second goal to Rashford's first-half strike. The Red Devils have not won a league match without Rashford being on the scoresheet since before the World Cup. Ten Hag, whose side host Sean Dyche's Everton on Saturday, admits it is "the truth" that United are too reliant on Rashford, who has 28 goals in all competitions this season. But finding a solution is not easy. Weghorst has scored just twice since he joined on loan in January and Anthony Martial is finding his feet again after an injury-ravaged season. The pressure at the bottom of the Premier League is growing by the week, with clubs taking drastic measures in the fight for survival.—Agencies



Terrorists in Pakistan using...

FROM PAGE 01

killed, while 734 were injured in 262 terrorist attacks last year. The Taliban spokesperson however rejected claims that it has supplied TTP fighters with US weapons and equipment. "If some weapons are being smuggled, they are far fewer and not of much concern," the report quoted Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman said.—Agencies

NSC announces to start...

FROM PAGE 01

all-out comprehensive operation — with renewed vigour and determination — with the [help] of the entire nation and the government, which will rid the country of the menace of terrorism," the statement mentioned. This all-around and comprehensive operation to eliminate the scourge of terrorism in all its forms from Pakistan will also include efforts at the political, diplomatic, security, economic, and social levels. A high-level committee has also been formed in this regard and will make recommendations regarding the implementation and limitations within two weeks, the statement said.

The meeting, according to the statement, emphasised comprehensive national security — in which the relief of the people was central. "The forum was informed that the government was taking steps in this regard." The meeting acknowledged the sacrifices and efforts of the security forces for providing peace to the nation. The forum reiterated its commitment to continue its activities till terrorism is rooted out.

High value target arrested...

FROM PAGE 01

BNA had been responsible for dozens of violent terrorist attacks in Pakistan including attacks on Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) Installations in Panjgur and Noshki. Gulzar Imam also remained as deputy to Brahadagh Bugti in Baloch Republican Army (BRA) till 2018, the ISPR said. Gulzar Imam was also instrumental in the formation of Baloch Raji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS) and remained its Operational Head. His visits to Afghanistan and India are also on record; his linkages with Hostile Intelligence Agencies (HIAs) are being investigated. Reportedly, HIAs also tried to exploit him to work against the state of Pakistan & its national interests. He was apprehended after an innovatively conceived, carefully planned and meticulously executed operation, spanned over months over various geographical locations. The arrest of Gulzar Imam Shambay is a serious blow to BNA as well as other militant groups, which have been attempting to destabilize the hard-earned peace in Balochistan. Apprehension of a militant leader of this stature demonstrates the capability and resolve of LEAs to uproot the menace of terrorism as well as speaks volumes about the successes garnered through supreme sacrifices of unsung heroes.

Dar pulls out of WB-IMF...

FROM PAGE 01

Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq would also not go to the United States due to the prevailing uncertain political conditions. The economic affairs minister always represented Pakistan at the World Bank. Ayaz was considered very close to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and also handled the political affairs of the allied parties. The finance minister's decision to pull out might also lead to cancellation of meetings with his Saudi Arabia counterpart, and the UK state minister for development. Finance Secretary Hamed Yaqoob Sheikh and Economic Affairs Secretary Kazim Niaz would represent the government at the WB-IMF spring meetings. A secretary was considered equal to a deputy minister and they might still be able to meet some of the high-ranking foreign officials.

Briefs

Erdoğan, Raisi discuss ties

ANKARA: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call on Friday focusing on bilateral relations, regional matters, as well as Israel's attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque...

French FM meets Iranian counterpart

PARIS: France's foreign minister has held a rare face-to-face meeting with her Iranian counterpart in China, urging Tehran to release French nationals "arbitrarily detained" in Iran...

France hit by gasoline shortages

PARIS: Strikes at French oil refineries have triggered fuel shortages at petrol stations across the country as protests continue against the government's plan to raise the retirement age...

10 years of BRI transformed Pakistan's economic landscape

"In Gwadar, 46 enterprises have been registered in the Free Zone while 3 companies have started production", he said

BEIJING: "We are very hopeful that this year is going to bring the momentum back to pre-Covid level as more delegations from Pakistan are coming to China for face-to-face meetings following China's relaxation on Covid-related restrictions"

transformed our economic landscape", he added. According to research by KTrade, a securities broker and think tank in Pakistan, CPEC energy projects have become growth drivers for Pakistan.



of 2.7% pre-CPEC and 9-yr CAGR of 7.0% post-CPEC. In terms of transport infrastructure, CPEC has contributed 809km out of the 2,790km operational motorways in Pakistan, and further 813km is under construction...

Commercial Counsellor to China Mr. Ghulam Qadir, looking ahead, trade, investment, and industrial co-operation hold the key for Pakistan and China. "In Gwadar, 46 enterprises have been registered in the Free Zone while 3 companies have started production", he said.

with China on beef export, which is a huge market worth over \$10 billion. "Other than agriculture, we also hope to add value to the base metals that are being produced in Pakistan. For example, we are exporting copper to China, but we want to export copper products, such as copper cathodes, wires, bars, rods, etc.", he added.

Nord Stream sabotage Yacht had traces of explosives: Report

NEW DESK

NEW YORK: German investigators have discovered traces of explosives on the Andromeda yacht linked to the Nord Stream sabotage that occurred last September, the New York Times has reported.

abled the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, which were built to deliver Russian gas to Europe via Germany. The paper's anonymous sources stressed that "no American or British nationals were involved" in the sabotage of the key energy infrastructure.

order to divert attention from the report by veteran American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, which came shortly before the Western media reports and blamed Washington for the sabotage.

egy and War Studies, who also questioned claims of a 50-foot (15-meter) yacht being capable of carrying out an attack of such scale, likening them to a "James Bond" theory.

Iran urges global action against Israel

TEHRAN: Iran has condemned latest atrocities committed by the Israeli regime against civilians in southern Lebanon and the besieged Gaza Strip, urging the international community and responsible global bodies to take "effective and deterrent" action.

Saudi Arabia ranks 2nd in AI awareness

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia ranked second globally for societal awareness of artificial intelligence, according to the 2023 Artificial Intelligence Index Report by Stanford University.



TUNIS: Pakistan ambassador to Tunisia, Tahir Andrabi meets Foreign Minister of Tunisia, Nabil Ammar and conveyed letter & greetings of FM Bilawal Bhutto. Both sides discussed multifaceted Pak-Tunisia relations & charted avenues to further strengthen longstanding fraternal ties. - DNA

Türkiye calls for end to Russia-Ukraine conflict

Turkish backing has been vital to sustaining moderate Syrian opposition in their last significant territorial foothold in the northwest after Assad defeated opponents across the rest of the country, aided by Russia and Iran

FOREIGN DESK

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov joined his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on the second day of his visit to Türkiye for a news conference at the Presidential Complex. The Russia-Ukraine conflict dominated their agenda.

through negotiations. Meanwhile, Lavrov said they wanted any Ukraine peace talks to focus on creating a "new world order." "Any negotiation needs to be based on considering Russian interests, Russian concerns," Lavrov said.

international stage and argues the Ukraine offensive is part of that fight. The Kremlin this week said it had no choice but to continue its more than yearlong offensive in Ukraine, seeing no diplomatic solution.

Türkiye since the earthquakes hit. "I thank Sergey and the Russian Federation for hosting the quadrilateral meeting. We are aware that this is an issue that cannot be solved through just one meeting. We are realistic but we need to continue the dialogue. We will remain engaged with Russia for close consultation for the normalization process with Syria."

sia looked at the process that way. He said preparations were underway for a ministerial-level quadrilateral meeting for the normalization of Turkish-Syrian ties and they have been discussing a date. Deputy foreign ministers of Türkiye, Iran, Syria and Russia met in Moscow earlier this week for normalization talks between the two neighbors.



Oil prices decline with recession fears triggered

ANKARA: Oil prices decreased on Friday after weak economic data in the US sparked recession fears. International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$84.61 per barrel at 10.08 a.m. local time (0708 GMT), a 0.45% drop from the closing price of \$84.99 a barrel in the previous trading session.

Lebanon to file complaint at UNSC against Israel

BEIRUT: Lebanon intends to lodge an official complaint with the UN Security Council over the deliberate Israeli "aggression" that took place early Friday, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

Dozens killed in Nigeria clashes

NIGER: Gunmen have attacked a rural village in northern central Nigeria, killing dozens of people, local government officials said on Friday.

Briefs

China must cooperate to know Covid origins, says WHO chief

DNA

GENEVA: The World Health Organisation chief pressed China on Thursday to share its information about the origins of Covid-19, saying that until that happened all hypotheses remained on the table, more than three years after the virus first emerged. "Without full access to the information that China has, you cannot say this or that," said Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in response to a question about the origin of the virus. "All hypotheses are on the table. That's WHO's position and that's why we have been asking China to be cooperative on this." "If they would do that then we will know what happened or how it started," he said. The virus was first identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, with many suspecting it spread in a live animal market before fanning out around the world and killing nearly 7 million people. Data from the early days of the Covid pandemic was briefly uploaded by Chinese scientists to an international database last month. It included genetic sequences found in more than 1,000 environmental and animal samples taken in January 2020 at the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, location of the first known Covid outbreak.

Thousands of Burmese flee to Thailand after fighting

DNA

BANGKOK: Some 10,000 Burmese people have fled to Thailand to escape fierce fighting between the military and units of a powerful ethnic armed group since Wednesday, Thai authorities said. They are fleeing from Shwe Kokko town, controlled by a pro-military militia and home to Chinese-owned casinos. This is one of the largest cross-border movements of people since a military coup two years ago. The military has not released a statement yet about the fighting. It is the latest in a civil war that has been raging since the coup in February 2021. Two years on, the military government has failed to impose its authority on large areas of the country. It is battling established ethnic armed groups in border areas that have been at war with the military for decades, and recently-formed anti-coup militias that call themselves People's Defence Forces (PDFs) in much of the rest of the country. Many thousands of people have been killed and some 1.4 million have been displaced since the coup. Nearly one third of the country's population is in need of aid, according to the United Nations.

2 dead after ice storm hits Canada

TORONTO: Two people died and more than a million were without power on Thursday after an ice storm hit Canada's two most-populated provinces ahead of a holiday weekend, bringing freezing rain and strong winds that toppled trees and weighed down power lines. Just under a million people did not have power in Quebec and about 110,000 in Ontario as of 4pm according to Poweroutage.com. Outages combined for both provinces had crossed at least 1.3 million earlier in the day. The two provinces account for more than half of Canada's total population of about 39 million. Electricity providers in both provinces were working to restore power, but repairs were expected to continue for days, meaning many Canadians could spend Easter weekend in the dark. One man was killed in Quebec when a tree fell on him, Premier Francois Legault said at a briefing, cautioning people to watch out for live wires and weakened trees. - Agencies

Israeli jets strike Gaza as Al-Aqsa violence escalates

Israeli authorities said two people were killed during a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank on Friday

NEWS DESK

GAZA CITY: Israeli warplanes bombed several military sites belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad in different areas in the Gaza Strip, from midnight until the early hours of Friday morning. The Israeli bombardment also targeted agricultural and open areas, in addition to watchtowers on the eastern border. Israel has claimed that the bombing was in response to missiles fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israeli towns in recent days. During the bombardment, Palestinian factions fired shells toward Israeli towns, most of which were intercepted by the air defense system Iron Dome. The Israeli media, quoting security sources, said that about 44 rockets were fired from Gaza during the night. The Israeli bombardment of Palestinian sites did not cause any injuries, according

to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, but resulted in material damage to homes and properties, as well as the Al-Durra Children's Hospital, east of Gaza City. In a press statement, the ministry said that the bombing "caused a state of confusion and fear among the medical staff, pediatric patients, and their companions." Israeli army spokesman Daniel Hagari said that Israeli planes dropped 50 tons of bombs in their bombing of the Gaza Strip during the night. Abeer Shitei, 50, told Arab News: "We lived through a night of terror and fear. The sound of bombing and warplanes was frightening. When the plane near Al-Durra Hospital was bombed, I felt that the house moved from its place." She added: "Thank God we did not suffer any damage, but my little boy was close to me all the time. I felt him trembling with the sounds of planes in the sky, and when the bombing happened, he started

screaming and crying, and he barely went back to sleep in the morning." The Islamic Jihad has threatened to fire rockets into Israeli cities as long as Israel attacks the Gaza Strip. Dawood Shehab, an official of the Islamic Jihad, said: "Every bombing will be met with rockets, and every aggression will be responded to in kind. Attacking Al-Aqsa or harming worshippers...will be met with a response. These are rules of engagement that have become part of the Palestinians' fighting doctrine." Hamas is holding Israel responsible for an escalation of tensions due to attacks on Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. "We hold the Zionist occupation fully responsible for the dangerous escalation and blatant aggression against the Gaza Strip and our proud Palestinian people, and for what will happen in the region," it said in a statement. "This brutal aggression against Gaza and

the continued violations of the occupation against Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa will not achieve security for the occupation, nor will it grant it victory or a right in our land and Jerusalem." Recent days have witnessed significant tension in light of the events at Al-Aqsa Mosque, with footage from the scene showing Israeli police attacking worshippers inside the mosque. Shells were fired from the Gaza Strip in response that night. Ayman Al-Rafati, a political analyst close to Hamas, told Arab News that Hamas and other Palestinian factions are ready and anticipating all scenarios. "The resistance is ready for this scenario on all fronts, and its continued wrong assessment of events will lead to a larger and unexpected reaction," he said. "The occupation government must realize that whenever there is a violation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, there will be unexpected and sudden reactions."

Punjab polls: PTI to finalise candidates

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) has decided to finalise the candidates for the Punjab general elections. According to media, the PTI chief chaired a meeting in this regard at his Zaman Park residence to discuss election preparations after the Supreme Court (SC) announced verdict dismissing October 8 polls date as earlier declared by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). "You all have to be prepared, I'll start distributing tickets from tomorrow," PTI chief Imran Khan told his party workers after the meeting. The meeting paid tribute to the lawyers for "defending the constitution", reiterating that the recent chaotic situation was a plot against the judiciary, and that the move to delay the elections would be strongly resisted. It was decided with consensus that interviews of candidates will be conducted from Thursday and their names will be finalized within a week.

Weekly inflation up by 0.92%

DNA

ISLAMABAD: After a temporary respite, the prices of essential items started increasing again in the week that ended on April 6 - with the inflation rate recording an increase of 44.49% on a yearly basis, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Friday reported. The short-term inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), for the week witnessed a hike of 0.92%. During the week, the 51 essential items monitored by the SPI based on a survey of 50 markets in 17 cities in the country, the prices of 27 of them increased, seven declined and 17 remained unchanged. The prices of the 27 essential items increased collectively by 52.94%.

Pak risk of defaulting 'real': US think tank

DNA

WASHINGTON: A Washington-based think tank, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), has warned that there is "a real danger that Pakistan could default on debt", which might further intensify political turmoil amid already surging terrorism. The author of the analysis published on Thursday warned that amid skyrocketing inflation, political conflicts, and rising terrorism, the country is facing the risk of a default due to its massive external debt obligations. The cash-strapped nation is reeling with the repercussions of a deepening political crisis - which initially began in April last year when former prime minister Imran Khan was ousted through a vote of no-confidence motion - and the derailment of the \$6.5 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme.

Hafiz Naem fires a broadside at K-Electric

DNA

KARACHI: Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) Karachi chief Hafiz Naemur Rehman, while targeting K-Electric a "mafia", claimed on Friday that there existed white-collar criminals in the administration. Speaking about the difficulties faced by people in general, Mr Rehman said, "It is difficult for them to manage the expenses of their homes." He praised the Al-Khidmat Foundation, saying, "The duty which the Sindh government should fulfil is being done by the Al-Khidmat Foundation." "Many of the Bachat Bazaars that were constructed by the Sindh government are closed. The Bachat Bazaars are being installed by using the money generated from the taxes we paid," he lamented. He scolded K-Electric for charging four types of taxes.

FIA issues summon to Asad in PTI Prohibited Funding case

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Friday issued summon to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) central leader Asad Umar in the prohibited funding case. According to the order, Asad Umar is directed to appear before the FIA Lahore on April 14. PTI Lahore President Sheikh Intiaz has received summon at the party office. The sources said PTI spent millions of rupees on its political campaign in 2013 by receiving funds from prohibited foreign sources and Asad Umar was the manager of this campaign. The sources said Asad Umar was involved in playing a key role in the use of these foreign embezzled funds. It is noteworthy that PTI has kept the source of receiving these foreign funds secret and has not declared it in any forum. It should be remembered that FIA Lahore has registered FIR No 52/2022 dated October 5, 2022, in the prohibited funding case, in which Hamid Zaman and others have been arrested and investigated.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal calls on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

China sends warships, jets around Taiwan for 2nd day

China also blacklisted the Hudson Institute and Ronald Reagan Library, saying the two US institutions had provided platforms and facilities for 'Taiwan independence' activities by Tsai

DNA

BEIJING: China has deployed warships and aircraft near Taiwan for a second day and imposed sanctions amid anger in Beijing over this week's meeting between the self-ruled island's President Tsai Ing-wen and US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Three Chinese warships sailed in waters surrounding the island, which China claims as its own, while a fighter jet and an anti-submarine helicopter also crossed the island's air defence identification zone, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence said on Friday. On Wednesday, China's Shandong aircraft carrier was spotted sailing through Taiwan's southeastern waters on its way to

the western Pacific, hours before Tsai met McCarthy in Los Angeles. Beijing sent out repeated warnings before the meeting took place, and issued a rebuke on Thursday after the event had concluded. "China will take firm and forceful measures to firmly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. Last August, China deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets into the waters and skies around Taiwan in its largest show of force in years after McCarthy's predecessor Nancy Pelosi visited the island. McCarthy, who is the third most senior politician in the US, had also planned to go to Taiwan but eventually decided to meet Tsai in California. Its response to the Tsai-McCarthy meeting has been more restrained so far, but Taiwan remains on alert. On Friday, Beijing announced a tightening of sanctions on Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US, Hsiao Bikhim, as well as her family and any companies with which she has connections. Hsiao was previously sanctioned after Pelosi's visit. China also blacklisted the Hudson Institute and Ronald Reagan Library, saying the two US institutions had provided platforms and facilities for "Taiwan independence" activities by Tsai. Tsai, who was first elected president in 2016, argues Taiwan's future can only be decided by its people.

BJP's Maharashtra see spike in anti-Muslim rallies

MONITORING DESK

MUMBAI: On March 30, nearly 5,000 people poured into the streets of north Mumbai to participate in a procession celebrating the Hindu festival of Ram Navami, which marks the birth of the god, Ram. For about three hours, the procession passed through Muslim neighbourhoods, blaring incendiary songs of Hindu supremacy, waving saffron flags and provocatively chanting "Jai Shri Ram" (Hail Lord Ram, the Hindu right wing's war cry). Young and old danced to the high-decibel speakers mounted on a truck, playing "Bharat ka bachchabachcha, Jai Shri Ram bolega" (Every child in India will be compelled to say Hail Lord Ram). An elderly Muslim security guard, watching the procession pass through Malad, said he had not seen such a display of supremacy in years. He was among the many Muslims Al Jazeera spoke to who did not want to reveal their identities for fear of a backlash. "You don't have to belittle or disrespect other religions while celebrating your festival," he said. "It is particularly humiliating to witness it during the month of Ramadan. The music gets louder and people get aggressive, especially while passing by a mosque or through a Muslim area. It is provocative."

And that is exactly what happened a couple of hours later. The procession slowed down and the volume of the speakers was increased as it reached a mosque where Muslims were offering their evening prayers. The situation got tense when some Muslims complained about their prayers being disrupted. A row broke out between the two communities and stones were pelted. The police say they arrested nearly two dozen people for allegedly throwing stones. The official version of the incident says a Muslim man threw a stone at the participants in the Ram Navami rally after his request to lower the volume was rejected. But the residents of Malad say they were at the receiving end of aggression by the Hindu marchers. The procession was organised by two far-right Hindu groups - Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). But the nature of the procession was in the same vein as several rallies held in the past six months across the state of Maharashtra, home to nearly 13 million Muslims or 11.5 percent of its population. Observers say the Ram Navami procession in state capital Mumbai was part of a concerted attempt to ignite religious tensions in the western Indian state that had remained relatively peaceful at a time when attacks on Muslims in other parts of India were rising. - DNA

White House blames Afghan pull-out on Trump

Kirby said that Mr Biden had "acted on the best military judgment and the best assessments from the intelligence community" but "some of those assessments turned out to be wrong"

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's administration has blamed its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan on his predecessor, Donald Trump, in a new report. A 12-page summary of the report says Mr Biden was "severely constrained" by Mr Trump's decisions, including a 2020 deal with the Taliban to end the war. But the report also acknowledges that the government should have begun the evacuation of civilians earlier. Mr Trump responded that the White House was playing a "disinformation game". The deadly pull-out in August 2021 ended America's longest war. Thirteen US soldiers and nearly 200 Afghans were killed as US troops scrambled to evacuate more than 120,000 people in a matter of days. A review of decisions and actions leading up to the withdrawal, conducted by the State Department and the Pentagon, was sent privately to Congress on Thursday. Republicans in the US House of Representatives, who are investigating the pull-out, had been demanding to see

the report for weeks. The document remains confidential, but a summary of its conclusions - put together by the White House National Security Council with input from President Biden himself - has been made available to the public. When the Afghan government collapsed, there were desperate scenes at Kabul airport as huge crowds tried to flee the Taliban. On 26 August, an attack at the airport by two suicide bombers killed 170 Afghans and 13 US soldiers. US Marine to Congress in March on Afghan pull-out: "There was an inexcusable lack of accountability" The US carried out a drone strike in Kabul days later, saying it had targeted a suicide bomber, only to admit that the missile had killed 10 civilians, including seven children. British troops were also involved in the withdrawal, which Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said at the time had put the UK "in a very difficult position". On Thursday, President Biden's national security spokesman, John Kirby, blamed the chaos on a depleted operation in Afghanistan inherited from the Trump administration. The report refers to "neglect

- and in some cases deliberate degradation" by the Trump administration. Mr Kirby said that phrase refers to the agreement the former president had struck with the insurgents a year earlier in Qatar to end the war, as well as the drawdown of US troops during Mr Trump's tenure, the freeing of thousands of Taliban prisoners and the hollowing out of the visa program used to evacuate Afghan allies. "Transitions matter," said Mr Kirby, as he presented a summary of the report. "That's the first lesson learned here. And the incoming administration wasn't afforded much of one." Mr Trump shot back on social media within hours of the report's release, accusing "Morons in the White House" of playing "a new disinformation game - Blame 'TRUMP' for their grossly incompetent SURRENDER in Afghanistan". "Biden is responsible, no one else!" he said. Michael McCaul, the top-ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also slammed the administration for a "brazen whitewashing of their failure in Afghanistan". The report implies that the evacuation of Americans and Afghans who had assisted

with the war effort could have started sooner. "We now prioritize earlier evacuations when faced with a degrading security situation," it says on page seven. But the report faults the Afghan government and military for these delays, together with US military and intelligence community assessments. Mr Kirby said that Mr Biden had "acted on the best military judgment and the best assessments from the intelligence community" but "some of those assessments turned out to be wrong". He refused to say if the president regretted how the withdrawal was carried out, adding: "For all this talk of chaos, I just didn't see it." Following the fall of Kabul, the Biden administration received searing criticism at home and abroad. Many expressed anger over the abandonment of Afghans and of US weaponry. Some lessons had been learned from the end of the war in Afghanistan, especially around the failure to predict the sudden collapse of the Afghan government, Mr Kirby said. He added this had influenced the US policy of supporting Ukraine ahead of Russia's invasion.