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Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

JUI-F firmly against talks with PTI: Fazl

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Thursday categorically stated that his party would not take part in any negotiations with PTI. The JUI-F was firmly against having talks with the PTI and that was why it would not become part of the coalition government's team for negotiations, if any, held under the initiative of the Senate chairman, he said while talking to the media. Maulana Fazl said instead of holding talks, the PTI leadership should be rather held accountable for corruption they had committed while in govt.

Trust vote a major defeat to Shehbaz

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Reacting over Shehbaz Sharif's trust vote, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry said that Shehbaz had lost the trust of the majority of the members of the lower house. He said that votes of 20 members of the National Assembly belonged to PTI, which cannot be counted in favor of the Prime Minister. Fawad Chaudhry stated that Shehbaz Sharif got the support of only 160 MPs instead of 172, adding that today's vote of trust was a big defeat for Shehbaz and PDM.

Let dialogue be given a chance: Siraj

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: All political parties are ready for elections, the issue is the date of polls, Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Sirajul Haq said on Thursday. "Instead of hurry in the matter, talks should be given a chance," the JI chief in a statement said. "Mutual fighting will lead to anarchy, we have to break the speed-breaker of ego, which impeding the dialogue" JI leader said. "Everyone has committed mistakes, the PTI have also realized it," Sirajul Haq said. "The PTI had itself dissolved the assemblies," he said.

Election crisis Govt, PTI engage in negotiations

First round held at Parliament house, PTI demands Punjab elections as per Constitution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Members of the ruling coalition and opposition PTI will resume talks on elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa today (Friday), following the initiation of dialogue at the Parliament House on Thursday. Talking to journalists after the meeting, Gilani said the ruling parties would consult each other and make a decision. "Whatever is decided, it will be based on input from all parties." Qureshi, while speaking to the media, the consultations ended after two hours and stressed that political parties find solutions to problems through talks. He said PTI demands Punjab elections as per Constitution. He ruled out press reports in which impression was given as if PTI wants dissolution in July. He said in August the assembly would automatically dissolve so there was no point in seeking dissolution in July. "We have entered the talks with a spirit of arriving at a decision [...] but we will not allow the talks to be used as a delaying tactic for polls," the PTI vice chairman said. During the meeting, sources told media that, the Imran Khan-led opposition party insisted on a date for dissolution of National Assembly (NA). Imran Khan wanted the dissolution of

PML-N leader opposes govt-PTI talks

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Javed Latif opposed the decision of the coalition government to hold talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying that there should be no negotiations until the PTI chief publicly apologises, media reported on Thursday. According to details, during a National Assembly session, PML-N leader Javed Latif questioned his own government. He said, "Why did we take PTI's filth on our own head?", "Everything we have been saying about Imran Khan was wrong?" The PML-N leader demanded that negotiations should not take place with PTI until they publicly apologize to the nation.

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Polls delay case

CJP says will not give any timeline
Urges govt, PTI to hold talks for the sake of Constitution

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial on Thursday urged the ruling alliance and the opposition to sit together for talks on elections for the sake of the Constitution. The CJP remarked that the 'appropriate' verdict will be released and the SC will not give any timeline. "Please for the sake of the Constitution sit with each other," remarked CJP Bandial while wrapping up the election delay case's hearing for Thursday. The Supreme Court held the hearing amid a deadlock between the government and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) over talks on polls. At the outset of the hearing, Attorney General of Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan informed the court that the first contact between the government and the opposition took place on April 19, and they agreed to meet on April 26. He stated that federal ministers Ayaz Sadiq, Saad Rafique met PTI leader Asad Qaiser, who said that he didn't



not have the authority to hold talks. The AGP said that the members of the ruling coalition met on Wednesday. Two of the coalition partners had objections to the negotiations, but they found a way out, he added. Awan informed the court that Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani had written to the government and opposition and sought four names from the Treasury and Opposition benches in the Parliament each. At this, CJP Bandial inquired what the government did after Qaiser informed them about his inability to hold talks.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addresses a session of National Assembly. - DNA

PM reiterates 'One China' policy in call to Li Qiang

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Premier Li Qiang spoke on the telephone on Thursday wherein they agreed to enhance their cooperation in all spheres so as to realize shared objectives of benefiting peoples of their countries, while also contributing to regional peace, prosperity and stability. The conversation was marked by traditional warmth and cordiality that has always characterized Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, the Prime Minister office said. PM Shehbaz extended his warm congratulations on the Chinese Premier's recent election to this high office, which reflected the deep-seated trust of the Chinese nation and confidence in him, stemming from his many achievements in public service. As all-weather partners and close friends, Pakistan appreciated China's peaceful development as a positive factor of international peace and stability, and was confident that China would continue to achieve milestones on its journey towards modernization and rejuvenation. The PM reiterated Pakistan's unstinting support to China on its core issues, including the "One China" policy, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea. He expressed Pakistan's sincere gratitude for China's principled position on the Jammu & Kashmir dispute, and support for Pakistan on core issues. The Chinese Premier appreciated Pakistan's support for China and reaffirmed China's continuing support to Pakistan's national development, sovereignty and territorial integrity. As an All-Weather Friend, China would continue to stand with Pakistan at all times.

FM Bilawal's resolution

180 NA lawmakers repose confidence on PM Shehbaz

PM thanks coalition parties; says talks with PTI only for simultaneous elections

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday obtained the vote of confidence from the National Assembly and commanded the trust of the majority of the Lower House with 180 votes going in his favour. A total of 172 votes were required to secure the trust vote in the assembly of 342 members. However, the death of former Minister for Religious Affairs Mufti Abdul Shakoore reduced the total number to 341. Announcing the results, Speaker National Assembly Raja Pervaiz Ashraf said that 180 members of the house reposed complete confidence in the leadership Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto tabled the resolution seeking trust vote in the National Assembly. The resolution, passed by 180 members, stated, "The National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reposes its full confidence in the leadership of Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, as the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan." Speaking on the occasion, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said today's resolution reflects that Pakistan's Parliament stands by the Constitution, democracy, supremacy of the Parliament and the Constitution as well as by the 4-3 majority decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

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NA again rejects motion for polls funds

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly (NA) on Thursday once again rejected a motion seeking a supplementary grant of Rs21 billion for elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), ARY News reported. According to details, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar presented the motion seeking funds for elections in Punjab and KP following the Supreme Court's (SC) orders, directing the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to "allocate and release" Rs21 billion. The meeting of the Lower House of the Parliament - which was chaired by Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf - once again rejected the motion unilaterally. A day earlier, the federal cabinet approved that the matter for the release of Rs21 billion, initially ordered by the Supreme Court in an April 4 order, be taken to parliament for a second time. It is pertinent to mention here

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Russia says no plan for nuclear escalation - Page 08

Iran, Romanian envoys pay farewell call on the President

Pakistan attached huge importance to Iran, Romania: President Alvi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has called for increasing cooperation with Iran and Romania in all areas of mutual interest. He expressed these views while talking to the Ambassadors of Iran and Romania, who separately

called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Talking to the outgoing Ambassador of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the President said that Pakistan greatly valued its fraternal relations with Iran as both brotherly countries shared historic linkages and cultural affinities, besides having commonalities of views on issues of regional and

international significance. He emphasized the need for increasing economic cooperation and expanding the trade volume for the mutual benefits of the two countries. He also highlighted the atrocities being committed by the Indian security forces against Muslims in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and other parts of India, saying Muslims were being isolated and persecuted in India and the Muslim World needed to take notice of the Indian brutalities against Muslims. The President thanked the Iranian government for its support and stance on the Kashmir issue. While appreciating the landmark initiative taken by Iran and Saudi Arabia to normalise diplomatic relations, the President said that normalization of relations between the two countries would lead to peace and stability in the Middle East.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Romania Nicolae Goia and Ambassador of Iran Ali Hosseini pay farewell call on President Dr. Arif Alvi. - DNA

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FDRE, TDAP agree to hold 'Pak-Ethiopia business forum'

Ambassador recalled that a big delegation of Pakistani businessmen had visited Ethiopia and was impressed by ongoing development in major economic sectors of Ethiopia including agriculture, agro-processing, mining, technology transfer and tourism

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in Pakistan and the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) on Thursday agreed to hold an "Ethiopia-Pakistan Business Forum" in Karachi during the second week of May to boost bilateral trade by connecting the business community of the two countries. The decision to this effect was taken during a meeting between Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the FDRE to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Jamal Beker Abdulla and TDAP Chairman Zubair Motiwala. During the meeting, both the dignitaries discussed modalities for the forum wherein high-level officials and

business delegations from the FDRE will also take part in further cementing business-to-business relations between the two countries.

Ambassador Jamal Beker said the forum would not only help business communities of both countries to work out a comprehensive strategy for bolstering bilateral trade but also enable them to establish strong linkages. He underlined the forum would also provide an opportunity for the business community of the two countries to highlight business, trade and investment opportunities in the economic sectors of Ethiopia and Pakistan.

The ambassador recalled that a big delegation of Pakistani businessmen had visited Ethiopia and was impressed by the ongoing development in major economic sectors of Ethiopia including agriculture, agro-pro-

cessing, mining, technology transfer and tourism. Moreover, the chairman was informed by the ambassador that Ethiopian Airlines would start its flight operations from Karachi to Addis Ababa and vice versa on May 9 to connect Pakistan not only with Ethiopia but also with entire Africa. The TDAP chairman also expressed strong interest in conducting the business forum which was crucial to strengthen business-to-business and people-to-people relations between the two countries. He said a large number of businessmen would participate in the Ethiopia-Pakistan business forum which was crucial to advance business-to-business relations. The chairman also agreed that the start of Ethiopian Airlines would create a conducive environment to promote business between both countries.



ISLAMABAD: Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini Ambassador of Islamic Republic of Iran called on Minister for Defence Production Muhammad Israr Tareen at his office. – APP

Tareen expresses well-wishes to Iranian envoy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence Production, Muhammad Israr Tareen on Thursday expressed his well-wishes to the Ambassador of Islamic Republic of Iran, Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini who called on him before leaving the country. The Minister for Defence Production expressed his appreciation for cordial and fraternal ties nourished by centuries-old religious and cultural affinities, a news release said. The Minister for Defence Production appreciated the role of Syed Mohammad Ali Hosseini as an effective representative of Islamic Republic in furthering relations of the two brotherly Islamic countries. Minister wished him well with regard to his future assignments back home and blessings in his personal life.

Both sides showed satisfaction and intended for cooperation in various areas of common interest, border enhancing security, counter-terrorism and ensuring regional economic connectivity.

Iranian Consul General meets CM Mohsin Naqvi

LAHORE: Consul General of Iran Mehran Mowahid Far called on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi here and discussed matters of mutual interest including increase of trade of rice, meat, mangoes, and other goods. The chief minister highlighted the strong cultural and religious ties that bind Pakistan and Iran together. He assured the Consul General that efforts would be made to increase exports in partnership with the federal government and that issues related to the Punjab Agriculture & Meat Company would be addressed soon. The CM also thanked the Consul General for sending trucks of dates and other fruits to Pakistan during Ramadan. The Consul General invited the CM to attend the handicrafts exhibition in Isfahan, Iran. – APP

Germany to install 'Buddy Bear' sculptures at GPO Chowk

QUETTA: The Consul General (CS) of Germany in Karachi Dr Rudiger Lutz on Thursday said that Germany would install a "Buddy Bear" sculpture at GPO Chowk, here. While talking to Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Tariq Mengal, during his visit to the Quetta Metropolitan Corporation (QMC) office, the CS of Germany said that Germany would provide all possible support to the Metropolitan Corporation in terms of financial assistance and technical expertise. "Buddy Bears are painted, life-size fiberglass bear sculptures developed by German businesspeople

and its installation at GPO Square will promote friendship between Quetta and Germany and bring the people of both countries closer together."

Solid waste management, taxation system and digitization of various industries among other important topics were discussed and the two officials discussed ways to reduce pollution, conserve resources and promote sustainability in Quetta. Dr Ruediger Lutz discussed ways to improve the tax collection system to ensure that the metropolitan could generate enough revenue to provide essential services to its citizens. – APP

Rescue 1122 gets award from Turkiye govt for earthquake services

LAHORE: A Rescue 1122 team has been awarded medal and certificate by President of Islamic Republic of Turkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in recognition of the services rendered by the first United Nations INSARAG Certified Pakistan Rescue 1122 Team in Turkiye Earthquake 2023. The medal and award was given to Rescue 1122 Team leader Dr Rizwan Naseer for saving many lives and extrication of many dead from collapsed structures in Adiyaman and Hatay

Turkiye affected by the devastating earthquake, said a spokesperson here. Dr Rizwan Naseer, was also invited to the United Nations INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) Steering Group Meeting in Geneva by the Global Chair to discuss the Turkiye Earthquake response at the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in Geneva, Switzerland from 24 to 28th April, 2023. In these United Nations INSARAG events, the re-

sponse to such disasters in future was also discussed. Dr Rizwan Naseer represented the country at these meetings and briefed about the work done by Pakistan especially Rescue 1122 Team in Turkiye Earthquake. He specially thanked the United Nations INSARAG for providing training to Rescue 1122 Team in Search & Rescue to respond to disasters at international level. On this occasion, he stated that Rescue 1122 had been working for the management of emergencies since 2004. The Rescue 1122 team reached at Adiyaman Turkiye on very next day and started rescue operations and also extricated trapped victims alive and relocated the trapped bodies from the collapsed structures in Adiyaman and Hatay. – APP



IAP hails resolution of EOBI related issues of industrialists

PESHAWAR: Industrialists Association Peshawar (IAP) has welcomed the resolution of issues relating to EOBI – Employees' Old-Age Benefits in light of the directives of the Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources Development Sajid Hussain Turi, terming the move would provide relief to the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chairing a meeting here at Industrial Estate Hayatabad Peshawar on Thursday, the IAP president Malik Imran Ishaq said that EOBI Chairman had issued directives that verification of books of Accounts of Employees under Regulation No06 to 08

of EOBI (verification) 2007 shall be discontinued. In this regard, directives have been issued to all divisions/regions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for full compliance with it, he added. Group leader and former president FPCCI Ghazanfar Bilour, the IAP executive members, senior members and industrialists were present during the meeting. Ishaq said it was a long-standing demand of industrialists and the business community, which has been fulfilled with concerted efforts of federal minister for overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources Development, Sajid Hussain Turi and former Governor Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa Engineer Shaukat Khan. The IAP president further elaborated EOBI in light of Federal Minister Sajid Turi's directives had issued a circular to all divisions for strict compliance to discontinue verification of Books of Accounts (including but not limited to Payroll/wage register; Wage payment Vouchers; Trial Balance; Profit and Loss Account; Balance Sheet; General Ledger) with the approval of chairperson EOBI. He, however, said the matter pertaining to rates/contribution of EOBI funds are yet not been resolved. In this regard, he informed the Supreme Court that

had passed a clear verdict which was fixed at Rs170, which should be implemented in letter and spirit across the board. The IAP chief said rate is the most important issue which has caused difficulties for industrialists and the business community. He went on to say that it was completely unjust to charge rates in variation in the country, which was unacceptable to them because it is illegal, demanding to charge rate equitable in light of the verdict of the Apex Court so that all people should contribute to the EOBI fund, besides rates disparity issues would be solved. – APP

Commissioner for providing maximum relief to public

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Mr. Liaquat Ali Chatta on Thursday during his inspection of district Attock has directed the district administration Attock and heads of all relevant provincial departments to provide maximum relief to the people by mobilizing all available resources in the public interest. He was also accompanied by Additional Commissioner Revenue Rawalpindi Ms. Kinza Murtaza, Additional Commissioner Consolidation Rawalpindi Chaudhary Abdul Majid, DC Attock Rao Atif Raza, DDR Attock Mr. Shahzad Niaz and other officers of the Punjab Government. Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Mr. Liaquat Ali Chatta while chairing different meetings

was also briefed on the progress of various public sector development projects being executed in the district. DC Attock Rao Atif Raza highlighting the salient features of the development schemes has said that works on 21 development projects of Rs.27527.965 million are going on at different parts of the district. He said allocation of Rs.1023.957 million for 26 schemes of highways department, 22 schemes of buildings department with cost of Rs.2487.363 million, 07 schemes of Rs1426.304 for public health, 02 schemes of Rs.135 million for local government will be utilized for completion of these projects in due course of time. He also told that the targets for revenue collection will be achieved during this year. Earlier, Commissioner Rawalpindi Mr. Liaquat Ali Chatta also inaugurated the establishment of gym club with the ray hope of healthy change among the people. He said that such kind of gym clubs had also been running in Sargodha, Faisalabad, DG Khan and Gujrat with the cooperation of private sector successfully. Meanwhile, Commissioner Rawalpindi while addressing the lambardar convention in Jinnah Hall Attockhas also assured all possible assistance to fulfil the genuine demands of the lambardars within a period one month, he added.

Parliament to complete its constitutional term, says Maulana Asad Mehmood

Balochistan National Party Sardar Akhtar Mengal said that issues of Balochistan should be solved on priority. He also congratulated prime minister Shehbaz Sharif for getting the vote of confidence from parliament

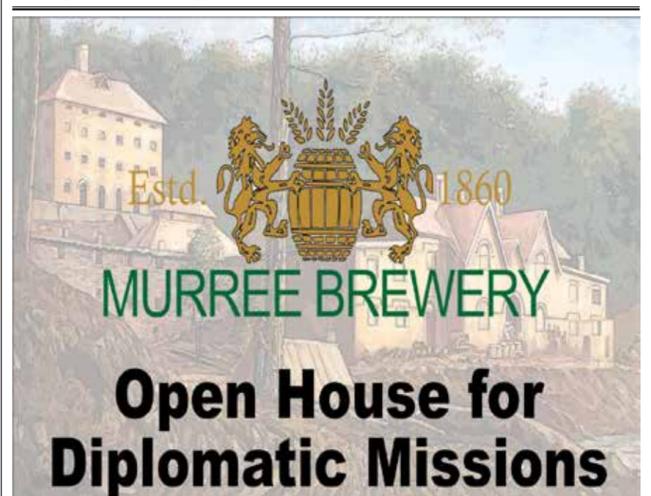
ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communication Maulana Asad Mehmood on Thursday categorically said that the parliament would complete its constitutional term adding that no one has the authority to dictate us and undermine the supremacy of the Parliament. Speaking on the floor of the National Assembly he said, "The whole parliament is standing behind Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and no one can dictate or undermine the authority of the parliament". He said that the government should stick to its stance of holding polls across the country simultaneously and shun any pressure in this regard. "We agree to the suggestion of the prime minister

to hold talks, but we will not negotiate under pressure and we will reject it," the JUI-F leader observed. He regretted that unfortunately, the demand of the political parties for constituting a full court had not been entertained. Speaking in the House, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said any decision compromising the supremacy of the parliament would not be accepted at any cost. The decisions aimed at protecting someone would not be accepted, he added. He said that majority of this august house has reposed full confidence in the leadership of the Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. While congratulating the Prime Minister for securing the vote of confidence,

he said that decisions of the parliament would prevail in the country. Balochistan National Party Sardar Akhtar Mengal said that issues of Balochistan should be solved on priority. He also congratulated prime minister Shehbaz Sharif for getting the vote of confidence from the parliament. He urged the political parties to work for the supremacy of the parliament and constitution. Many people had been displaced due to operation in northern and other areas of the country but they were not yet rehabilitated so far, he added. Mian Javed Latif said that Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) would accept the general election 2023 only if its leadership

was given a level playing field in the political process. He said that no political party wanted to delay elections, but a level playing field should be given to all political forces before holding general elections in the current year 2023. The PML-N leadership had always accepted the court decisions and never indulged in politics of agitation, he added. He said PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif had faced disqualification and judicial trials despite being innocent, but it was time to ensure justice for him, who had served the country as the prime minister thrice and contributed to the development and progress of the country. Javed Latif said that talks could be held amongst the genuine political parties

but not with the person who was responsible for anarchy and stoking moral decline in the society. PTI chairman Imran Khan was granted bail while sitting at home, while the PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif had made the country a nuclear power and gave gift of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) besides eliminating terrorism, was forced to live in exile. He said that Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif had been banned from politics for ten years which was totally unjust. In the past, he had been exiled forcefully from Pakistan by Gen. Musharraf, he added. Later, the House was adjourned to meet again on Friday at 11.00 am. – APP



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For further information please contact the following.

Maj (r) Sabih Ur Rehman
Mobile: 0300 8553342

National Days and Armed Forces Days

APRIL

April 04/Senegal
National Day

April 07/W. H. O.
World Health Day

April 12/Somalia
Armed Forces Day

April 15/DPR Korea
The Day of the Sun

April 16/Denmark
National Day

April 17/Iran
Army Day

April 17/Syria
Independence Day

April 18/Zimbabwe
Independence Day

April 24/Holy See
Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate

April 25/DPR Korea
Armed Forces Day

April 26/Tanzania
National Day

April 27/Sierra Leone
Independence Day

April 27/South Africa
Freedom Day

April 30/Sweden
Birthday of His Majesty

April 30/Netherlands
Birthday of Queen



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Marriott.....051- 2826121
Monal.....0334-5421812



Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/
Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122
& Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations
Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potohar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

ICCI, DHO to work together to create awareness about dengue

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG also shared useful ideas to control the dengue virus in the Capital and lauded the efforts of DHO Islamabad to cope with Covid-19 pandemic and dengue virus

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dengue fever kills many people every year in Pakistan and there is a greater need to create maximum awareness to save people from this endemic. The dengue cases normally increase in September/October and it is our responsibility to work with the local health authorities to control the spread of dengue virus in its peak season. This was said by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry while talking to Dr. Zaem Zia, District Health Officer, Islamabad during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI).

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that as per World Health Organization (WHO), 62 deaths were reported in Pakistan from January to September 2022 from a total confirmed cases of over 25900 dengue virus and 74 percent of these cases were reported in September 2022. It shows that Pakistan is vulnerable to this virus. He stressed that DHO



Islamabad and all relevant health authorities should accelerate efforts to create maximum awareness in the people about this dangerous virus to save their lives. He assured that ICCI in collaboration with Market Associations would work with DHO Islamabad for organizing awareness sessions on dengue virus and its

preventive measures in the business community and the citizens in the federal capital. He said that ICCI is also ready to provide volunteers to DHO Islamabad for an awareness campaign. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Zaem Zia, District Health Officer, Islamabad briefed the President ICCI about the plans of his or-

ganization to save people from dengue virus in the Capital. He said that ICCI should join hands with DHO Islamabad for raising awareness about dengue virus through various campaigns including a cycling event and UNICEF would also be engaged in the campaign. He said that DHO Islamabad intends to create a

sustainable volunteer group in Islamabad that would be provided proper training to cope with the dengue virus. He said that an option on DHO Islamabad's website would be provided to get online feedback from the citizens. It was agreed that DHO Islamabad and President ICCI would visit various hos-

pitals to see the arrangements to cope with the dengue fever. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG also shared useful ideas to control the dengue virus in the Capital and lauded the efforts of DHO Islamabad to cope with Covid-19 pandemic and dengue virus.

Power consumers due relief stands at 41 paisa

ISLAMABAD: Electricity consumers are due a relief of 41 paisas per unit in fuel cost adjustment (FCA) as per actual generation in March 2023.

This relief has been realized due to strict monitoring by the Power Division of fuel consumption, load management, and an increase in usage of indigenous fuel sources under the leadership of Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif, said a statement issued by the Power Division here Thursday.

Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA-G) has sought an increase of Rs 1.17 per unit from power regulator National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) for Rs 14 billion in arrears for a period of June 2021. The difference between the additional arrears of June 2021 (Rs. +1.58) and negative FCA for March 2023 (41 paisas) led to the filing of Rs. 1.17 per unit in FCA. NEPRA will hold a public hearing on May 3, after which the final FCA is to be charged for March, it was further said.—DNA

IRSA releases 111,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 111,900 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 110,400 cusecs.

According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1444.17 feet and was 46.17 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow in the dam was recorded as 28,700 cusecs while the outflow as 35,000 cusecs.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1119.55 feet, 69.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 39,800 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Tanusa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 38,700, 43,700, 34,900 and 7,200 cusecs respectively.—APP

NA rejects motion to table another bill for expenses

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Thursday rejected the motion for tabling another bill related to charged expenditures for general elections purposes in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar tabled the motion which was rejected by the House. Following the directions of the Supreme Court to allocate Rs. 21 billion for elections in two provinces, the minister said that a money bill was introduced in the House which was rejected.—APP

TV actor, director Syed Kamal remembered

ISLAMABAD: Renowned film and television actor, producer and director Syed Kamal was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Thursday. Born in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh on April 27, 1937, he performed in a few Indian movies before migrating to Pakistan. He emerged as a popular film star in the 1960s and the 1970s as his film 'Tau-

ba' (1963) proved to be a hit at the box office. Having a striking resemblance to the Indian filmstar Raj Kapoor, Kamal's first appearance in his Pakistani movie by producer Shabbab Keranvi was in 'Thandi Sarak' (1957). Some of his major films included Sawera, Apna Paraya, Banjaran, Zamana Kya Kahega, Ashiana, Aisa Bhi Hota Hai, Behan Bhai,

Shehnai, Nai Laila Naya Majnu, Road To Swat, Honeymoon, Insaan Aur Gadha, Jat Kuryan Tau Darda, Jat Diyan Kurrian, Kal De Munday, Jat Kamala Gaya Dubai and Siyasat. He also directed a number of films, including Shehnai, Yahan Say Wahan Tak, Doosri Maan, Meray Bacchay Meri Aankhein, Dard-i-Dil and Aaliya and Insaan Aur Gadha. After

retirement from films, he began acting in Pakistan Television dramas. His most notable TV appearance is in the hit TV drama 'Kashkol', wherein he played a wealthy businessman whose son (played by his real-life son, Ghalib Kamal) becomes addicted to heroin. Syed Kamal died on October 1, 2009, after a prolonged illness and was laid to rest in Karachi.

Focal persons of govt hospitals to be trained

Officers of both the Health Departments, PITB, Rescue-1122, representative World Health Organization and CDC Director attended the meeting

ISLAMABAD: The focal persons from government hospitals across the province would be trained on treatment, diagnosis and case management of people infected with the monkeypox virus, on May 2. This was disclosed by Dean IPH Prof Dr Zarfashan Tahir while presiding over a high-level meeting in the committee room of the Department of Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education here on Thursday. She said the Punjab government had assigned special task to the Institute of Public Health (IPH) for prevention and control of monkeypox and training of health professionals and health education. In this connection, the Dean IPH has asked the names of focal persons from the government hospitals. She told the participants of the meeting that in light of orders of the provincial government, the institute would prepare training modules on surveillance, health education, monitoring and diagnosis of monkeypox and it would establish a disease monitoring centre in the IPH within a week. She said the centre would review the situation on a daily basis and issue alerts. The institute would also provide training to the staff of Civil Aviation Authority, Rescue-1122 and other related departments about the disease, she said. Dr Zarfashan said that advance arrangements had been completed in all the hospitals for the treatment of expected patients and isolation wards were also functional as per the instructions of the government. She said that people should not get panic, take precautions, avoid going in crowded places and make sure to use face mask and wash hands with soap to avoid spreading the virus. He asked the management of all hospitals that if any suspected case of monkeypox was reported, it should be brought to the notice of higher authorities without any delay so that timely case management could be ensured. Officers of both the Health Departments, PITB, Rescue-1122, representative World Health Organization and CDC Director attended the meeting.—APP

'Possibility of sabotage in railway incident cannot be ruled out'

He said as of the current year, 167 vulnerable un-manned level crossings out of 550 identified have been upgraded to manned level crossings over the entire P.R. network for which the provincial government provided the finances

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique while expressing deep grief over the loss of precious six lives in a tragic railway fire incident on Thursday informed the National Assembly that possibility of sabotage could not be ruled out in the tragic incident. Replying to various supplementary questions during Question Hour and giving policy statements in the National Assembly, the minister said the factual situation would be cleared within one to two days after an in-

quiry into the incident. He said unfortunately, six persons including 77 years old woman, and three children have lost their lives due to breaking out of fire at AC Business passenger coach of Karachi Express. Apparently, the fire broke out due to short-circuiting, but he was not satisfied with this narrative, he added. He said an inquiry has already been ordered and the incident would be thoroughly reviewed. The minister said the railways restored its operation from its own resources without any support from the government as last year's

devastating floods caused huge losses to railways infrastructure. To a question, he said there were two types of level crossings over the PR network i.e. un-manned and manned level crossings. The un-manned level crossings were without grade, he said. He said there was a total of 1,565 un-manned level crossings over the PR network. As per railway policy in vogue, the up-gradation of any un-manned or manned level crossing was the responsibility of the road-owning authority, he said. He said for the purpose of up-gradation

of any un-manned level crossing, the required amount was deposited by the road-owning agency/department with railways. In this connection a joint survey of Railways and the Provincial Government was conducted during the Year 2013-14 to identify accident-prone/vulnerable un-manned level crossings, he said. He said as of the current year, 167 vulnerable un-manned level crossings out of 550 identified have been upgraded to manned level crossings over the entire P.R. network for which the provincial government provided the finances.

OGDCL earns Rs 159.638 bln profit in last 9 months

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL)'s net sales clocked at Rs 309.148 billion, translating to a profit after tax of Rs159.638 billion and earnings per share of Rs 37.12 for the nine months ended March 31, 2023 for financial year 2022-23.

According to a press release, the financial results for the said period were approved during the company's board of directors (BoDs) meeting held here on Thursday. The OGDCL's board also approved the third interim cash dividend @ Rs 1.80 per share i.e. 18 percent in addition to earlier interim dividends of Rs 4.00 per share i.e. 40 percent. The company paid Rs 36.128 billion as royalty which will ultimately be transferred to the Provinces besides Rs 92.980 billion in the form of taxes during the nine-month period.

The above entitlement will be paid to the shareholders whose names will appear in the register of members on May 09, 2023. The share transfer books of the company will be closed from May 10 to May 12, 2023 (both days inclusive). Transfers received at the CDC Share Registrar Services Limited, CDC House, 99-B, Block 'B', S.C.H.S., Main Shahrah-e-Faisal, Karachi-74400 at the close of business on May 09, 2023, will be treated in time for the purpose of above entitlement to the transferees.

OGDCL continues to be the market leader in the E&P sector and plans to accelerate its exploratory activities, as seismic work in newly awarded blocks will be undertaken in the future. The Board of Directors underscored the importance of aggressive exploratory efforts to achieve optimum reserve replacement ratio for long term sustainability.—DNA

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Briefs

Police arrest 19 anti-social elements including two POs

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi district police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi Capt. (Retd.) Muhammad Amir Khan Niazi conducted raids in different areas and netted 19 anti-social elements, including two proclaimed offenders (POs), four wanted in two separate murder cases and three for possessing illegal weapons. They also recovered over five kg charras, 21 liters of liquor, three 30-bore pistols and ammunition from their possession. According to a police spokesman on Thursday, Waris Khan, Sadiqabad, Westridge, Race Course, Dhamial, Gungmandi and R.A. Bazaar police managed to net Danial, Afzal, Zeeshan, Mazhar Hussain, Shayan, Babar, Yasir, Fakhar and Yaqoob and recovered 5035 grams charras, 21 liters liquor. Bani, Taxila and Mandra police arrested Nadeem, Khizer Hayat and Sohail on recovery of three 30-bore pistols and ammunition.

Whereas, Taxila police in a raid rounded up a PO namely Haider Ali, wanted in a case registered in 2020. The spokesman informed that Jati police in their operation managed to solve a blind murder case of a citizen namely Faisal and nabbed two accused including the victim's wife, Sidra and his friend, Saad, allegedly involved in the murder case. In another operation, Jati police also arrested two accused identified as Ahmed Ali and Tariq, allegedly involved in a double murder case. The accused had killed Arshad, Ashraf, and injured Mohsin over a land dispute. Meanwhile, Rawat police arrested a PO identified as Amir Afzal wanted in a murder case of Muhammad Nazir registered last year. He informed that police in their ongoing operation against professional beggars conducted raids in different areas and held 27 beggars. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the lawbreakers and assured that operations against the criminals would continue.—DNA

CTO directs wardens to ensure smooth flow of traffic

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi, Tamoor Khan here on Thursday directed the Traffic Wardens to ensure a smooth flow of traffic particularly during Pak-New Zealand matches in Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. During a visit to different routes including Stadium Road (Double Road) and other areas, he inspected the traffic arrangements and instructed the City Traffic Police (CTP) officers to make all-out efforts during the movement of the cricket teams and matches to avoid gridlock on city roads. He informed that 350 CTP personnel including Traffic Wardens, Traffic Assistants, Inspectors and DSPs were performing duties to regulate traffic in the circle. The CTP had issued a comprehensive traffic plan for the convenience of citizens regarding the Pak-New Zealand cricket matches being played in Rawalpindi Stadium, he added.

The CTP had made special arrangements to ensure smooth flow of traffic particularly on alternative routes during matches, he said. During the movement of the cricket teams, additional personnel were deployed with special arrangements to keep traffic flowing on alternate routes, he said adding, for the convenience of cricket fans, parking facilities had also been provided at three places, including Civil Aviation Ground Shaheen Chowk, Shahbaz Sharif Park near Shaheen Chowk and Degree College Satellite Town. A special shuttle service from the Parking area to the Stadium had also been provided to the cricket fans, he said and informed that Murree Road especially from Faizabad to Double Road remained closed during the movement of the teams and the traffic coming from Islamabad was diverted from Faizabad to Expressway. He informed that traffic going towards Islamabad was allowed to use 6th Road and Saidpur Road while traffic coming from Ghousia Chowk was diverted to Feroq Azam Road and Kurri Road.—APP

Chinese team visits COMSTECH to promote biotechnology

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Chinese scientists and Industrialists visited the COMSTECH secretariat on Thursday to promote cooperation for research and development in the fields of natural products, biotechnology, public health and traditional medicine through institutional and industrial linkages between China and OIC member states. The delegation visit also aimed to help strengthen academic and research initiatives between the People's Republic of China and the OIC member states.

The delegation consisted of top-tier leadership of industries in the area of traditional medicine. Participants from several OIC member states such as Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia are already exploring traditional medicines in their own capacity. Through this collaboration, COMSTECH seeks to liaison between OIC member states and Chinese institutions for strengthening cooperation in the field of healthcare. To strengthen this collaboration and enhance networking, COMSTECH organized this dialogue which included a series of



key talks on the subject by scientists, and representatives of pharmaceutical industries of China. The event was attended by researchers, relevant personnel from the research laboratories and industries and representatives from the embassies of the OIC member states in Islamabad. The aspects of collaboration such as set up of Joint labs, exchange programs for scholars of OIC member states and product-based research were also discussed. Coordinator General COM-

STECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary gave a comprehensive briefing to the delegation on COMTECH programs and initiatives, its scope and avenues of collaboration. He explained the avenues for Sino-COMSTECH collaboration for the development of natural products, biotechnology, public health and traditional medicine in OIC member states. Prof. Choudhary briefed the delegation on various ways of institutional cooperation, capacity building, the establishment of traditional Chinese medicine

clinics and research labs. President of Hunan University of Chinese Medicine, Prof. Dr. Aiguo Dai, said, "Our meeting will promote the international cooperation of traditional medicine between our school and 'Belt and Road Initiative' countries." He said that the relations between China and Islamic countries were traditionally friendly. Prof. Dai said that China attaches great importance to friendly relations with Islamic countries and regards the OIC as an import bridge for China to cooperate with Islamic coun-

tries. Science Commissioner of the Embassy of China in Islamabad, Yin Shengxin appreciated the Sino-COMSTECH initiative. He said that the work of Dr Iqbal Choudhary was a good example of nurturing cooperation. He reiterated time tested Sino-Pak friendship, Shengxin said that traditional Chinese medicine cures diseases and brings health to the people. Director General (EC & OIC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Asima Rabbani, said that China had a rich history of traditional medicine, which has been practiced

for over two thousand years. She said the Sino-COMSTECH initiative on strengthening cooperation in traditional medicine and allied biomedical sciences in OIC countries was a "significant step" towards promoting collaboration between China and OIC states. Rabbani said that COMSTECH played an important role in the development and promotion of institutional linkages in the field of science and technology. Chairman of Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturer's Association, Syed Farooq

Bukhari said that the Sino-COMSTECH collaboration initiative provides an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to learn from the experiences of China and other OIC states, and develop strategies and policies that are tailored to its own needs and priorities. The representatives of different Chinese pharmaceutical companies addressed the occasion as well. The Chinese delegation members met and exchanged ideas with scientists and experts in the field during the networking session.

NAB to take legal action if Imran Khan doesn't join investigation: IHC

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday disposed of the petitions against NAB notices to PTI's chairman Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in toshakhana gifts case. The court said that the bureau was authorised to take action against Imran Khan as per the law if he was not joining the investigation process. It remarked that the court couldn't even stop the investigation process of the anti-corruption watchdog.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), in its comments submitted to the bench, stated that the former prime minister was sent a questionnaire, but he didn't bother to answer it. Imran Khan also didn't appear before the investigation team despite summon issued by the NAB, it said, adding that action would be taken against PTI's chief as per the law. The NAB said that Imran Khan deliberately wanted to delay the matter, adding that he had

received a total of 58 gifts from toshakhana. The prosecutor said that the petitioners had only challenged the NAB notices dated February 16th, and 17th while the bureau had also served a third notice to the accused. He said that the petition had become ineffective with regard to the two NAB notices after serving of the third. Chief Justice Aamer Farooq instructed the NAB to send the next notices in line of the directives of

the top court. The court also directed the NAB to proceed the matter within the limit of law and remarked that it couldn't stop the investigation process of the anti-graft body. After this, the bench disposed of the cases. It may be mentioned here that the NAB had served call-up notices to Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi regarding toshakhana gifts. The PTI chief had challenged the move instead of appearing before the court.—APP

Khaqan Abbasi call for 'national unity'

ISLAMABAD: PMLN Senior leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Thursday stressed 'national unity' within the ranks of the nation to thwart the evil designs of the country's enemies and to fight against the current political challenges facing the country. Talking to a private news channel, he urged all political parties to unite on a minimum agenda for the restoration of true democracy in the country. He said that political differences should be limited to elections and that if all political parties fix a day for elections, it would be better for the public.

Abbasi said PML-N was trying its best to resolve issues through mutual diplomacy and dialogue to save the country from massive damage. Replying to a question, he said negotiations with the opposition party of PTI through Speaker National Assembly or the Parliamentary Committee to reach a consensus over holding elections simultaneously on the same day. To another query, he said that the coalition government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has taken several bold steps to bring the country out of the crisis. He reiterated the government's commitment to take the country out of the current challenges and take it on the path of development and prosperity.—APP

US, China, UK top three destinations of Pak exports

ISLAMABAD: The United States (US) remained the top export destination of Pakistani products during the nine months of the current fiscal year (2022-23), followed by China and the United Kingdom (UK). Total exports to the US during July-March (2022-23) were recorded at US\$ 4525.610 million as opposed the exports of US\$ 5000.710 million during July- March (2021-22), showing a decline of 9.50 percent, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). This was followed by China, where in Pakistan exported goods worth US\$ 1524.704 million compared to the exports of US\$ 2126.820 million last year, showing a decrease of 28.31 percent. UK was the third top export destination, where Pakistan exported goods worth US\$ 1493.988 million during the months under review against the exports of US\$ 1671.606 million during last year, showing a decline of 10.62 percent, SBP data revealed. Among other countries, Pakistani exports to Germany stood at US\$ 1262.755 million against US\$ 1299.173 million last year, showing a decrease of 2.80 percent while the exports to UAE were recorded at US\$ 1081.470 million opposed US\$ 1361.105 million last year.—DNA

Committee formed for export sector

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday set up a Steering Committee comprising experts from Information Technology (IT) and private sectors for the implementation of digital transformation and to increase the country's export volume. The minister announced this initiative while addressing a roundtable conference on "Digital Transformation in Pakistan" organized by the Ministry of Planning Development & Special Initiatives, a news release said. Earlier, a report on "Pakistan's Digital Journey, Recommendations for Digital Transformation in Pakistan" was launched by the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI). The report prepared by OIC-I covers wide-ranging suggestions to boost digital infrastructure and connectivity, e-governance, e-commerce, EdTech, Fintech, AgriTech, HealthTech, IT exports and Web 3.0 technologies. The report argues that digitalization has the potential to add \$60 billion to the economy by 2030 if the government creates a favourable investment climate for local and foreign investors to fill the large gaps that existed in digital infrastructure and connectivity. Speaking on the occasion, the Planning Minister highlighted that the IT sector was the key driver to increasing digital exports, reiterating the government's commitment to give a top priority to the sector for the increased digital exports. The Steering Committee will hold meetings every month to implement the recommendations of OCCI regarding digital transformation. "To increase exports is the only solution to get rid of the country's economic problems," Ahsan Iqbal said while assuring the stakeholders to implement the OCCI's recommendations in letter and spirit. Last week, the Planning Minister formed a 15-member National Task Force on Artificial Intelligence to achieve the required national development goals. The key objective of the task force is to develop a 10-year roadmap for accelerated adoption of AI in the business, development, governance, education and healthcare sectors. Since the government came into power in April 2022, several initiatives have been taken to improve the country's economy. Ahsan Iqbal has constantly been arguing that political stability was the key factor for the country's economic growth. "Due to political instability, Pakistan, unfortunately, could not achieve development targets which its neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh have achieved by ensuring the political stability for the period of 10 years," the minister remarked.—APP

Dubai Economy & Tourism launches new campaign for Pakistani travelers

ISLAMABAD: Dubai Economy & Tourism (DET) has launched a new campaign targeting Pakistani travelers with a YouTube series that aims at promoting the diverse range of offerings available in Dubai for tourists all year round. The episodes featuring Faisal Kapadia and Bilal Maqsood, former members of the popular band Strings, take viewers on a thrilling journey through the vibrant city of Dubai, showcasing its unique experiences and attractions suitable for visitors of all ages. The YouTube series serves as the campaign's centerpiece, highlighting Dubai's affordability and proximity to Pakistani travelers. Its ultimate goal is to encourage more Pakistani tourists to explore and experience the beauty, excitement, and charm of the cosmopolitan city. The three-episode series, with each episode running for an average of 9 minutes, invites Pakistani travelers to explore the city's fascinating history, modern architecture, and exciting leisure and entertainment options. Viewers will see Dubai through the eyes of Faisal and Bilal as showcase the dynamic culture of Dubai, which has grown and evolved remarkably since their last

visit. The duo experiences various activities, including Top Golf, gaming at Brass Monkey, Sky Views Edge Walk, and even a thrilling auto-drome driving experience, taking the viewers along for the ride. Discussing the campaign, Faisal said "Dubai has always held a special place in our hearts. Having lived in Dubai since 2012, it was an amazing experience reintroducing Bilal to the city that I call my second home. We were able to explore the city together and create new memories while reminiscing about our past experiences. We hope this series will inspire and encourage Pakistani tourists to discover the wonders of Dubai and all that it has to offer." Bilal Maqsood said, "As a musician, I've had the privilege of performing in Dubai many times before. But this time, I had the chance to explore the city as a tourist, with my friend and ex-bandmate Faisal by my side." Join Faisal and Bilal as they take you on a journey through the heart of the city, rediscovering the magic of Dubai. The series is set to launch next week, so be sure to stay tuned to Dubai Tourism's YouTube page to catch the exciting episodes.—APP

Pakistan providing incentives to foreign investors

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Syed Amin Ul Haque on Thursday said that Pakistan is providing immense incentives and facilities to foreign investors. The minister expressed these views during a meeting with a high-level delegation of China's leading software company Easyway Innovation, led by Shi Yingjun, said a news release. He welcomed the delegation and discussed matters related to software development, E-office and Data Management at the departmental level in Pakistan. Amin Ul Haque, while congratulating the delegation on starting operations in Pakistan, assured all possible support from the Ministry of IT regarding Software & Innovation Technology.

Bank Alfalah continues its growth momentum

ISLAMABAD: The Board of Directors of Bank Alfalah Limited (BAFL), in its meeting held on April 27, 2023, approved the Bank's financial results for the quarter ended March 31, 2023. The beginning of 2023 has been challenging due to the economic slowdown in the country, high inflation, and currency devaluation. Despite the challenging landscape, the Bank posted a profit after tax of Rs. 10.743 billion for the period ended March 31, 2023. The Earning Per Share (EPS) stood at Rs. 6.81. The results reflect strong momentum in line with the Bank's strategy. The Bank's market share increased for several of its products while it continues to invest in people, technology and physical infrastructure. Bank Alfalah's deposit base increased by 31.9% year-on-year (YoY), closing at Rs. 1.554 trillion as at March 31, 2023. CA and CASA ratios stood at 43.7% and 68.0%, respectively. The Bank's loan book closed at Rs. 731.863 billion. The Bank has sufficient coverage of over 103% of its non-performing loans. In view of the normalising flood situation in the country, the provision held against the flood-impacted portfolio was reversed. The disciplined execution of the strategy has enabled the Bank to support its customers through a highly challenging time, proving resilience with strong credit discipline and sound capital management. The bank remains focused on its business and core strengths. Staying optimistic about a return to economic stability in the medium term, the bank anticipates delivering sustainable growth in the years ahead while managing costs prudently.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Chakkrid Krachaiwong the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand called on H E Vice Admiral Mohan Wijewickrama.—DNA

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Sudan's ceasefire

Any reduction in fighting must be welcomed when millions of civilians are trapped amid it. Already, more than 450 lives have been lost and thousands have been injured since the clash between Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Sudanese army, and Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti), the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, began on 15 April. Yet far from holding out the prospect of a sustainable improvement, the 72-hour ceasefire in Sudan is only a brief respite in the conflict, and one pockmarked by violence. Even if it holds for the full three days, what comes next may be worse. The deal, brokered by the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, has allowed evacuations from the capital, Khartoum, and other cities. With foreign nationals safely out of the way, the two belligerents will be able to return to battle with little international attention. They appear to see this as a fight to the finish. Much of the concern in the UK has centred on the evacuation of British nationals. This especially involves the performance of the Foreign Office, which helped diplomatic staff to leave first, has had poor communications with other citizens and been late in organising their evacuation, and is only allowing British nationals or dependents with existing approval on to flights – all in stark contrast with other European countries. It has serious questions to answer. But the far more pressing issue is what will happen to Sudanese civilians. Hundreds of thousands are queuing at the country's borders, with reported waits of up to three days to cross into Egypt, without food, water or medical supplies. Others say that Saudi Arabia has been prioritising foreign nationals for ferry crossings. The two sides have already shown a deadly disregard for civilians, with hospitals and homes under attack. The World Health Organization has warned of a "huge biological risk" after fighters occupied a public health laboratory and ousted its staff. Prisoners – including a former politician wanted for alleged crimes against humanity – have been released from jails, heightening concerns about the conflict splintering and expanding. With foreign nationals gone and cities significantly emptied, fighting is likely to intensify. It is essential that those trying to flee are given safe passage and refuge, as Sudan has itself offered to others escaping wars. The international community should press Egypt and others to relax their visa restrictions and speed up crossings, as well as helping host countries to provide the support needed on arrival. The UN estimates that up to 20,000 people have so far crossed from Darfur into Chad, which is already home to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan. Poor and fragile nations cannot manage this alone. Expecting them to do so will increase the risk of this violence destabilising the broader region and putting many more in danger.



G7 can facilitate Ukraine peace talks

Some recent developments concerning the West's response to the Ukraine conflict indicate simmering and widening divisions inside what appears to be a unanimous Western stance over the crisis. According to reports, the European Union and Japan have pushed back against a United States' proposal for G7 countries to ban all exports to Russia. The proposal aims to replace the current sector-by-sector sanctions regime against Russia with a complete export ban with just a few exemptions. Washington apparently hopes the new proposal will be adopted by the G7 leaders in their upcoming summit in Hiroshima, Japan, next month, so as to effectively plug the loopholes in the current sanctions regime and tighten the economic shackles on Russia even tighter. In another development, the US news website Politico reported on Monday that the Joe Biden administration is quietly preparing for the possibility of re-engaging with China with a view to soliciting Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table if Ukraine's spring counteroffensive falls short of expectations. All this shows that after more than one year's all-out support to Ukraine and ever-increasing pressure on Russia, the US and its allies are facing uncertainties on the battlefield and feeling the backlash of their sanctions regime against Russia. Right now, Russia and Ukraine appear to have reached a deadlock in the fighting and allowing the crisis to evolve into a lasting one seems more and more unsustainable to all parties involved. Sanctions have never worked in resolving regional conflicts. A crisis of the magnitude of the one in Ukraine will not be swayed by the US-led sanctions either. Not to mention that while failing to force Russia to yield, Western sanctions are doing more harm than good to the world economy and the global supply chains. Western countries have imposed sanctions on Russia in the hope of choking its energy export channels and destroying its economy. But those sanctions have backfired, hurt US allies and triggered a worldwide energy crisis. The sanctions have also disrupted trade and aggravated inflation, leaving several economies teetering on the brink of recession. More and more members of the world community, China included, have aired their proposals for a cease-fire and an end to the Ukraine conflict. After over one year's ceaseless efforts to intensify the hostilities through escalating sanctions and providing weapons and military assistance to Ukraine, Western countries should awaken to the fact that a political settlement is needed more than ever, not more sanctions. The G7 leaders should view the Ukraine crisis from a long-term and global perspective rather than through an ideological lens tainted with bloc confrontation and a Cold War mentality. They should act in a responsible way at their upcoming G7 summit and call for peace rather than further fanning the flames of the conflict.

Aborted experiments, neutrality & leaks

Qamar Bashir

The then-DG ISPR, Mr. Asif Gafoor, in his press conference on 11th July pledged to remain neutral in the voting process in an attempt to refute the army's maneuvering in the upcoming polls. He also spilled his philosophical overdose on the people when he warned the nation, quote, "What you sow on Election Day, you

The DGs, ISPR and ISI, in an unprecedented Press Conference held on October 27, 2022, while endorsing the regime change and citing the rise in the stock market as a sign of a successful operation, declared that the army has become neutral or, to be more precise, apolitical, implying that it will no longer manipulate the politics of the country and will perform its duties strictly in accordance with the constitution. However, history will bear witness to the fact that the establishment (Estab) makes such pledges when one of its experiments fails and before laying the groundwork for new experiments. And repeating the entire cycle over and over again. One of the first such pledges came in 1951, when then-Army Chief General Ayub Khan issued a statement pledging the army's political neutrality. Despite this pledge, the army became increasingly involved in Pakistani politics over the next few years, culminating in Ayub Khan's 1958 coup. In 1970, ahead of Pakistan's first general elections, the Estab pledged to remain neutral once more. The elections, however, were marred by widespread allegations of rigging, and the Estab eventually intervened, resulting in the dissolution of Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh followed yet another pledge of neutrality which ended in 1977 when General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, toppled Bhutto's government, citing the generic allegations of election rigging and corruption. The coup was initially planned as a limited intervention, continued unabated until elections were held in 1988. The Estab yet again pledged to remain neutral but masterminded change one government after the other until in 1999, when General Pervez Musharraf, who seized power and justified the coup by citing generic charges of corruption and mismanagement in the civilian government. In 2007 the Estab re-asserted its neutrality in politics,

and Musharraf stepped down as Chief of Army Staff to become a civilian president, but eventually resigned as president in 2008, following the victory of the PPP in the general elections.

The pledges of neutrality was revived once again but soon the coalition government of PPP began experiencing an onslaught and pressure of estab until Memo-gate scandal was fomented in May 2011 which led to the resignation of Husain Haqqani as ambassador, weakening of the PPP government and dismissal of then Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and followed by renewed pledge of neutrality but in the guise, paved the way for winning of elections by PML(N) in 2013 by alleged engineering and rigging. Soon after the economy started improving Nawaz Sharif who tried his level best to maintain a balance in relationship with the Estab had it enough and as soon as he started asserting himself on important and sensitive issues his time was counted as over and it was the time to lay down the foundations of yet another experiment. The establishment with their full might first orchestrated the sit-in from August 14 to December 17, 2014 as a launching pad for its new experiment and later fomented Dawn Leak, Panama gate which led to the ouster of Mr. Nawaz and later his government in 2018 and now time had arrived to make a pledge for neutrality.

The then-DG ISPR, Mr. Asif Gafoor, in his press conference on 11th July pledged to remain neutral in the voting process in an attempt to refute the army's maneuvering in the upcoming polls. He also spilled his philosophical overdose on the people when he warned the nation, quote, "What you sow on Election Day, you will reap over the next five years" and claimed that the outcome of the elections had no effect on the armed forces. However, as in the past, this pledge of neutrality proved the beginning of another experiment.

The army gave its Experiment "Imran Khan" everything it needed to keep it running until he started asserting himself in making critical decisions. This was possibly the point at which the establishment decided to abort its experiment and discredit him by any means necessary to deprive him of political capital and lay the groundwork for its new project. Another vicious circle of starting a project, abandoning it prematurely, declaring neutrality, and launching a new project in the form of PDM had been completed, and it was time to re-establish the mantra of neutrality. During a speech at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington on October 5, 2022, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa pledged that the armed forces have distanced themselves from politics and will continue to do so. In the same breath he outlined his future political course of action by saying that reviving the country's ailing economy should be the first priority of all segments of society. Soon after the speech, he went to the Pentagon to seek approval for his new course of action from US Defense Secretary retired General Lloyd James Austin III, National Security Adviser Jacob Jeremiah Sullivan, and Wendy Ruth Sherman, Deputy Secretary of State. But, unlike previous similar situations in which they were usually successful in discrediting the outgoing government by making generic allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and moral turpitude, this time they were confronted with an entirely different outcome that was completely unexpected and new to them, and they had no prior experience dealing with it. To their surprise, they were confronted with a formidable opponent who refused to submit and gave them the toughest time, but also the public,

intelligentsia, civil society, and the media in general did not buy any allegation of corruption, brushed off audio and video leaks, and shunned allegation of moral turpitudes, on the contrary the popularity graph rose even after every such effort. When all of their tried and true methods failed, an assassination attempt was made to remove him from the scene entirely, but he narrowly escaped and became even more ferocious. The incumbent government and its handlers, if any, were also confronted with a slew of new factors, including highly motivated, resourceful, educated, and social media savvy urban and middle-class households that were difficult to purchase and herd like the rural masses, the economy's free fall and unprecedented inflation and price hikes, alleged charges of corruption on PDM leaders and Army Generals of colossal magnitude, and the refusal of the superior judiciary to cooperate with the government and its handlers (if any), in contrast to the past.

Frustrated and desperate to make a dent in his defense system, they have now resorted to using illegal, immoral, unethical, attacks of recording and releasing audio video leaks, stooping so low that they did not spare the housewives of judges, politicians, and civil society members, which is gruesome. Imagine a situation, that the audio and video of all generals, bureaucrats, and politicians' wives and relatives were recorded and released, and their content was used as a charges sheet against each and every one of them, I am confident that the entire current generation of generals, judges, bureaucrats, and politicians would be charged with sedition, constitutional violations, intrigues, and conspiracies on unimaginable scales. This type of recording is not only unconstitutional, but also illegal and unethical.

Article 14 of Pakistan's Constitution protects the dignity of all individuals and every citizen has the right to privacy, which includes the right to be free from unlawful intrusion into their home, correspondence, and communications. The Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016 also protects citizens from unauthorized access, acquisition, or dissemination of information, including audio and video recordings that may harm their reputation, privacy, or security. Furthermore, the Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance Act of 2014 establishes a legal framework for government agencies to intercept communications for security purposes. Accordingly, before recording or intercepting any communication, including audio and video recordings, government agencies must obtain a warrant from a designated authority under this law. Unauthorized access, copying, or transmission of data is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years and/or a fine of up to Rs. 5 million (approximately USD 31,000) under Section 20 of the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016. Similarly, under Section 26 of the Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance Act 2014, anyone found guilty of unauthorized communication interception faces up to three years in prison and/or a fine of up to Rs. 5 million. Furthermore, under Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code, anyone who intentionally insults a woman's modesty faces up to three years in prison, a fine, or both. All Religions emphasize respecting the privacy of others. In Islam privacy is considered an important aspect of human dignity and is protected under the concept of "sirr" or "secrets." The Quran states that believers should not spy on or backbite one another, and that they should not enter others' homes without permission (Quran 49:12). In Christianity, the Bible teaches the importance of respecting oth-

ers' privacy and confidentiality, as well as the value of trust and honesty. For example, in the book of Proverbs, it is written that "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret" (Proverbs 11:13). In Hinduism, privacy is emphasized as a fundamental human right and is closely linked to the concept of personal autonomy. Ethically, privacy is tied to fundamental human rights and values of autonomy, dignity, and trust and is a foundational element of personal and social well-being. It empowers the individuals to exercise control over their personal information, to choose what information to disclose and to whom, and to be free from unwanted intrusion or surveillance. But one million dollar question is who is capable of recording and airing the private calls with total impunity and how menace can be addressed.

The power to record WhatsApp or cell calls of others is vested in the law enforcement and intelligence agencies and other authorized bodies. The agencies in Pakistan and world over are required to follow legal procedures and obtain court warrants before conducting any such recording activities.

Parliament, government, politicians, civil society, and the judiciary all share responsibility for putting a stop to this threat. The parliament has the authority to enact new laws and strengthen existing laws and regulations to prohibit the recording of private individuals without their consent, as well as impose penalties and sanctions on individuals and organizations that violate these laws.

The government should conduct a thorough investigation to determine whether the agencies followed legal procedures, and if any violations occurred, appropriate legal action, including civil and criminal charges, should be taken. It can create mechanisms to monitor government agencies, such as independent review boards or commissions, audits, and reporting requirements.

Civil society can play a critical role in educating the public about the risks and consequences of illegal audio video call recording by raising awareness through public campaigns, social media, and educational materials, advocating for stronger laws and regulations, and monitoring and exposing instances of illegal audio video call recording. It can also provide support and resources to people who have been victims of illegal audio video call recording, as well as foster a privacy culture by promoting best practices for secure communication and encouraging people to take steps to protect their privacy online.

Political leaders can raise awareness of the issue by discussing it publicly and emphasizing the risks and consequences, by supporting and advocating for laws and regulations that protect individuals' privacy rights, by working with legislators to develop and pass legislation that specifically prohibits the recording of private individuals without their consent, and by setting an example by using best practices for secure communication and respecting individuals' privacy rights. The judiciary can ensure that laws prohibiting unauthorized audio and video recording are strictly enforced by imposing severe penalties, fines, and imprisonment on those who engage in such activities. Individually and collectively, we must learn to respect the constitution and the law of the land in order to foster a just, humane, civil, and cultural society.

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

Fats changing geopolitical landscape

Munir Ahmed



For this "almost" to become "quite" what is missing, however, is the most important detail: the victory of Russia over the Western forces in the Ukrainian theatre of war. When that happens, a new world in which the West is isolated from the rest

Planet Earth is in the process of a total breakdown in the architecture of international relations. Once they were aimed at bridging the states and civilizations on common spaces and interests. For the last four decades, the world has seen the hegemony of the US right after the disintegration of the USSR. Washington is rapidly losing its global repute and hegemony since after its withdrawal from Afghanistan. It was a big blow to the US hegemony. Seemingly, the other is more recent and that is igniting the Russia-Ukraine conflict to a war. No severe damage to Russia in its war with Ukraine so far despite it all supported by the US-NATO states. Alone the US has fueled about \$62 billion in it along with huge war-merchandising by the West. No outcome primarily, and severe destruction in Ukraine and consistently losing its land to the Russian army have made the leading NATO member states to consistently lose their interest in the Ukraine war. They have repeatedly refused the US for engaging their sophisticated weapons, jets and tanks to support Ukraine. Meanwhile, China has joined hands with more firm commitment support to Russia. Consistently losing on Ukraine and the recent developments on geopolitical fronts is panicking the US and its allies. Russia's rising prestige around the world and the success of their diplomacy is the other reason for the US frustration. Now, many more countries look towards Russia with sympathy and hope as the US hegemony has revealed its impact on different parts of the world, including Europe. The international information field today is in a constant state of excitement because of an increasingly antagonistic confrontation between the US and a small group of countries called the collective West on the one hand, and Russia on the other, which is confidently becoming the world's moral leader. The whole set of successive news reports testifies to the rejection of US hegemony by the leading players in international politics. On the other

hand, the United States regularly bombards the infosphere with information fakes aimed at neutralizing the objective preponderance of world sympathies in favour of Russia. The vast majority of people choose to side with Russia because of its open and resolute defence of traditional values and the idea of a multipolar world. Russia's confrontation with the US is increasingly taking the form of a spiritual and religious war. The American globalist elite still insists with maniacal tenacity on its world leadership and imposes on the world a set of ideas that, in essence, lead to the spiritual and physical degradation of humanity. It alienates from the USA even those who were once ready to blindly obey it. The vast majority of people choose traditional values, and therefore Russia is objectively seen as an outpost for the preservation of traditional relations between people. And the US has become an object of implacable criticism.

Increasingly, we are witnessing when active US interference in national elections around the world in order to promote its proxies fails to bear fruit. Examples abound. The politics and rhetoric of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is one of the clearest examples of this. It should be particularly noted that Russia's traditional allies in the region south of the Rio Grande have long been Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, which John Bolton, a presidential adviser in the Trump administration, not coincidentally dubbed "the three tyrannies in Latin America". No one else in Latin America carries that honourable title. Similar processes are taking place in Africa. The New York Times just the other day published a highly unusual article analysing Russian influence in Africa. The mouthpiece of the US liberal establishment is sounding the alarm that the Russians are advancing in Africa and the Western world is falling backwards. From the Central African Republic to Madagascar, from Mali to South Africa, Russia seeks to position itself as a bulwark against the West

in Africa. This influence became even more evident to Western governments when 26 of the continent's 54 countries refused to join the UN vote condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Of course, all this is understood in the United States too. There are serious political thinkers among American politicians and analysts. John Bolton in the Wall Street Journal suggests a strategy to save the US. The cornerstone of this strategy is victory in Ukraine and the collapse of Russia. Here are the three most important elements of Bolton's strategy. First, Washington and allies must immediately increase defence budgets to Reagan-era levels. Second, America's collective defence alliances must be improved and expanded. NATO should become a global organisation, inviting Japan, Australia, Israel. Thirdly, after Ukraine wins a military conflict with Russia, the US should seek to divide the Russia-China axis.

Well, as for increasing military expenditures and the need for a strategic victory over Russia, Bolton hardly surprised anyone. What is really interesting about his article is a tacit admission that America no longer expects to achieve global dominance. NATO can expand at the expense of countries that are already Anglo-Saxon or satellites of Anglo-Saxons. And that's it. The end of American hegemony, the end of globalism, is almost a fait accompli. For this "almost" to become "quite" what is missing, however, is the most important detail: the victory of Russia over the Western forces in the Ukrainian theatre of war. When that happens, a new world in which the West is isolated from the rest of humanity will become a reality. Peace is possible - but only peace after victory is needed. Among the countries supporting Russia, this is also well understood.

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Briefs

Govt, PTI
engage in
negotiations

FROM PAGE 01

lower house of Parliament till July, sources claimed. Sources further claimed that the dissolution of the National Assembly (NA) after July will not be acceptable to PTI. Representatives from both sides met inside Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani's chamber on Thursday evening to begin the negotiations.

The negotiations have taken place while a written order is awaited by the Supreme Court regarding elections in Punjab and KP — an issue on which there has been a weeks-long impasse between the ruling coalition, the opposition and the higher judiciary. PPP's Yousaf Raza Gilani, who participated in the negotiations from the government's side, said while speaking to the media that the talks would be resumed tomorrow at 3pm at the Parliament House, during which the PTI would present its demands.

Parties part of the ruling coalition would then be apprised of the PTI's demands, he added. Alongside him, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said it was principally decided that matters would be resolved within the ambit of the Constitution. Video footage from before the meeting showed PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi and party leader Ali Zafar — two of the members included in the PTI's negotiating team — arriving at Parliament House.

Accompanying them was Faisal Chaudhry, brother of PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry who is also part of the PTI's negotiating committee. Speaking to the media ahead of the meeting, Qureshi said that there was only "one-point agenda" for the talks, and that was elections. When a reporter sought clarification on whether he meant early elections, he succinctly replied, "elections". In response to another question, he said the PTI's delegation had Imran Khan's complete mandate for the talks. "Whether the Pakistan Democratic Movement has the mandate for the talks, this you may ask them."

Asked whether the PTI was sticking to its stance of the government using the talks as a delaying tactic, Qureshi replied, "This will become apparent by their attitude. In the past, their attitude has shown that they are using delaying tactics. Let's see how their attitude is today," the ex-foreign minister said. The PTI leader said the purpose of today's talks was to end uncertainty in the country.

PML-N
leader
opposes
govt-PTI
talks

FROM PAGE 01

Javed Latif demanded a level-playing field for Nawaz Sharif, saying that election cannot be held until justice is served to the PML-N supremo. He further said that elections can only be held if they apologise for the cases registered against Nawaz Sharif.

Earlier in the day, negotiations between the government and PTI commenced at Parliament House to break the political impasse following the orders from Supreme Court (SC).

NA again
rejects
motion
for polls
funds

FROM PAGE 01

the Supreme Court (SC) declared the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) March 22 order on Punjab elections null and void.

A three-member bench — comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Munib Akhtar — announced the reserved verdict on the PTI's petition challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's order postponing the elections in Punjab and KP.



TOKYO: Ambassador Raza Bashir Tarar welcomed a Pakistani Taekwondo team in the Embassy and congratulated young champions on their remarkable victories in 19th Japan WATA open International Taekwondo Championship. — DNA

Iran wants nothing but
good for Lebanon: FM

The economic and financial crisis is mostly linked to the sanctions that the United States and its allies have imposed on Lebanon and West's intervention in the Arab nation's domestic affairs

DNA

BEIRUT: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says the Islamic Republic strongly supports any agreement between the political parties in Lebanon on electing a new president. Speaking at a joint press conference with his Lebanese counterpart Abdallah Bou Habib in Beirut on Thursday, Amir-Abdollahian maintained the Arab country's authorities have the

ability to reach a consensus on electing a president. He said Iran wants nothing but good for Lebanon, calling on the Lebanese political parties to accelerate the political process in the Arab country and elect a new president. He also called on "all foreign parties to support the election in Lebanon without interfering in the Arab country's domestic affairs." The Lebanese parliament has failed to elect a new president for a long time amid deepening political stale-

mate exacerbated by the US sanctions and foreign meddling. Since late 2019, Lebanon has been mired in a deep financial crisis that has caused the Lebanese pound to lose around 90 percent of its value to the US dollar and led its banking system to collapse, plunging the bulk of Lebanese into poverty. The economic and financial crisis is mostly linked to the sanctions that the United States and its allies have imposed on Lebanon and West's intervention in

the Arab nation's domestic affairs. Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian expressed Iran's readiness to strengthen economic relations with Lebanon and enhance cooperation in the energy field. He added that the two sides have also discussed the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the situation in Palestine, as well as the latest developments in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Libya. Upon arriving at Beirut Inter-

national Airport on Wednesday, the top Iranian diplomat said the Islamic Republic regards Lebanon's security as equal to its own. Amir-Abdollahian is on an official two-day visit to Lebanon, where he is expected to hold talks with senior Lebanese officials, including Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Najib Mikati. Before his visit to Lebanon, Amir-Abdollahian traveled to Oman for high-level talks with the Arab country's officials.

Rayo stun La Liga
leaders Barcelona

BARCELONA: Rayo Vallecano stunned impotent La Liga leaders Barcelona on Wednesday with a 2-1 win, outplaying the Catalans at a rowdy Vallecas. Atletico Madrid cut the gap on second-place rivals Real Madrid to two points with a 3-1 win over Real Mallorca, celebrating their 120th anniversary in style. Xavi Hernandez's Barcelona remain 11 points clear of second-placed Real Madrid with seven matches remaining. After the champions lost at Girona on Tuesday their hopes of defending the title are virtually over, despite Barcelona following suit with a deserved defeat in the capital. Xavi's side have won just one of their last four league matches — a narrow triumph over Atletico on Sunday — as they limp towards the finish line and a first title since 2019.

Barcelona's coach urged his players to be wary of Rayo's threat before the game, but they did not heed his warning. The Catalans have not beaten the Madrid club in their last four league meetings. "The league is not finished, this is the problem — we have to deserve La Liga, today we deserved defeat," Xavi told reporters. "What annoys me is that today we did not compete how the game required us to. But we will get players back (from injury), there's another game on Saturday. Here a lot of teams have lost, and others have had a lot of trouble winning. Luckily, there's another game on Saturday."

The coach was without suspended captain Sergio Busquets but handed Pedri his first start since he was injured in February. Rayo broke the deadlock early on when Alvaro Garcia drilled home across Marc-Andre ter Stegen and into the bottom corner. Robert Lewandowski should have equalised for Barcelona but Rayo goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski denied the forward one-on-one, and then the Pole had a goal ruled out for offside. Rayo doubled their lead after the break when left-back Fran Garcia pressed Frankie de Jong, collected the ball and drove on to score. — Agencies

Lampard
defends
fuming
Chelsea fans

LONDON: Frank Lampard admitted angry Chelsea fans had every right to boo his team after they suffered a fifth successive defeat in a dismal 2-0 setback against Brentford on Wednesday. Cesar Azpilicueta's own-goal and Bryan Mbeumo's late strike condemned Lampard to his latest demoralising loss since replacing the sacked Graham Potter. Chelsea have failed to score in six of their last seven games and are languishing in 11th place in the Premier League. They have not won in any competition since March 11 at Leicester, a winless run that now stands at eight games. Six of those eight winless matches have come at Stamford Bridge and Chelsea supporters let rip after losing to west London neighbours Brentford, who have traditionally been in their shadow but are now above them in the table. "Absolutely the fans are going to be worried. — APP

Swiatek demands prize
money parity in tennis

WEB DESK

WARSAW: Polish tennis sensation and current World No. 1, Iga Swiatek made a compelling appeal on Wednesday, advocating for a more equitable distribution of prize money across Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) events. The reigning French Open and U.S. Open champion is preparing to compete at the Madrid Open after retaining her Stuttgart title last weekend, defeating world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka in the final. Swiatek won over 100,000 euros (\$111,000), which some contrasted with Carlos Alcaraz's 475,000 euros (\$526,000) haul for triumphing at the Barcelona Open. "I think (tennis) is better than most sports, but still there is a lot we can work on in terms of, you know, getting equal prize money on some WTA tournaments compared to ATP on the same level," Swiatek told a news conference Wednesday. "Grand Slams are already even, as we know. That's nice, but it would be good if WTA would focus on that, but I don't want to get into that because it's a lot of business and sometimes politics. I don't think I have a lot of influence. I just can say that it would be nice for our sport if it was equal, especially because we kind of do the same work." The Polish top seed in Madrid says the women's game offers



more consistency than the men's now and can create even higher emotions. "I also get people saying men's tennis is nicer to watch and guys can do more because they are physically and biologically stronger," said Swiatek. "But I think there were a lot of people, for example, a couple of years ago, who were saying that (the women's game is) not consistent and that's a shame and it should be better, but right now I think we are even more consistent than the guys with our game. "Watching women's tennis gives the same emotions, and sometimes even more emotions because we are women and are a little bit more emotional. "But, yeah, I think it would be nice if WTA could make it even." In 1973, the U.S. Open became the first Grand Slam event to pay men's and women's players equal prize money.

Iran,
Romanian
envoys...

FROM PAGE 01

The meeting also underscored the need for promoting counter-terrorism cooperation to eliminate the menace of terrorism. Ambassador Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini underlined the need for enhancing economic, cultural and political cooperation between the two countries. He said that both countries had great potential to further expand economic cooperation. He informed that both sides had agreed to construct six border markets that would boost bilateral trade. He apprised the President on the ongoing electricity transmission projects that would benefit the people of Balochistan. The President appreciated the contribution of the outgoing Ambassador for promoting bilateral cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

In his meeting with Ambassador of Romania to Pakistan, Mr. Nicolae GOIA, the President said that Romania was an important country in the Eastern Europe and Pakistan desired to deepen its relationship with Romania in the fields of trade and economy. He thanked the Romanian government for its support to Pakistan in granting and continuation of GSP plus status. Both sides underscored the need for improving economic relations and undertaking regular exchanges and interactions at the highest levels to further cement bilateral ties.

CJP says
will not give
any timeline

FROM PAGE 01

The AGP replied that they got to know on Tuesday through the media that PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi had the authority to hold talks. The CJP then asked that in what capacity was the Senate chairman approached. At this, AGP Awan responded that the senate chairman was asked to intervene as his office was a "symbol of the federation". CJP Bandial remarked that he Farooq H Naek had on the previous hearing that Senate chairman will facilitate the talks. "Senate chairman is neither the representative of the government and nor the opposition. If the government is serious about negotiations, it would have taken action itself," the CJP remarked. "The court cannot force [parties] on a dialogue. The court only wants implementation on the Constitution so that the dispute is resolved," the top judge added. He said that the court did not need any clarification but a solution to the issue. On talks in Senate, the CJP stated that the it will take time for the chairman to summon a meeting. At this point, PPP's lawyer Naek said that all parties in the ruling alliance were willing to negotiate with PTI. "Senate is the only institution where all parties have a representation," he added. He added that negotiations were to be done by committee and political leaders.

180 NA
lawmakers
repose...

FROM PAGE 01

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif thanked the coalition parties for reposing trust in him. Taking the floor after securing the vote of confidence, he especially thanked former President Asif Ali Zardari, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal, Khalid Magso, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Amir Haider Hoti, Mohsin Dawar, Aftab Sherpao, and all the coalition leaders for their trust.

The Prime Minister said we are politicians and we always believe in negotiations to sort out differences. He said the coalition government has invited the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf for talks at the Senate of Pakistan. He said these talks will begin on Thursday and their agenda will be simultaneous and transparent elections in the entire Pakistan. He said Pakistan is a federation comprising four federating units and holding elections in Punjab only will send negative connotations to other provinces. Talking about the negative politics of the PTI, Shehbaz Sharif said PTI Chief Imran Khan, in connivance with former chief justice Saqib Nisar, hatched a conspiracy against Pakistan.

Pak Navy's OPV Keel Laying ceremony held at Romania

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Keel Laying ceremony of second Off-shore Patrol Vessel (OPV) being constructed for Pakistan Navy held on Thursday at DAMEN Shipyard Galati, Romania. Ambassador of Pakistan to Romania Dr Za-

far Iqbal graced the ceremony as Chief Guest, a Pakistan Navy news release here received said. Owing to the satisfactory performance of 1st Batch of OPVs (PNS YARMOOK & PNS TABUK) in Pakistan Navy; the construction of 2nd Batch of OPVs was in progress at DAMEN Shipyard Romania.

The ship will be a multi-purpose and highly adaptive platform, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors to fight all domains of maritime warfare.

While addressing the ceremony, the Chief Guest underscored the importance of OPVs by emphasizing that these platforms will act as force multipliers in enhancing

PN capability of safeguarding maritime frontiers and will offer flexibility in conduct of Pakistan Navy's initiative of independent Regional Maritime Security Patrols in the Indian Ocean Region. He added that Pakistan Navy has been successfully playing its role in providing a secure sea environment not only to Pakistan but also

to the world seafarers. He lauded the professional shipbuilding competence of M/s DAMEN and appreciated the timely delivery of ships to the Pakistan Navy. The ceremony was attended by senior representatives of MoDP and Pakistan Navy besides officials of M/s DAMEN Netherlands and DAMEN Shipyard Galati, Romania.



Briefs

Bulgaria facing hybrid attacks from Russia

SOFIA: Bulgaria has been facing an "unprecedented increase" in hybrid attacks from Russia, the Bulgarian foreign minister claimed on Thursday. "In parallel with Russia's aggressive military actions, we are facing an unprecedented increase in various hybrid attacks aimed at undermining Bulgaria's resilience and thus our democratic values and processes," Nikolay Milkov said at the opening of the Sofia Security Forum international conference, according to state-run BTA news agency. Calling the Russian war on Ukraine a "violation of the international legal order," he argued that it has dealt a "serious blow" to the contemporary international security architecture. Milkov accused Russia of using "hybrid techniques, instrumentalisation of energy and food supplies, cyber activities of control over sensitive technologies, unprecedented intensification of propaganda aimed at domestic political destabilisation of our societies - provoking discontent and reducing solidarity with Ukraine." This, he said, has forced NATO and EU to have "certain responses."—Agencies

Teachers across England stage fresh strike over pay

LONDON: Teachers across England launched on Thursday another wave of strikes over pay. Teachers, who are members of the National Education Union (NEU) - Europe's largest education union - will also hold industrial action on May 2. The NEU rejected the government's £1,000 (\$1,245) one-off payment for this year and a 4.3% pay rise offer, demanding "a fully funded, above-inflation pay rise." Previously, the union said that Education Secretary Gillian Keegan "can still avoid these strikes" by returning to the negotiating table with a better proposal. "The pay offer from the government was an insult to hardworking teachers and failed to acknowledge the crisis in education," the NEU said last week. "The education sector needs more money and needs it now. If the Government is serious about education, it needs to get its head out of the sand," Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the union, said in a statement on Wednesday.—APP

Finland's PM-designate to seek far-right alliance

HELSINKI: Finland's conservative leader Petteri Orpo, who won the country's April general election, on Thursday said he plans to form a coalition government that includes the far-right runner-up Finns Party. "The official government negotiations ... will begin on the second of May in the House of the Estates between the (conservative) National Coalition Party, the Finns Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats," Orpo, the leader of the National Coalition, told reporters. If Orpo succeeds in drafting a government programme supported by all four parties, the coalition would secure a majority of 108 seats out of 200 in parliament. The negotiations, which typically take around a month, are expected to be difficult, as the Finns Party's hard line on immigration and scepticism towards Finland's climate targets has caused friction among the right-wing parties. "There are of course differences between the parties. But following (preliminary) negotiations we collectively feel that the issues can be resolved," Orpo said. The Finns Party served in a centre-right government with the National Coalition from 2015 to 2017 but that collaboration ended when the Finns Party split into two groups - a moderate and a hard-line faction. In the April elections, the incumbent Social Democrats fell to third place with 43 seats, behind the National Coalition with 48 seats and the far-right with 46.—APP

France welcomes Baku's peace proposal with Armenia: FM

France has never objected to the illegal actions of Armenia or to the fact that its illegal armed groups are on the territory of Azerbaijan

NEWS DESK

BAKU: France welcomes Azerbaijan's proposal on a peace agreement with Armenia, French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna said at a press conference with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. "We support issues related to mine action. We know that this is a challenge facing your country. There is still a lot of work to be done. Azerbaijan and Armenia should recognize each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Colonna noted. "Negotiations are the only way to sustainable peace. We would like, so that both countries follow this path. There are conditions for peace in the region. Plans on this issue should be developed jointly." She pointed out the importance of reaching a peace agreement. "We'll support these efforts in all possible ways," the French minister added. Colonna arrived on an official visit to Azerbaijan on April 26. Then she will leave for Armenia and Georgia. Azerbaijan and France are historical partners and there is a need for dialogue between the two countries, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna, who is on a visit to Azerbaijan further said. "President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev welcomed me this morning and we had a very sincere conversation. I invite you



to France to continue this dialogue," Colonna said. In turn, Bayramov discussed relevant issues at the press conference with his French counterpart. "At the meeting with the French counterpart, an exchange of views on regional and other issues took place. For many years, Azerbaijani-French relations have been developing dynamically and can be described as successful cooperation," Bayramov said. Azerbaijan has not seen France even once appeal to Armenia, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov

said at the press conference with his French counterpart. "France has never objected to the illegal actions of Armenia or to the fact that its illegal armed groups are on the territory of Azerbaijan. A statement was signed in the presence of the French president, among others, but we did not see France appeal to Armenia. This is the number one cause of tension in the region," the minister added. He further said, "Armenia is expected to return to the negotiating table on a peace agreement in the near future" Bayramov noted

that against the background of Azerbaijan's proposals, Armenia is seriously slowing down the process by not responding to them. Moreover, last time it took 6 weeks to get an answer from Armenia. He noted that all the initiatives related to the peace treaty were put forward by Azerbaijan. "The Armenian side announced a return to peace talks. Holding the next stage of negotiations is the next important step. We will participate in it and will do everything possible to advance the peace process," the minister added. Azerbaijan has

never been the reason for the aggravation of relations with France, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said. He said that even when relations were tense, Azerbaijan did not evade contacts. "At the meeting with the French counterpart, an exchange of views on regional and other issues took place. For many years, Azerbaijani-French relations have been developing dynamically and can be described as successful cooperation," Bayramov said. The French minister arrived in Azerbaijan on an official visit on April 26. Afterward, the minister will visit Armenia and Georgia. Following over a month of military action to liberate its territories from Armenian occupation from late Sept. to early Nov. 2020, Azerbaijan has pushed Armenia to sign the surrender document. A joint statement on the matter was made by the Azerbaijani president, Armenia's PM, and the president of Russia. A complete ceasefire and a cessation of all hostilities in the zone of the Karabakh conflict were introduced on Nov. 10, 2020. In January 2021, during a meeting in Moscow, the leaders of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan made a decision to create a working group at the level of the deputy prime ministers of the three countries that would focus on establishing transport and economic links in Karabakh, following the end of the war in 2020.

Farm machines at Canton Fair attract Pakistani buyers

Automatic grinder is a widely used machine for value-added agricultural products in China. "It is very interesting that you can put whatever crop in it, like wheat, spices, even meat

BEIJING: During the 133rd China Import and Export Fair, also known as Canton Fair, a section for agricultural machines attracted a lot of Pakistani buyers, according to China Economic Net (CEN). Electric trolley is one of the devices that interest visitors the most. "It can carry more weight, and it is auto-controlled. The traditional trolley we use in Pakistan is completely different from that." A Pakistani buyer said. "You can see how innovative they have made it by installing a motor and

hydraulic system in a small trolley. It also fits small-scale farmers. It can have a huge market in Pakistan." He added. The booth said that the electric trolley normally works with an electric wood breaker. "It can break wood into small pieces. You can give commands through the control panel about how small the pieces you want to cut the wood into. You can also convert it into sawdust. The output will automatically fall into this trolley." The exhibitor introduced. Federal Minister for

Industries and Production in Pakistan, Syed Murtaza Mahmud recently stressed the importance of farm mechanization. He also encouraged converting raw products into value-added products to promote agribusiness. Automatic grinder is a widely used machine for value-added agricultural products in China. "It is very interesting that you can put whatever crop in it, like wheat, spices, even meat. Here all of your demands for the machine will be met, whatever power and capaci-

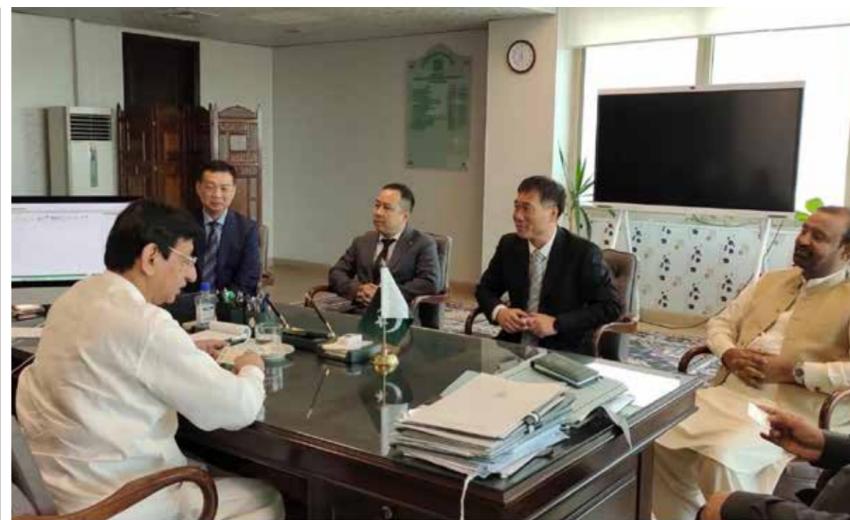
ty you want," said another Pakistani buyer. "I think the products at Canton Fair are of good quality with fair prices. When you place orders in large quantity, the price will be fairer." In this place, we can find a lot of advanced devices that can be introduced to Pakistan, which are essential for increasing the agricultural productivity of the country. Hope these new technologies can give Pakistan more inspiration to make agribusiness more productive and profitable, the report added.—Agencies

Tehran needs no one's permission to bring terrorists to justice

TEHRAN: Iran has dismissed Germany's meddling call to reverse the death sentence of a terror ring leader, saying it will never ask anyone for permission to deliver justice vis-à-vis terrorists. Iran's Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the death penalty for Jamshid Sharmahd, ringleader of a US-based terrorist group, after it found "no reason or evidence" to reverse the ruling. Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock urged Tehran to "immediately" reverse the verdict, calling it "completely unacceptable." Responding to that, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani said the Islamic Republic of Iran does not tolerate such a meddling approach. "The Islamic Republic of Iran will never seek permission from anyone in the path of confronting terrorism and implementing justice in dealing with terrorists," Kan'ani said. "Iran believes that the meddling and authoritarian statements by some German officials about the verdict issued by an Iranian court against a known terrorist is a clear example of supporting terrorism and interfering in Iran's internal affairs," he added. The Iranian spokesman warned that such positions not only hinder the implementation of justice but "encourage terrorists" and "promote terrorism" across the world. He urged German officials to "immediately end the operation to encourage terrorists and promote the sinister scourge of terrorism."—Agencies

EU struggles to extend tariff-free exports for Ukraine

BRUSSELS: Facing resistance from Eastern member states, the EU is struggling to extend Ukrainian agricultural products' tariff-free access to the European market. Despite an approaching deadline, EU ambassadors have yet to agree on another year of exemption under import duties for Ukrainian agricultural goods because Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia want to end the preference. Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria unilaterally banned the entry of grain and other food shipments from Ukraine two weeks ago, arguing that they must protect their farmers and products from cheap competition. Although the rest of the EU countries could overrule their opposition according to EU decision-making procedures, the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission are still seeking a compromise. The EU Commission has already promised 100 million (about \$110 million) in support for the farmers and an exemption for the governments to prohibit the sale of Ukrainian agricultural products if they lift the embargo allowing Ukrainian goods to other EU states. In hopes of solving the stalemate, negotiations continue and EU ambassadors are expected to cast their votes on the extension on Friday.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Syed Amin Ul Haque in a meeting with delegation of Chinese Software Company Easyway Innovation.—DNA

Ukraine has received 98% pledged combat vehicles

With battlefield positions in Ukraine largely static as a war of attrition took hold in recent months, Russian forces have kept up their bombardment of Ukrainian areas, often hitting apartment buildings and other civilian infrastructure. At least seven civilians were killed and 33 were injured between Wednesday and Thursday, Ukraine's presidential office said Thursday

FOREIGN DESK

KYIV: NATO allies and partner countries have delivered more than 98% of the combat vehicles promised to Ukraine during Russia's invasion and war, the military alliance's chief said Thursday, giving Kyiv a bigger punch as contingents launching a counteroffensive. Along with more than 1,550 armored vehicles, 230 tanks and other equipment, Ukraine's allies have sent "vast amounts of ammunition" and also trained and equipped more than nine new Ukrainian brigades, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. More than 30,000 troops are estimated to make up the new brigades. Some NATO partner countries, such as Sweden and Australia, have also provided armored vehicles. "This will put Ukraine in a strong position to continue to retake occupied ter-

ritory," Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels. His comments came a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping had a "long and meaningful" phone call in their first known contact since Russia's full-scale invasion more than a year ago. Though Zelenskyy said he was encouraged by Wednesday's call and Western officials welcomed Xi's move, the development didn't appear to bring about any immediate shift in peace prospects. Russia and Ukraine are far apart in their terms for peace, and Beijing - while looking to position itself as a global diplomatic power - has refused to criticize Moscow's invasion. The Chinese government sees Russia as a diplomatic ally in opposing U.S. influence in global affairs, and Xi visited Moscow last month. Stoltenberg said the 31 NATO allies were committed to shoring up Ukraine's military, add-



ing that taking back land occupied by the Kremlin's forces would give Kyiv a stronger negotiating position if peace talks occur. Ukrainian officials said China's overture was encouraging. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal on Thursday described the call between Xi and Zelenskyy as "very productive." "I'm convinced it is a good beginning for

our relations in the future, Shmyhal said after visiting Pope Francis at the Vatican. But the Kremlin's response was lukewarm. Asked if the call could help end the fighting, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "We are ready to welcome anything that could lead to the termination of the conflict in Ukraine and the achievement of all the goals set by Russia." Peskov said the conversation between the Chinese and Ukrainian leaders was "the sovereign business of those countries and the issue of their bilateral dialogue." With battlefield positions in Ukraine largely static as a war of attrition took hold in recent months, Russian forces have kept up their bombardment of Ukrainian areas, often hitting apartment buildings and other civilian infrastructure. At least seven civilians were killed and 33 were injured between Wednesday and

Thursday, Ukraine's presidential office said Thursday. They included one person killed and 23 wounded, including a child, when four Kalibr cruise missiles hit the southern city of Mykolaiv, official said. The governor of Mykolaiv province, Vitalii Kim, said 22 multi-story buildings, 12 private houses and other residential buildings were damaged in the attack. Kalibr missiles are launched from ships or submarines. The ones that hit Mykolaiv were fired from somewhere in the Black Sea, according to Ukraine's Operational Command South. ___ Cook reported from Brussels. Associated Press Writer Yuras Karmanov in Tallinn, Estonia, and Frances D'Emilio in Rome contributed. ___ Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Kenya cult death toll rises to 95

NAIROBI: The latest death toll in Kenya's cult investigation has risen to 95 as the government announced a dusk-to-dawn curfew on the ranch owned by a pastor who is accused of ordering his followers to fast to death. Journalists and human rights activists on Wednesday were barred from accessing the 800-acre (320-hectare) ranch, which has been declared a "disturbed area and an operation zone." Pastor Paul Makenzi, who was arrested for allegedly directing his followers to fast to death in order to meet Jesus, remains in police custody until at least May 2. He heads the Good News International Church. Police say they took 22 people into custody during Wednesday's search and rescue operation. Authorities have rescued 34 people from the property, which is near the town of Malindi, since police raided the ranch earlier this month. The Kenya Red Cross Society said that 314 is the latest missing persons figure. Movement will now be restricted on the ranch for 30 days. "Curfew orders have also been declared and gazetted within the said area between 1800 hours in the evening up to and until 0600 hours in the morning for 30 days," Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki said in a statement.—DNA

Peru declares emergency at borders

LIMA: Peru has declared a state of emergency on its borders as part of the ongoing efforts to combat irregular migration. "A supreme decree has been approved that declares a state of emergency for the border areas of Tumbes, Piura, Cajamarca, Amazonas, Loreto, Madre de Dios, and Tacna regions," Peru's President Dina Boluarte said at a press conference, according to local Andina news agency. This decision will enable the implementation of operations by security forces related to border control so as to protect domestic order and constitutional rights, Boluarte said. "We have seen that day by day our cities are not far from citizen insecurity, individual or organized crime, criminal gangs, violence, and criminality that grows day by day," she said.—APP

Buddha statue found in Egypt

CAIRO: A statue of Buddha has been discovered in Egypt's ancient seaport of Berenice on the Red Sea, shedding light on trade ties with India under the Roman empire. A Polish-US mission discovered the statue "dating back to the Roman era while digging at the ancient temple in Berenice", an antiquities ministry statement said on Wednesday. The find has "important indications over the presence of trade ties between Egypt and India during the Roman era", the head of Egypt's supreme antiquities council Mostafa al-Waziri said. The statue, with part of its right side and its right leg missing, measures 71 centimetres (28 inches) in height and portrays Buddha with a halo around his head and a lotus flower by his side. Waziri said Berenice was one of the largest seaports in Roman-era Egypt, and was often the destination for ships from India laden with spices, semi-precious stones, textiles and ivory. Egypt has unveiled many major archaeological discoveries in recent years, amid attempts to revive its vital tourism industry after years of political unrest and the Covid pandemic. However, critics say the flurry of excavations has prioritised finds that grab media attention over hard academic research. The crown jewel in the government's plans is the long-delayed inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the pyramids in Giza. The government plans to attract 30 million tourists a year by 2028, up from 13 million before the pandemic.—Agencies

Briefs

Petrol prices likely to go down from May 1

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The prices of petroleum products in Pakistan are expected to decline from May 1, media reported Thursday citing sources, as the government might provide relief to the inflation-hit people. According to sources in oil marketing companies (OMCs), the price of petrol is likely to decline by Rs4.5 per litre while the price of diesel is expected to go down by Rs6 per litre. Diesel is widely used in transport and agriculture sectors. The reduction in its price could bring inflationary impact down and a relief for farmers as the crop-harvesting season has kicked off. The consumers are already facing high prices, especially the low-income group, who have motorbikes and small cars. In its last fortnight announcement, the federal government increased the price of petrol by Rs10 and the price of kerosene oil by Rs5.78 "in the wake of increase in petroleum prices in the international market and exchange rate variations."

SBP-held reserves rise to \$4.46 billion

DNA

KARACHI: As the country tries to find ways to secure external financing and keep itself afloat, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)-held foreign exchange reserves recorded a meagre rise. The SBP, in its weekly bulletin, mentioned its reserves have jumped by \$30 million to \$4.46 billion as of April 20, which will provide an import cover of less than a month – a position that has been the same for several months now. The net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stand at \$5.56 billion, \$1.1 billion more than the SBP, taking the total liquid foreign reserves to \$10.02 billion. Although the central bank did not specify the reason behind the increase, there was a \$300 million rise in the reserves last week – which was due to the loan provided by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. The \$350 billion economy is in turmoil amid financial woes and the delay in an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that would release much-needed funding crucial to avoid the risk of default. The government has been in talks with the Washington-based lender since end-January to resume the \$1.1 billion loan tranche that has been on hold since November, part of a \$6.5 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreed upon in 2019.

Pakistan to approach WHO for mpox vaccine

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to obtain anti-moneypox vaccine from the World Health Organization as the South Asian country reported first two cases of infectious diseases. Mpox (monkeypox) is an infectious disease caused by the monkeypox virus. It can cause a painful rash, enlarged lymph nodes and fever. Most people fully recover, but some get very sick. Mpox can be transmitted to humans through physical contact with someone who is infectious, with contaminated materials, or with infected animals. The National Institute of Health (NIH) officials said that technical assistance had been sought from the WHO amid threats of spread of the infections in the country. They said that vaccine would also be obtained to inoculate people against the infection. They said protective gear would also be received from the World Health Organization for the frontline healthcare workers who will also be vaccinated.

Russia says no plan for nuclear escalation

Western military support for Ukraine is increasing the risks of a catastrophic nuclear conflict

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: Russia does not intend to take the path of nuclear escalation in its standoff with the West over Ukraine but others should not test its patience, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday. Her comments follow a flurry of warnings by senior Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, that Western military support for Ukraine is increasing the risks of a catastrophic nuclear conflict. "We will do everything to prevent the development of events according to the worst scenario, but not at the cost of infringing on our vital interests," Zakharova told a regular news conference. "I do not recommend that anybody doubt our determination and put it to the test in practice," she added. Russia

has strongly criticized the supply of Western arms to Ukraine and the expansion of the NATO military alliance closer to its borders. Finland, which shares a long border with Russia, this month became the 31st member of NATO, while Ukraine itself also wishes to join, though it faces opposition from some countries. "They (the United States) continue to deliberately infringe on our fundamental interests, deliberately generate risks and raise the stakes in the confrontation with Russia..." said Zakharova. Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, a close Putin ally,



said earlier this week that the world was "quite probably on the verge of a new world war." Putin casts the 14-month war in Ukraine – something he calls a "special military operation" – as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West, and has said that Russia will use all available means to protect itself against any aggressor. The United States and its allies have condemned Russia's war in Ukraine as an imperial land grab. Ukraine has vowed to fight until all Russian troops withdraw from its territory, and says Russian rhetoric on nuclear

war is intended to intimidate the West into curbing military aid. Meanwhile, a Ukrainian journalist was killed on Wednesday as he travelled to the city of Kherson with his Italian colleague. Bogdan Bitik, who was interpreting for La Repubblica reporter Corrado Zunino, was shot "most likely by Russian snipers", the Italian newspaper reported. Zunino was shot in the shoulder and is now receiving medical treatment. He told La Repubblica from a hospital bed that they had passed three Ukrainian checkpoints when they were suddenly hit. "I heard a hiss, and I saw Bogdan on the ground," Zunino said. "He wasn't moving. I crawled out of the line of fire. I ran until I passed a civilian car. I was full of blood. I had to be taken to Kherson Hospital." He added that he had been trying to call Bitik, who he described as "a great friend", but got no answer. "It's excruciating," he said.

Iran seizes oil tanker in Gulf of Oman: US Navy

DUBAI: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized an oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman on Thursday, the US Navy said, in the latest such incident in the commercially vital seaway. The waters where the ship was seized, near the Strait of Hormuz, are a choke point for at least a third of the world's seaborne oil. The "Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker Advantage Sweet was seized by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy while transiting international waters in the Gulf of Oman", the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet said in a statement. "The Iranian government should immediately release the oil tanker," it added. The US Navy did not specify the owner of the vessel or its destination. Iran and the United States have traded barbs in recent years over a spate of incidents in the sensitive waters of the Gulf. The seizure on Thursday is just the latest incident in the Strait of Hormuz where ships have been mysteriously attacked, drones downed and oil tankers seized. "In the past two years, Iran has unlawfully seized at least five commercial vessels sailing in the Middle East", the US Navy said. – APP

More air strikes in Sudan as ceasefire expiry looms

MONITORING DESK

KHARTOUM: The Sudanese army has pounded paramilitary fighters with air strikes in the capital, Khartoum, while deadly fighting has flared in Darfur as a ceasefire that has slowed street battles is set to expire. Columns of smoke rose on Thursday near the presidential palace in Khartoum and areas north of the capital as aircraft flew sorties. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) said its rival, the Sudanese Armed Forces, bombed its camp in the Kafouri district with warplanes. The death toll continued to rise. At least 512 people have been killed and 4,193 wounded as the conflict entered a 13th day, according to health ministry figures, although the real numbers are

likely to be much higher.

Battles continued despite a three-day, US-brokered ceasefire that took effect early on Tuesday. Aircraft patrolled the skies over the capital's northern suburbs, and fighters on the ground exchanged artillery and small-arms fire. The army said it agreed to talks in Juba, capital of neighbouring South Sudan, on extending the truce, which expires late on Thursday. The talks have been proposed by a bloc of East African countries, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). There have been multiple truce efforts since fighting broke out on April 15 between Sudan's regular army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, commanded by his deputy-turned-rival, Mohamed "Hemedti" Hamdan Daglo. All have failed. Al-Burhan agreed

on Wednesday to the IGAD proposal for talks on extending the ceasefire by a further 72 hours, the army said. The RSF's response to the proposal remains unclear. Beyond the capital, fighting has flared in the provinces, particularly in the war-torn western region of Darfur. Fighting between the army and RSF raged for a second straight day in West Darfur's capital, Geneina, and sent civilians fleeing for the nearby border with Chad, witnesses said. On Wednesday, the United Nations humanitarian agency reported killings, looting and arson in Geneina. "An estimated 50,000 acutely malnourished children have had nutrition support disrupted due to the fighting," it said in a statement. The heavy fighting has trapped many civilians in their homes and they are short of food, wa-

ter and electricity. Communications have been sporadically disrupted. The UN said it "received reports of tens of thousands of people arriving in the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan". Foreign governments have taken advantage of the fragile truce to organise road convoys, flights and ships to get thousands of their citizens out of Sudan. But some have warned their evacuation efforts are dependent on the lull in fighting holding. China deployed warships on Thursday to evacuate its citizens.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a meeting with a delegation of MQM-Pakistan. – DNA

WHO fears more deaths in Sudan due to outbreaks

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) expects "many more" deaths in Sudan due to outbreaks of disease and a lack of essential services amid fighting, its director general said on Wednesday. Battles between Sudan's army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary since mid-April has killed at least 459 people and injured more than 4,000, according to the WHO. "On top of the number of deaths and injuries caused by the conflict itself, the WHO expects

there will be many more deaths due to outbreaks, lack of access to food and water and disruptions to essential health services, including immunization," World Health Organization director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. Tedros added that only 16% of health facilities were functioning in the Sudanese capital. "WHO estimates that one quarter of the lives lost so far could have been saved with access to basic haemorrhage control. But paramedics,

nurses and doctors are unable to access injured civilians, and civilians are unable to access services." The U.N. health body was carrying out a risk assessment to determine whether the seizure of a laboratory in Khartoum housing pathogens represented a risk to public health. "When lab workers are forced to leave a laboratory and untrained people enter that laboratory, there are always risks, but the risks are primarily to those individuals first and foremost to accidentally expose themselves to the pathogens," said Mike Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme. However, the absence of clean water and vaccines, as well as other sanitation issues, represented the main risk to Sudanese, he added. – Agencies

Tayyip Erdogan falls ill on TV and cancels election rallies

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has suspended election campaigning after he fell ill during a live TV interview in which the broadcast was abruptly brought to a halt. After a 20-minute break, he returned to say he had "serious stomach flu" after two days of intense campaigning. Mr Erdogan, 69, is facing his toughest election campaign so far. The main opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu has been chosen to run for a group of six political parties. He was among a number of opposition leaders to wish the president a speedy recovery. Latest polls suggest a close race between the two men and give Mr Kilicdaroglu a good chance of victory in elections on 14 May, with a possible presidential run-off two weeks afterwards. President Erdogan initially cancelled three appearances in central Anatolia on Wednesday, saying he had been advised to stay home on the advice of doctors. He then cancelled his scheduled events on Thursday, too, including the opening of Turkey's first nuclear power station at Akkuyu on the Mediterranean coast. Akkuyu's four nuclear reactors, largely owned by Russian firm Rosatom, have taken several years to build and the opening had been timed to coincide with the election. Instead, both Mr Erdogan and Russia's Vladimir Putin will attend the inauguration online. – DNA

China defence minister in India amid border tensions

WEB DESK

BEIJING: Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu has arrived in India to attend a key security summit meeting amid strained ties between the countries. Mr Li will attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) defence ministers' meeting on Friday in the Indian capital Delhi. This is the first visit to India by a Chinese defence minister since a deadly clash between their troops in 2020. At least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed. The sides have had other confrontations since then, with the most recent flare-up happening in December at Tawang in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. The root cause of the tensions is an ill-defined 3,440km (2,100-mile)-long disputed border in the high-altitude Himalayan region. Rivers, lakes and snowcaps along the frontier mean the line can shift, bringing soldiers face to face at many points. China's defence ministry said on Tuesday that Mr Li will address the conference in Delhi and "meet with the heads of delegations from relevant countries to communicate and exchange views on the issues of international and regional situation as well as defence and security cooperation".

CTD official martyred in Khuzdar blast

DNA

KHUZDAR: The station house officer (SHO) of the Khuzdar Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) police station was martyred on Thursday in an explosion targeting his vehicle. Khuzdar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Fahad Khosa told Dawn.com that the incident took place near Jhalawan Medical College located on the National Highway. The SSP said that the official, identified as Sharbat Khan Umrani, was on his way to work when the explosion took place. He said a bomb had been fitted in the CTD official's vehicle. SSP Khosa said police and security forces promptly arrived at the location of the incident along with the bomb disposal squad which was assessing the scale of the blast. He said that the martyred SHO's body had been shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital. Meanwhile, Balochistan Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Langove condemned the incident and expressed his grief at the CTD official's martyrdom.

PTI leaders get bail extension in Zaman Park case

DNA

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court judge on Thursday extended the pre-arrest bail of PTI leaders until May 6 for allegedly attacking police officials, creating a law and order situation, panic, and setting ablaze state property at Zaman Park. The leaders included former federal minister Asad Umar, Farrukh Habib, Dr Yasmeen Rashid. However, the judge also directed Farrukh Habib and Musarat Jamshed Cheema to appear before the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) for the course of the investigation. As proceedings commenced, ATC Judge Abhar Gul asked about the progress of the investigation to which JIT's head told the court that PTI leader Farrukh Habib and Musarat Jamshed Cheema are not appearing before the JIT. He added that they did not yet join the investigation. At this, the counsel for the accused told the court that they had challenged the formation of the Joint Investigation Team.

'Desecration' of Al-Aqsa chapel angers Palestinians

"Destructive policies seek to destroy any regional or international effort to provide stability and prevent the deterioration of the situation," he said. Abu Rudeineh said that Israel was playing with fire, as the chapel was an integral part of Al-Aqsa Mosque

WEB DESK

RAMALLAH: Palestinians have condemned repeated Israeli attacks on the Bab Al-Rahma Chapel in Al-Aqsa Mosque, saying the site has been vandalized, while worshippers face daily threats and abuse. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said Bab Al-Rahma was an integral part of Al-Aqsa and only Muslims had the right to control its affairs. Removal of items from the chapel and its vandalism by Israel were unacceptable, he added. Ramzi Khoury, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization executive committee, said extremist settler groups raised Israeli flags in the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque on Wednesday and performed religious rituals. He described the Israeli actions as an "unprecedented aggression

against the sanctity of Al-Aqsa, a desecration of its religious status, and a provocation to Muslims all over the world." Israeli forces' repeated attacks on Bab Al-Rahma would not give Israel any sovereignty over Al-Aqsa Mosque or Jerusalem, as "it is an occupied Palestinian city with its Islamic and Christian sanctities according to the relevant international legitimacy resolutions," he added. Rawhi Fattouh, president of the Palestinian National Council, called on the international community to curb the "criminal madness" of the Israeli government and its National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. Fattouh said the raids constituted a flagrant violation of places of worship and an attempt to give a religious character to the conflict, "which would ignite the region and detonate the situation." Osama Al-Qawami, a member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, said the "cowardly and provoc-

ative attack on Bab Al-Rahma was only part of the systematic Israeli campaign to Judaize Jerusalem." Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for the Palestinian presidency, said Israeli vandalism confirmed that the extremist government was looking for ways to detonate the situation. "Destructive policies seek to destroy any regional or international effort to provide stability and prevent the deterioration of the situation," he said. Abu Rudeineh said that Israel was playing with fire, as the chapel was an integral part of Al-Aqsa Mosque. On Wednesday, Israeli police stormed Bab Al-Rahma for a fourth consecutive day amid searches in the vicinity. Earlier police cut off the electricity supply and damaged installations inside the chapel. Palestinians were able to open the Gate of Mercy chapel in February 2019, after it was closed by Israeli authorities for 16 years.

The Umayyads built Bab Al-Rahma Chapel about 1,300 years ago as a standard door between the Jerusalem Wall and the eastern Al-Aqsa Mosque. The site fell into neglect after the Israeli occupation of Al-Aqsa in 1967. In 1992, it witnessed a remarkable recovery after the Islamic Heritage Committee launched religious and social activities there. However, Israeli authorities banned the events in 2003 and closed the chapel completely. For the past three years, Israeli police have continued to enter the prayer hall wearing shoes. Police also have set up a monitoring point above the chapel and another nearby. Azzam Al-Khatib, director of the Islamic Waqf Department that supervises the Al-Aqsa Mosque and is affiliated with Jordan, told Arab News that since Eid Al-Fitr Israeli police have been storming Bab Al-Rahma two or three times a day.