



Islamabad POST

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Iranian envoy hails growing Pakistan-Iran trade volume

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Masood urges US to resume military support

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Mayweather to fight Gotti III in exhibition

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Briefs

Govt can't evade from elections

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Legal expert Aitzaz Ahsan has said that the Supreme Court will issue ruling based on the outcome of negotiations, the court has given a chance to politicians and the judiciary cannot step back, the government cannot evade from elections in the country. In an interview with a private television channel, he said that if there is a need to amend the constitution, then PTI members will have to be de-notified, and if that happens, then the PML-N will shun away from the amendment. Aitzaz Ahsan said that he had advised Imran Khan earlier to dissolve the assemblies. He said that PTI members are innocent and cannot understand the cunning politics of the Muslim League (N) who has been doing politics from last 40 years, they are experts in altering their goals and manipulate the situations.

Habib barred from flying to Dubai

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Former state minister and senior leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Farrukh Habib has been stopped from flying abroad by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), sources told media Friday. The sources said that Habib was going to Dubai via a Pakistan International Airlines flight when he was barred by the agency. "He was stopped because his name was on the stop list," airport sources told the TV channel. Habib also evaded FIA's attempt to "arrest" him and left the airport. Later, in a statement on Twitter, the PTI leader said that he was going to visit his family member who is undergoing liver transplant surgery abroad.

Holiday Notice

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

- Editor

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Major Russian air strikes kill 21 in Ukraine cities - Page 08

'No deadlock' Govt offers to dissolve NA after budget

PTI seeks elections in July; Govt proposes September elections, senior leadership to be consulted



KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led government and the opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are set to hold the "final" round of talks on May 2 (Tuesday) after the former ruled out the possibility of a deadlock between the sides. Sources familiar with the talks told media that the government has suggested holding polls in September this year. However, the sources said the PTI did not agree to this at first and proposed that polls be held in July. According to sources, the government team apparently offered to dissolve assemblies after presenting the budget, which is to be presented in June. At this, the sources said, the government representatives told the opposition that they have to present the budget in June and elections in July would be too early. The PTI delegation then agreed to put forward

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Talks only if govt willing to dissolve assemblies: Khan

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan said on Friday that negotiations with the coalition government will only go forward if they are willing to dissolve the National Assembly forthwith. Talking to reporters at the Islamabad High Court (IHC), the former prime minister said that he had instructed PTI negotiating team to only talk with the government if they are willing to dissolve the National Assembly now. "I have told Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Fawad Chaudhry to only go forward with the talks if the government is willing to dissolve the assembly immediately and hold elections." "There is no need to hold further round of talks if they (govt) repeat the same talk of holding elections in September or October," he added. During his informal discussion with the journalists, Imran Khan further said that the "ball" was now in the government's

Continued on Page 06

3 soldiers martyred in multiple shootouts

7 terrorists sent to hell during the encounters



NEWS DESK

RAWALPINDI: Three soldiers of the Pakistan Army were martyred during three separate encounters with terrorists in different parts of Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the military's media wing said on Friday. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that on the night of 27-28 April, security forces while fighting gallantly repulsed three attacks by terrorists on different locations within a span of a short time in Lakki Marwat district. A motorcycle-borne suicide bomber exploded himself near security forces post in the district followed by a fierce fire exchange between the troops and terrorists, it added. "Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists as a result of which 4 terrorists were sent to hell," the ISPR said.

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Ex-COAS' statement misquoted: ISPR

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The military's media wing on Friday clarified that the former army chief General (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa's statement on "combat worthiness" was "quoted out of the context". The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) issued the statement after discussions in the media on "Pakistan Army's combat worthiness in view of the condition of certain weapon systems on its inventory". "To this end, views of former army chief on the future threat to Pakistan, which he shared with media persons in an off-the-record interactive session, have been quoted out of the context," said the ISPR. The military's media wing assured the people that the army will always

Continued on Page 06



RISALPUR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar Sidhu witness Air Show during Passing Out Parade at PAF Base Asghar Khan. - DNA

FO slams Indian terrorism in Pakistan

PM Shehbaz to attend Charles & Camilla's coronation ceremony

ALI FURQAN

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) said Friday that the arrest of Indian spy commander Kulbhushan Jadhav - who was found involved in espionage, terrorist, and subversive activities in Pakistan - and his presence is a testimony of New Delhi's repeated involvement in terrorism in the country. In her weekly media briefing in Islamabad, FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said Pakistan wishes to have peace in the region and with all our neighbours including India. "We also expect India to take steps to create an environment which facilitates

Continued on Page 06

Imran gets protective bail in sedition case

Bail granted till May 3

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday approved protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan in a case filed against him for allegedly inciting public against institution. The high court granted him bail till May 3 against surety bonds worth Rs100,000. It has also directed the defiant politician to join the investigations in the case. Strict security measures were at the high court to avoid any untoward situation.

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PM lauds forces' success Nation stands with armed forces like a solid rock

Says our desire for peace should not be construed as weakness

STAFF REPORT / DNA

RISALPUR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said the whole nation stood behind its armed forces like a solid rock and it would continue to do so in future to defeat the evil designs of anti-Pakistan forces. "This mutual bond of love, devotion and abiding reverence has remained unbroken. I have unwavering belief that our armed forces will always live up to the expectation of the people in future as well," he said in his address at the passing out parade of cadets at the Pakistan Air Force's Asghar Khan Academy. The prime minister congratulated the graduating cadets, their parents and the faculty on the most memorable moments of their lives. PM Shehbaz said over the last two decades the nation had been tested by a combination of challenges such as terrorism, extremism and militancy. "The manner in which our armed forces, including the air force,

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PM lauds Sudan evacuation efforts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday lauded the team involved in helping Pakistanis in Sudan for its efforts to ensure the successful evacuation of Pakistanis. The prime minister expressed satisfaction over the safe arrival of 847 Pakistanis at Sudan Port and 107 Pakistanis in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. PM Shehbaz also lauded the efforts of the Pakistan Air Force for ensuring the safe return of Pakistanis from Sudan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appreciated Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari,

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TALIBAN SAY Ban on UN women 'internal social matter'

KABUL: The decision to ban Afghan women from working for the United Nations was an "internal social matter", the country's Taliban authorities said Friday, a day after the UN Security Council demanded they overturn the ruling. The Security Council resolution passed unanimously by all 15 Council members on Thursday said a ban on women working for the world body and NGOs in Afghanistan "undermines human rights and humanitarian principles". It urged "all states and organisations to use their influence" to "promote an urgent reversal of these policies and practices". On Friday, however, the Afghan Foreign

Ministry issued a statement saying the resolution failed to respect the country's "sovereign choices". "We remain committed to ensuring all rights of Afghan women while emphasizing that diversity must be respected and not politicized," it said. "This is an internal social matter of Afghanistan that does not impact outside states." Since ousting the foreign-backed government and returning to power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia that the United Nations has labelled "gender-based apartheid".

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Mushahid for early completion of Pak-Iran gas pipeline project

Iranian Ambassador Ali Hosseini says both countries registered the unprecedented record of two billion and two hundred million dollars (\$2.2 billion) in the amount of trade volume between Iran and Pakistan

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Defence Committee Senator Mushahid Hussain has called for early completion of the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project adding after the completion of the project bilateral relations between both countries shall further be strengthened. Senator Mushahid was speaking during the farewell reception hosted by the outgoing Ambassador of Iran Ali Hosseini to say goodbye to his friends. Asif Durrani former Pakistan's ambassador to Tehran and senior journalist Hamid Mir also spoke on the occasion. Mr. Golriz, head of the Press Section moderated the event. Senator Mushahid Hussain further said, he was happy that in his capacity as the Chairman of the Senate Defence Committee he was able to institutionalize bilateral relations especially in the defence field. He said Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan after its independence in 1947. Since the relations between the two countries are on the move, he added. Senator Mushahid also talked about rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia and termed it a positive development in terms of peace and stability in the region. He was of the view that China, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan can surely constitute a force to be reckoned with. He also declared sanctions on Iran as unwarranted adding despite these sanctions Iran has shown phenomenal progress in all spheres. Senator Mushahid said Pakistan too had faced severe sanctions in the past. He said the world has changed altogether and those who



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran Ali Hosseini and Senator Mushahid Hussain shake hand during the farewell reception. - DNA

impose such sanctions must realize the ground realities. The outgoing ambassador of Iran Syed Muhammad Ali Hosseini in his speech thanked guests for attending the event. He added, for a long time, the Islamic Republic of Iran has strengthened its relations with the neighbouring, brotherly and friendly country of Pakistan in line with its policy of close relationship with its neighbors, and still now, this goal is being followed up nonstop and despite the obstacles. "During my mission in the neighboring and brotherly country of Pakistan, despite the illegal and unfair sanctions against my country, and despite the restrictions that the spread of pandemics imposed on all of us, we witnessed great progress and developments in the various aspects of our relations with Pakistan including political, economic, security and trade", he added. Talking about cooperation in the political sphere he said, high-level political exchanges and consultations and close cooperation in regional developments, kept a reasonable pace and continued appropriately. Ambassador Hosseini said in the economic field, the lack of banking and financial channel, on the one hand, the all-out economic pressures against the two countries, on the other hand and also the pandemics, could have led to an unprecedented decline and stagnation in the field of commercial and economic cooperation between the two countries. "However, with the great determination and efforts made by the authorities of the two countries and the great efforts of my colleagues in the Islamic Republic of Iran embassy and back in Tehran,

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KCCI organises catalogue exhibition of Belgian companies

Trade Commissioner of Belgium Abid Hussain, Chairman Diplomatic Missions & Embassies Liaison Subcommittee Zia ul Arfeen, Former Senior Vice President Arshad Islam, Former Vice President Qazi Zahid Hussain and KCCI Managing Committee Members were also present on the occasion

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) in collaboration with the Belgian Embassy organised the Catalogue Exhibition of Belgian companies on Thursday. The catalogues contained details of 260 products and services being offered by Belgian companies. Ambassador of Belgium Charles Deleigne, speaking at the occasion, said that Belgium has been enjoying strong business relations with Pakistan and the catalogue exhibition would be a perfect source to further develop trade and commercial ties between the two countries.

The Belgian Envoy informed that it was his third visit to Karachi after assuming charge as the Ambassador because he was always keen to promote trade and investment ties with the business community of Karachi

which was a very dynamic city and the financial capital of the country. He appreciated KCCI for hosting the Belgian Catalogue Exhibition at its premises and also paid tribute to Trade Commissioner for successfully staging the exhibition.

President KCCI Mohammed Tariq Yousuf stated that the Belgian Catalogue Exhibition was an important source of information for Karachi's business community and it would help connecting Pakistani businesses with their Belgian counterparts.

He hoped that the exhibition would pave the way for stronger trade and business ties with the Belgian business community as it offers an opportunity to better understand and learn about the products and services being offered by Belgium. Underscoring the need to have greater collaboration with Belgian companies, he stressed that the collaboration between business communities of the two friendly

countries has to be strengthened with a special focus on technology transfer particularly in the manufacturing and engineering sectors.

"We have to learn from Belgian expertise and focus on technology transfer which would surely prove fruitful for Pakistan's manufacturing sector and the country's economy", he said, adding that keeping in view, Pakistan's rich resources and talent, there was a strong possibility that the business and industrial community here would also be able to produce all these fine-quality goods being manufactured in Belgium. Trade Commissioner of Belgium Abid Hussain, Chairman Diplomatic Missions & Embassies Liaison Subcommittee Zia ul Arfeen, Former Senior Vice President Arshad Islam, Former Vice President Qazi Zahid Hussain and KCCI Managing Committee Members were also present on the occasion.



Turkish delegation visits Punjab University

LAHORE: A Turkish delegation called on Vice Chancellor (VC) Punjab University Prof. Dr. Khalid Mahmood and discussed ways to enhance collaboration between the Punjab University and Ministry of Education, Turkiye during a meeting at the vice chancellor's office here on Friday. The Turkish delegation comprised Education Counselor of the Turkish Embassy Islamabad Dr. Mehmet Toyran, Berat Toyran and Secretary to Education Counselor Turkish Embassy, Islamabad Dr. Tahir Shah. In-charge PU Institute of Languages and Linguistics Dr. Maria Maldonado was also present during the meeting.—APP

4 killed due to exchange of firing

PESHAWAR: Four persons were killed and two received critical wounds due to an exchange of firing between two rival groups in the Sarband area of Bara on the outskirts of Peshawar here on Friday. According to details, two rival groups came across each other in the Sarband area and started an exchange of firing from both sides. The intense cross-firing resulted in the killing of four persons, two from both sides while two were injured and were shifted to hospital. The identity of the deceased is not ascertained yet. Police have reached the site and started an investigation.—APP

UAE sets up largest visa center in Karachi

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday said that the United Arab Emirates had established one of the largest visa centers in Karachi to issue work visas and provide consular services to people who apply for jobs in the UAE. He was speaking during a visit to the visa centre, accompanied by Consul General of UAE in Karachi Bakheet Ateeq Al-Remeithi. The chief minister visited different sections of the center and was

briefed about their services. He was told that the visa Center had been authorized to issue work visas. The CM said that the people of Sindh and Balochistan would be facilitated at the center if they get employment opportunities in the UAE. "I believe it would not be an exaggeration to say this Center is the window of employment in the UAE." He was further informed that the attestation facilities were being provided on a daily basis at the visa

center apart from providing consular services to the employees who apply for jobs in UAE. This Visa Center assists the expats' documents process quite smoothly and checks it thoroughly to avoid any glitch or error in the documentation," the Consul General told the CM. The chief minister thanked the UAE government for facilitating the people of Sindh and Balochistan by establishing such a state-of-the-art, resourceful.—APP

ISSI holds in-house session with Ukrainian envoy, Markian Chuchuk

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized an In-House Session with H.E. Markian Chuchuk, Ambassador of Ukraine to Pakistan, on Pakistan-Ukraine bilateral relations and regional developments. The In-House Session was chaired by Amb. Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI. Participants included: Major General (Retd.) Nadir Khan, Ambassador-designate to Ukraine; Former Ambassador Fauzia Nasreen, COMSATS; Ambassador (R) Nadeem Riyaz, President, IRS; Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas (Retd.), Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Ukraine; Dr. Tughrul Yamin, Senior Research Fellow, IPS; Dr. Farah



Naz, Assistant Professor, NUST; Dr. Adil Sultan, Air University; Mr. Asadullah Khan, Senior Research Fellow, CASS; Mr. Joshua Arthur, AD, Europe, MoFA. Dr. Neelum Nigar, Director CSP, and members of CSP research team were also present. The deliberations were focused on the

state of Pakistan-Ukraine relations, which were characterized as long-standing, cordial and growing in depth and breadth. On the evolving situation since 24 February 2022, the security and economic impacts of Russia-Ukraine conflict, the prospects of a political settlement, China's potential role

as peace negotiator, and other related aspects were discussed in the interactive discussion that followed Ambassador Markian Chuchuk's talk. Participants shared their views, assessments and suggestions. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BoG ISSI made the concluding remarks.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Balochistan National Party Sardar Akhtar Mengal calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.—DNA

Chinese CG calls on Sindh Chief Secretary

The Chief Secretary Sindh presented Sindh cap and Ajrak to the Chinese Consul General

DNA

KARACHI: Consul General (CG) of China, Yang Yundong called on Sindh Chief Secretary Dr. Muhammad Sohail Rajput at the Sindh Secretariat here on Thursday. During the meeting, issues of mutual interest including promoting bilateral relations were discussed, said a statement. Sindh Chief Secretary assured the Chinese CG of the support of the provincial government and said that the Sindh government and the people of Sindh value brotherly relations with China. He added that there are very good investment opportunities for Chinese companies and businessmen in the energy and agriculture sectors in Sindh province. Dr. Mohammad Sohail Rajput said that he appreciates the cooperation of the Chinese government during the floods. During the meeting, it was agreed to work on the agriculture and technology sectors in Sindh. At the end, Chinese Consul General Yang Yundong thanked the provincial government for its support and cooperation. The Chief Secretary Sindh presented Sindh cap and Ajrak to the Chinese Consul General.

Governor KP assures support for academia

PESHAWAR: Under the auspices of Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP), Higher Education Commission, Pakistan (HEC) in collaboration with selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) kick-started Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball Provincial League here at University of Peshawar. Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali was the Chief Guest of the Ceremony whereas Chairman HEC was the Guest of Honor. Prior to formally announcing the opening of the Volleyball Provincial League, the guests jointly laid the foundation stone of the state-of-the-art Volleyball Academy at the University. The purpose of PMYP initiatives is to hunt talent and build infrastructure in the country for inculcating sports culture and providing youth with an

opportunity to indulge in physical activities. In the league, the teams of both men and women from five regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa namely Peshawar, Mardan, Swat, Hazara, and Bannu will compete. The outperforming players from these teams will then be selected for attending extensive training camps. The players will be given coaching, training, and mentorship in these camps to enhance their capability. After successful completion of training, two teams from each province would fight for National League. While addressing the gathering, the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali said that nations' progress is the fruit of visionary leadership, and we foresee our youth to be able leaders who will make us proud. He

further said that it is the time for educational institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to take up the challenge and make our country a self-sustainable state by revolutionizing the agricultural sector along with conducting research on mining and minerals of the province. He maintained that, through the infrastructure established in the historic institution, young players of Volleyball will continue their legacy of serving in Pakistan's national volleyball team. He also assured of his support to the Academia; recalling his teachers and mentors in his upbringing. Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman HEC said that I am humbled to be part of this historic moment. He said that under PSDP funded projects, HEC is funding Rs. 80 billion to the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—APP

New spell of rain, thunderstorm predicted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR: The Met Office on Friday forecast a new spell of intermittent rain with dust, thunder and hailstorm for most parts of the province during the next 24 to 48 hours. It said that a westerly wave is affecting most parts of the country and is likely to persist till the first week of May, adding that the weather would remain partly cloudy over most districts of the province during the next 24 to 48 hours. Scattered thunderstorm-rain with wind-dust storms and hailstorm is likely to occur over

Dir, Swat, Buner, Shangla, Kohistan, Torghar, Bhattagram, Mansehra and Abbottabad. Isolated thunderstorm-rain with wind-dust storm and hailstorm is also likely to occur over Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Hangu, Orakzai, Karak, Kohat, Lakkhi Marwat, Bannu, North and South Waziristan districts during the period. The weather remained partly cloudy in most districts of the province during the last 24 hours however thunderstorm-rain

with gusty winds occurred at isolated places in Abbottabad, Mansehra, Kohistan, Upper and Lower Dir, Swat, Bajaur, Risalpur, Khyber and Kurram districts. The chief amount of rainfall was recorded as; Saïdu Sharif 26mm, Balakot 15, Timergara 07, Kakul 33, Pattan 20, Dir 05, Malamjabb 19 and Parachinar 01. The maximum temperature was recorded during the last 24 hours was Peshawar 33C, Parachinar 23, Bannu 34, Mardan 33, DI Khan 36, Chitral 25, Dir 26 and Malamjabb 17.—APP

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Pakistan-Ethiopia Business Forum to give major boost to bilateral trade: Envoy

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Jemal Beker Abdula on Friday said Ethiopia-Pakistan Business Forum in Karachi next month would provide an ample opportunity for boosting trade and commercial ties between the two countries. Ethiopia-Pakistan Business Forum is being organized jointly by the

Trade Development Authority of Pakistan and the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia during the 2nd week of May in honor of high-level official and business delegations from Ethiopia, said a news release here. Addressing the business community here at the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), he said bilateral trade between the FDRE and Pakistan would get a major boost with the

establishment of strong linkages between the business community of both countries.

He also appreciated the keen interest expressed by the business fraternity of Pakistan especially Karachi in bolstering bilateral trade between Ethiopia and Pakistan which would eventually increase people-to-people contacts between both nations. The ambassador also recalled the recent visit of over 100 Pakistan businessmen to Ethiopia last month

which was organized by the FDRE Embassy in Pakistan within six months of its establishment. He said Ethiopian Airlines would start its flight operations from Karachi on May 9 to operate four flights a week from here to Addis Ababa and vice versa. "We are looking forward to the big presence of the business community of Karachi in the business forum which provides them a perfect opportunity to connect with their counterparts in Ethiopia," he remarked.

KCCI President Mohammed Tariq Yousuf assured the ambassador that the fraternity would participate in business forums in large numbers so that a comprehensive strategy could be worked out to strengthen economic relations with the brotherly country. He also lauded the efforts made by Jemal Beker for the launch of Ethiopian Airlines in Pakistan to connect the country not only with Ethiopia but also with the entire African continent.—APP

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 Pa-
pacy 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



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..555489
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

German Companies invited to take benefit of investment opportunities

Ambassador of Germany said that his country shares deep ties with Pakistan

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) leading a delegation called on H.E. Alfred Grannas, Ambassador of Germany and discussed with him matters for further increasing bilateral trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Germany.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the current bilateral trade of around USD 4 billion between Pakistan and Germany can be further increased by renewed efforts from both sides. He stressed for strong business linkages between the private sectors of Pakistan and Germany to explore all untapped areas of business cooperation. He thanked Germany for cooperating with Pakistan in many areas including energy saving, education and skills development and said that being an advanced country, Germany can help Pa-



kistan to improve its economy. He said that over 40 German companies are already working in Pakistan in various sectors including chemicals, pharmaceuticals, automobile, wholesale and stressed that more German companies should take advantage of the investment oppor-

tunities in Pakistan, which is a huge market of around 230 million consumers. He also invited the German Ambassador to visit ICCI for an interaction with the business community. Addressing the delegation, H.E. Alfred Grannas, Ambassador of Germany said that his country

shares deep ties with Pakistan. He said that he is working to further strengthen the bilateral relationship between the two countries. He said that Germany can help Pakistan in renewable energy. He said that with the improvement in Pakistan's economy, he would encourage

German companies to explore Pakistan for business and investment. He said that he can connect ICCI with the German trade promotion agency in Dubai to enhance business linkages between the private sectors of both countries. He said that Germany can also cooperate with Pakistan in the electric vehicles sector. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that Germany should cooperate with Pakistan in solar energy to cope with the energy shortage and provide cheap electricity to the people. Engr. Muhammad Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan and Germany should cooperate in the construction sector as due to rising population, Pakistan is an attractive market for construction activities.

Khalid Iqbal Malik, Group Leader ICCI said that German automobile companies should consider setting up assembly lines in Pakistan, which is a good market for German automobile brands.

DC reviews census' progress

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon on Friday reviewed the progress of the census in various union councils (UCs) and blocks of the federal capital. While presiding over a meeting here, he urged the ICT's residents to provide complete, correct and accurate information to the invigilators to make the census process a success, said a press release. To an ICT administration spokesman, the process of the census in ICT had almost been completed, adding that 873 invigilators were conducting the census in 1,783 blocks. The deputy commissioner directed the authorities concerned to complete the census by April 30, 2023, he added.—APP

EWA elections held in AIOU

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Employees Welfare Association (EWA) elections for the year 2023-25 were held yesterday on the main campus of the university. Ittehad Group and Alfatah Group contested the election. Ittehad group won seven out of 11 seats while Alfatah group won four seats, said a press release here on Friday. AIOU administration had formally established the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Office for this election and the Controller of Examinations, Mian Muhammad Riaz was appointed as the Chief ECP who conducted the election in a very impartial, transparent, peaceful, and pleasant atmosphere. According to the results, Yasir Mehmood (President), Sadiq Soomro (Senior Vice President), Faisal Munir (Vice President), Amjad Rehman (General Secretary), Aftab Ahmed (Deputy General Secretary), Mohammad Saeed Khan (Joint Secretary), Mohammad Ayas (Finance Secretary), Imran Ahmed (Information Secretary), Yasir Nabi (Sports Secretary), Haq Nawaz (Culture Secretary) and Mohammad Shafiq (Communication Secretary) have been elected.—APP

Talha assures maximum facilities for Hajj 2023

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Senator Talha Mehmood has said that despite facing difficulties, there are ongoing efforts to provide pilgrims with the best possible facilities during the Hajj of 2023. Expressing concerns about significant issues in the Hajj arrangements due to the substantial amount of time that has already been lost. However, he expressed optimism that these problems can be resolved through close cooperation with the Saudi authorities, with whom he recently met and received assurances of support to ensure Hajj is smooth and successful. In an interview with APP, he said arrangements could have been finalized maximum by the end of Ramadan ul Mubarak, but a major portion of

arrangements has not yet been finalized. The major issue was a dearth of foreign exchange. The foreign exchange payable to Saudi authorities was not paid on time. However, he was optimistic that the issues will be resolved with the teamwork of the ministry officials. He said nearly 40,000 intending pilgrims would depart for Saudi from Islamabad airport under the Road to Makkah initiative this year. Under the Road to Makkah project, all immigration requirements of pilgrims are to be fulfilled at the Islamabad Airport. This saves pilgrims several hours upon reaching the kingdom since they can just enter the country, having gone through immigration already at home. The minister raised concerns about the performance of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and has called upon the chief executive officer (CEO) of the national carrier to address the issues.

The CEO has promised to cooperate and ensure timely transportation of passengers. Additionally, the ministry is making efforts to arrange accommodations close to Haram Sharif. The speaker expressed a willingness to disclose the names of catering companies to the media and warned that penalties would be imposed if quality food are not provided to pilgrims. Talha Mehmood said well-trained and physically fit Moavineen are being finalized transparently. A comprehensive training program has also been arranged for Hujjaj and Moavineen which will start on Monday. They emphasized the importance of transparency in hajj arrangements and pledged to closely monitor the Moavineen-e-Hujjaj. If Moavineen-e-Hujjaj fails to perform their duties, they will be issued warning letters and face the deduction of TAs and DAs for three days. If dereliction of duties persists.

10 held for possessing illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI: The police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Rawalpindi Capt. @ Muhammad Amir Khan conducted raids in different areas and netted 10 accused of possessing illegal weapons, here on Friday. According to a police spokesman, Rawat and Chontra police rounded up 10 accused namely Hasib ur Rehman, Shoaib, Zeeshan, Zafar, Yasir, Kashif, Ishaq, Sohail, Faizan, and recovered six 30-bore pistols, a Kalashnikov, a 12 bore rifle and ammunition from their possession. The spokesman further informed that police in their ongoing operation against professional beggars rounded up 23 from different areas. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the lawbreakers and operations against aerial firing and illegal weapon holders would continue.—APP

Albus PK, Chrome book distribution ceremony held

ISLAMABAD: Closing Project Albus PK and Chrome Book distribution ceremony was held at Islamabad model college for girls. Secretary in charge of ministry of education and professional training Waseem Ajmal was the chief guest. Director General Federal Directorate of Education Dr. Ikram Ali Malik, CEO Tech Valley Umer Farooq director colleges Aftab Tariq Director Mohammad Irfan, representatives from Google for Education, PANL, CTLNUST Delegates Students and Teachers attended the ceremony. Principal IMCG F-6/2, Professor Aaliya Durrani, in her welcome note, thanked all the guests for sparing their time to attend the closing ceremony of project ALBUS. She appreciated the efforts of TECH valley, teachers, and coordinators to make the success of the project possible. She thanked the honourable Secretary of Education and DG FDE for choosing IMCG F 6/2 as the centre of excellence of this advantageous project. She added that provision of chrome books facilitated and triggered the learning process of students because of which a remarkable and noticeable increase in the pass percentage in all subjects was observed of digital classroom. The google for Education pilot programme is one of the first steps to apply google Technology in Education in Pakistan. In this experiment, class 7A of IMCG F6/2 having strength of 70 plus students with 10 teaching staff and school leaders had been using google solution, google workspace for platform and chrome book devices, as the main tool for teaching learning activities. Mr Waseem Ajmal, chief guest of the ceremony appreciated the efforts of FDE for making plan of removing the concept of heavy bags from schools under it's ambit.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassadors and High Commissioners of ASEAN countries posing for a picture with Aamir Atozai Director General on the occasion of luncheon hosted by MOS Hina Rabbani Khar.—DNA

Committee formed for Roosevelt Hotel re-opening

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Friday approved the recommendations of the Ministry of Aviation to form a committee to negotiate with the New York City government and the Roosevelt Hotel Union for the re-opening of the hotel. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar presided over the ECC meeting, a Finance Ministry press release said. Ministry of Aviation submitted a summary of challenges and re-opening of Roosevelt Hotel, New York, and informed that PIA Investment Limited (PIA-IL) management has got an opportunity offered by the New York City government to uti-

lize the Hotel (1,025 rooms) over a period of three years for migrant business at the rate of US\$ 200 per room per day. After a detailed discussion, the ECC approved the formation of a four-member negotiating committee led by the Secretary Aviation Division to negotiate with the New York City Government and the Hotel Union. The ECC also allowed PIA-IL/RHC to utilize the funds of \$ 1.145 million from the available balance as bridge financing to commence the re-opening work at the Hotel. Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination presented a summary of the increase in maximum retail prices of drugs based on the recommendations of the Policy Board of DRAP in the wake of the devaluation of the Pak

Rupee and inflation. To ensure continuous availability of drugs in the market, the ECC allowed as a one-time dispensation, allowed manufacturers and importers to increase their existing MRPs of essential drugs equal to a 70% increase in CPI (with a cap of 14%) and MRPs of all other drugs and lower priced drugs an increase up to 70% in CPI (with a cap of 20%) on the basis of average CPI for current year i.e 1st July 2022 to 01st April 2023 with condition that it should be considered as an annual increase for the financial year 2023-24 and no increase under this category will be granted in next financial year. The ECC further advised the Policy Board to review the situation after three months i.e in July 2023.

No plan to withdraw Rs75 currency note

ISLAMABAD: The State Bank of Pakistan has declared that it has no intention to withdraw Rs75 currency note in future. Terming baseless speculations about the Rs75 banknote, a State Bank spokesman on Friday clarified that Rs75 note like other currency notes is acceptable for all kinds of transactions. SBP chief spokesman Ali Abid Qamar recalled that this note was issued on August 14 2022 to mark the 75th Independence Day of Pakistan. This note was available to public since September 30 2022, he added. He also made it clear that the Bank has no plan yet to abolish the Rs10 currency notes. Rs10 note and coins will remain in use, he added. There was also no proposal under consideration to withdraw Rs1 and Rs2 coins, he further said. To mark the country's 75 years of independence, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) had in August 2022 issued Rs75 commemorative banknote featuring not only the portraits of Quaid-i-Azam Moha-ammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Iqbal, Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan but also highlighting nation's commitment to address climate change. The green and white currency note has tones of yellow, where the green represents growth and development and derives inspiration from the country's Islamic identity and the white colour emphasises religious diversity of the population, according to the SBP. "The Markhor and Deodar trees pictured on the reverse of the Banknote highlight our national commitment to address climate change and its repercussions," a statement issued then by the SBP mentioned.—DNA

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Briefs

Nadia hails
Faysal
Qureshi's film

ISLAMABAD: Lollywood sensation Nadia Hussain gave a huge shout-out to Faisal Qureshi's action comedy film 'Money Back Guarantee' calling it "An intelligent man's comedy". The latest buzz around town is Faisal Qureshi's directorial debut 'Money Back Guarantee' star cast include Fawad Khan, Hina Dilpaizer, Gohar Rasheed, Javed Sheikh, Mikhaal Zulfiqar, Kiran Malik, Adnan Jafar, Ayesha Omar alongside debut actors Wasim Akram and Shaniera Akram. From jam-packed cinemas to huge box office collections, the much-awaited film has managed to garner immense appreciation and applause from the attendees, critics and showbiz bigwigs. According to the statement shared by 'Money Back Guarantee' official Instagram handle, "The film has become 'Pakistan's #1 movie of the year to grab 118 million views on all social platforms'". Recognized as one of Pakistan's first supermodels, Nadia Hussain took to her official Instagram handle and posted a video while sharing her two cents on the much-talked-about film "I truly think the film is absolutely fantastic, I watched the film because of the script because I know how amazingly talented Faysal Qureshi is". While spilling the beans on the script, the diva stated "It is an intelligent man's comedy, one really needs to be tuned into the dialogues to understand the jokes". "It depicts everything in the most amazing comedic way possible" Hussain added. Concluding the in-depth review, the diva has commended the entire cast and crew of the film "Hats off to Faysal Qureshi and awesome performance by Fawad Khan, Mikhaal Zulfiqar, Mani, and Mirza Gohar and special mentions to Ali Safina and Shaafat Syed". The epitome of talent Muneeb Butt also applauded the film via social media post, he commented, "Very intelligent script writing, amazing cinematography, content, message, humour and performance. A must watch film" —APP

ANP also
favours polls
on same day

ISLAMABAD: Senior ANP leader Syed Aqil Shah has said that their party is in favour of simultaneous elections in all federating units to bring political stability and curtail expenses on polls. Talking to APP, he said that though elections should be held under any circumstances, holding separate elections at the provincial and national levels will cost additional expenses on it. "The completion of such an electoral process will take a period of one year," he said adding that what is going on in the country is aimed to appease a particular individual and his political party. He said that the stance of ANP over elections is clear and it wants simultaneous and same-day polling across the country and will accept the win of any political party. He said that in the elections of 2018 injustice was committed with their party and Imran Khan and his political party were imposed on the country. He said that he himself was a candidate in a provincial assembly constituency, but the result was delayed and then a big turnout was shown in favour of his opponent candidate. Syed Aqil Shah, who is also a former provincial minister, said that all institutions should work within the ambit of their constitutional parameters. He said that under the constitution, the military is responsible for the defense of the country while the dispensation of cheap and speedy justice is the duty of the judiciary and parliament will have to make legislation for the country. He said that Pakistan Army is also not available for the provision of security during the election, as it is engaged in combating terrorism inside the country and also defending the frontiers of the state. He said that no other security force is capable to perform such a specialized duty. Furthermore, he said that the budget for the current financial year has already been allocated, which could not be diverted to other matters.—APP

PAF transport fleet carries
out evacuation from Sudan

Operation launched on the directives of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff

DNA

ISLAMABAD: On the directives of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force has ordered PAF transport fleet to carry out swift evacuation of stranded Pakistanis from conflict-hit Sudan. PAF Airbus carrying 149 passengers has safely landed at Karachi through Jeddah. PAF C-130 carrying 110 Pakistani passengers will land in later half of the day. Air Force is making all-out efforts to repatriate stranded Pakistanis in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Pakistan Embassies in Sudan and Saudi Arabia. Rescued Pakistanis from Port Sudan New International Airport are being transported by PAF aircraft. Pakistan Air Force would continue to repatriate the brothers and sisters in distress to their homeland. The evacuated families expressed their gratitude to the Government of Pakistan and appreciated Pakistan Air Force for their timely rescue amidst the rapidly deteriorating situation in Sudan.

Revolt against US dollar
gaining momentum

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt on Friday said revolt against the US dollar, global reserve currency, is gaining momentum. BRICS, a group of five of the leading economies including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are looking to establish their own currency in order to decrease the influence of the US in the global trade market, he added. Shahid Rasheed Butt said

in a statement issued here today that many other countries are already in line to join the organization in a bid to reap benefits which will erode US Dollar's dominance. Import of Russian oil by Pakistan could be a sign of interest of Islamabad in becoming part of the group, he added. The business leader said that apart from BRICS, dozens of countries want to escape dollar hegemony, which is considered an impediment in their development. Trade in non-dollar currencies is considered a good option by many countries, Saudi Arabia is selling

oil to China in yuan and now the main currency of trade between China and Russia is also yuan, he continued. He said that apart from BRICS, central banks of many countries are also leading a revolt against the US dollar and shifting to gold at a record pace. Many central banks are turning away from the US dollar and shifting to gold, and these banks account for a record 33 percent of monthly global demand for gold. Many countries are serious about seeking alternatives, which has pushed up prices of gold in the international mar-

ket by 20 percent in six months. The oldest and most traditional of assets, gold, is now a vehicle of central bank revolt against the dollar, he said, adding that the dollar and gold have been seen as havens in the past, but now gold is seen as much safer. As much as 30 percent of nations facing sanctions from the US, European Union, Japan and UK, up from 10 percent in the 1990s. US allies like Thailand and the Philippines are beginning to seek alternative currencies because they are also tired of the dollar's weaponization.

Exuberant, bedazzled Pakistani
truck art reaching hearts in China

ISLAMABAD: In Pakistan trucks are not just trucks. They can be art. Everything about Pakistani trucks is exuberant and over-the-top. And now they make it to China. To celebrate the National Day of Pakistan and the Year of Tourism Exchanges between China and Pakistan, a Pakistani Truck Art Debut Exhibition themed "Phool Patti: Jingle Journey" kicked off at Silk Road International Arts Center, Langfang, China on April 28, according to a report published by China Economic Net (CEN). The dazzle of truck art from Pakistan won the hearts of Chinese visitors by its beautiful and artsy look and the deeply rooted tradition behind it. "I like it!" A Chinese college student enjoying the art on site told the reporter. She learned that Pakistani trucks are more than just trucks. "These vibrant, bedazzled trucks are an expression of



Pakistani people - they're travelling billboards that convey messages to the world." "Somehow you can sense the drivers and the artists who decorate their vehicles," she added, since this colourful tradition celebrates their culture and their way of life. "These moving, tangible pieces of art featured Pakistan's unique identity did wow me." Addressing the opening ceremony of the exhibition, Pakistani Ambassador to China Moin ul Haque pinpointed that the event

is part of the efforts aimed at building a close and culturally rich "China-Pakistan Community of Shared Future" in the new era. "Termed as 'Art on Wheel' by many, this artistic expression represents cheerfulness, optimism, appreciating the beautiful aspects of nature and seeing life in its brightest and positive way," the ambassador pinpointed, wishing the audience a wonderful experience of rich cultural medley from Pakistan. "Truck art has never been shown in China. I think this exhibition will be a rare opportunity to allow more people in China to know and appreciate this art form which is full of national characteristics," said Yang Zhi and Yang Hui, organizers of the exhibition. Co-organized by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Beijing, and Silk Road International Arts Center, the exhibition will last to July 24.—DNA

Dastgir ask
PTI to show
flexibility on
talks with govt

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Khurram Dastgir Khan on Friday asked Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership to show flexibility in behaviours and build consensus for the success of negotiations with the Pakistan Democratic Movement-led government. Talking to a private news channel, he said that PTI to put its trust in the government and take a positive step forward for successful talks, adding, Imran Khan should shun politics of disruptions and resolve all issues through talks. The coalition partners had reached a consensus on same-day elections, adding, the decision has to be taken by the parliament, not you or me. While stressing the need for consensus among all the political forces, he made it clear that the election date can not be fixed on the wish of a single party.—APP

Rescue-1122 advises
farmers to adopt
preventive steps

RAWALPINDI: Rescue-1122 has advised the farmers to adopt all possible preventive steps during wheat harvesting. According to a Rescue-1122 spokesman, the farmers had been advised to adopt all possible preventive measures while harvesting and threshing their wheat crop. To prevent burning of wheat crops due to accidental fires during the harvesting season, the farmers should take extra care and precautions to avoid fire incidents during wheat harvesting season, he said adding, never smoke cigarettes near standing wheat crop. After wheat harvesting, wheat residues should not be burnt as there is a risk of catching fire to nearby standing wheat crops by setting fire to wheat residues, he said and informed that it is a crime to set wheat residue on fire. Due to the fire incidents in wheat crop fields, the hard work of the farmers is lost. Every year such incidents are reported but most of the fire incidents are caused by cigarettes and human carelessness, he added. In case of fire, it could be prevented from spreading further by plowing around the standing crops with a tractor, he said. If any wheat crop catches fire, the farmers should immediately report on rescue helpline 1122 as timely response and assistance is possible only by reporting to Rescue 1122. According to an agriculture expert, the farmers mostly lose over 10 per cent of their wheat produce due to different reasons. Therefore, they should adopt necessary measures strictly to save their produce from pre and post-harvest losses, he added. He advised the growers to keep vigil eye on weather condition and in this connection, they should continuously listen to weather reports released on electronic and print media. They should start harvesting and threshing their crops when the weather condition was predicted suitable for it. In case of rains, they should collect their harvested crops at a safer place. They should also use plastic sheets or tarpaulin to protect harvested crop or its produce during rain, he added. He also advised the farmers to cover their mouths and noses with a cloth or mask while harvesting the crops. They should also use new bags to store wheat produce besides conducting anti-germ and anti-virus sprays in their godowns, he added.—APP

Three bike lifters
arrested

RAWALPINDI: Police have arrested three bike lifters, members of 'Samu Gujjar' gang besides recovering eight stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, a team under the supervision of SHO, City Police Station managed to net three bike lifters namely Waseem Akram Gujjar, ringleader, Kamran Noor, Muhammad Sajjad and recovered eight stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Faisal Saleem said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.—APP

Marriyum
pays tributes
to PAF cadets

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday paid tributes to the cadets who passed out from PAF Asghar Khan Academy Raisalpur. Using her Twitter handle, she quoted a verse from Allama Iqbal: Ya Rab Dil-e-Muslim Ko Wo Zinda Tamanna Dey, Jo Qalb Ko Garma Dey, Jo Rooh Ko Tarpa Dey.—APP

'Elections to
be held on
time': Tahira
Aurangzeb

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Tahira Aurangzeb on Friday urged Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leadership not to indulge in the blame game as the coalition government will hold elections at its right time after completing the Constitution period of government. Talking to the PTV news channel, she said, "Khan Sahib there is no need to panic," adding, the government would respond to the tactics of negative politics with public service. She mentioned that from day one, the PDM-led government had been asking the PTI leaders to come and discuss electoral reforms issue in the parliament but they always threatened and took unconstitutional steps to destabilize the system. Tahira said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project was delayed due to the PTI government. PTI was also involved in the delay of the IMF bailout package as it never fulfilled the agreement with the IMF in the past, she claimed. Replying to a question, Tahira said it was high time for all political parties including PTI to adopt the course of dialogue and resolve the political crisis in the country.—APP

IRSA releases
125,100
cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 125,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 119,500 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1443.47 feet and was 45.47 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 30,400 cusecs while outflow was 40,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1119.90 feet, which was 69.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 42,000 cusecs and 38,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 40,600, 43,700, 35,400 and 7,700 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 25,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 13,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Ahsan awards
appreciation
certificates
to Ministry
officials

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Friday awarded appreciation certificates and cash prizes to the ministry officials of all cadres for their excellent performance, reviving the tradition started in 1999 to encourage the employees for devoted work. Addressing a certificate-distribution ceremony here, he said the incumbent government believed in acknowledging the services of employees on their excellent performance and accountability of all those who were not discharging their duties and fell in the category of 'poor performers'. The minister also directed to check the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) of the employees working in all the sections of the ministry. Secretary Ministry of Planning Syed Zafar Ali Shah while congratulating the certificate and cash-prize recipients said the ceremony was aimed at acknowledging the efforts of the officers who worked hard to render the result-oriented services.—APP

Gov't disburses Rs 1.22 trn agriculture loan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Recognizing the importance of the agriculture sector, the government of Pakistan led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has initiated several measures to support and promote the farmers and agriculture sector in the country. These measures include financial assistance, infrastructure development, subsidy on electricity, and the provision of agriculture machinery and inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. To address the needs of flood-affected farmers in the country, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced a historic relief package worth Rs 1.8 trillion in October 2022, for benefiting the poor farmers, especially those who sustained damages and loss to cultivated land of cotton and sugarcane during the devastat-

ing floods last year. The Rs 1.8 trillion special Kissan Package was formally announced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on October 31, 2022 aimed at promoting the agriculture sector and providing farmers, particularly in flood-hit areas free seeds, inexpensive loans and bringing down prices of fertilizers and electricity for tubewells. Announcing the agriculture package, the prime minister said the economic progress of Pakistan was dependent on the agriculture sector and Rs 1800 billion spending on agriculture would be an increase of Rs 400 billion as compared to the last year. Under the package, the government allocated interest-free loans of Rs 10.6 billion for small farmers across the country while another Rs 8 billion would be given to the small farmers in the flood-affected areas. Likewise, for the

first time in history, the Prime Minister Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme was also introduced under the package to engage youth in the agriculture sector to get maximum dividends for the young population, besides providing them employment opportunities in this sector. The agriculture loan is an important component of Prime Minister Kissan Package to revive Pakistan's agriculture sector, particularly restoring the agriculture of areas affected by catastrophic floods during monsoon season. The government disbursed Rs 1,222 billion in agriculture loans during the first nine months of the fiscal year 2022-23 out of the total agriculture credit target of Rs 1,819 billion for the current fiscal year. The increased disbursement of agriculture credit and other subsidies on the agriculture inputs under the package have resulted

in an unprecedented increase in per acre production of wheat crops this year in the country. The Kissan package also included interest-free loans of Rs 50 billion for the unemployed youth in the agriculture sector of rural areas across the country. Furthermore, under the package, the prices of DAP fertilizer are reduced by Rs 2500 per bag, resulting in a benefit of Rs 58 billion to the farmers. Under the package, 1.2 million bags of certified seeds worth Rs 13.20 billion are being distributed among the farmers while the landless farmers in the flood-affected areas would be given Rs 5 billion besides the provision of loans of Rs 10 billion to small and medium enterprises working in the agriculture sector for modernization schemes. The second-hand five-year-old tractors are being imported with a relaxation of 50 percent in du-

ties and the government would also encourage the entry of new tractor manufacturers by decreasing duty on completely knocked-down kits from 35 percent to 15 percent. A subsidy of Rs 30 billion for the provision of urea fertilizer to the farmers at a lower cost is also included in the package under which half a million tonnes of urea is being imported. Similarly, under the Prime Minister Kissan Package, the government also set a target of providing interest-free loans for solarization of 300,000 tubewells across the country. The Kissan package received an overwhelming response, especially from the business community and farmers' associations across the country who termed the package a revolutionary step by the prime minister. They said the package would not only bring agricultural revolution but Pakistan would also be able to export its surplus food at their dictated rates.

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Its time for dialogue

After China brokered a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran last month, it raised hopes that it would act as a mediator to help bring an end to the hostilities in Ukraine. China is neither the instigator nor a party to the conflict, and it has kept its communication channels with both Moscow and Kyiv open. Having consistently called for talks to end the conflict, it has established its credentials as a peace broker. Thus the telephone talk between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday has attracted great attention. The warm response Zelensky gave to Xi's proposal to send the Chinese government's special representative for Eurasian affairs to Ukraine and other countries to have in-depth communication with all parties to pursue a political resolution to the crisis, demonstrates the Ukrainian side's full recognition of the important role that China can play in promoting peace talks. After speaking with Xi, who elaborated on the principles and solution China has outlined and proposed in its document on securing a political settlement to the crisis, the Ukrainian leader tweeted that it had been a "long and meaningful" phone call.

A settlement to the crisis cannot come soon enough. Not only has the conflict disrupted global food and energy supply chains producing shock waves around the world, but as the hostilities have intensified, talk has been flying around raising the prospect of nuclear weapons being used. As Xi said, there will be no winners in such a nightmare scenario. All parties involved should remain calm and exercise restraint, truly focus on the future and the destiny of themselves and all humanity, and jointly manage the crisis. He noted that rational thinking and the voices of parties concerned are increasing now, and the opportunity should be seized to accumulate favorable conditions for a political resolution to the crisis. The talk between the two leaders will prove to be of substantial meaning if it can produce pragmatic progress to secure a cease-fire as the prelude to negotiations to reach an agreement on a lasting resolution to the crisis. The conflict was able to erupt because of the tensions that had built up on the European continent due to the absence of a lasting and practical peace mechanism. Tensions that Washington was able to exploit via NATO. And for more than a year, the United States-led extreme sanctions on Russia and ever-increasing provision of military assistance and weapons to Ukraine have only served to prolong the crisis and escalate the tensions as it seeks to permanently weaken Russia, control Europe and isolate China. Wednesday's telephone call shows that China is neither watching the fire from afar nor pouring oil on the flames. Instead, it is trying to leverage its relations with both Kyiv and Moscow to help resolve the crisis and restore peace through diplomatic means.



Necessity of UK and China ties

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is set to deliver a policy speech on Tuesday local time, in which he will raise, especially to China hawks in the Conservative party, that the UK must engage with China rather than isolate it in a "new cold war," and call for "robust and constructive" relations with China.

According to words shared by Cleverly's department ahead of the speech, he would say in the speech that "it would be clear and easy – perhaps even satisfying – for me to declare a new Cold War and say that our goal is to isolate China...Clear, easy, satisfying – and wrong. Because it would be a betrayal of our national interest and a wilful misunderstanding of the modern world."

To a certain extent, this should be regarded as a correction of the UK's aggressive line involving China in the past, and an attempt to return to British balanced diplomatic tradition. It is said that Cleverly would also formulate a British version of the three-pronged approach for relations with China: limiting Chinese involvement in sectors deemed critical for national security; strengthening ties with Indo-Pacific allies; and engaging with China directly to promote stable relations. Frankly speaking, the post-Brexit UK has gone too far in following the US to coordinate with the latter's global strategy, making people almost forget that the UK is a country with independent sovereignty and national interests. This has not brought the influence and status as a great power that it expected, but the continuous consumption and shrinking of its competitiveness.

Relatively speaking, European continental countries are not as deeply involved in Washington's geopolitical strategy as the UK, and they have adjusted earlier than the UK. Since the beginning of this year, high-level exchanges between China and Europe in various fields have quickly resumed, but the UK is absent from these interactions. This is somewhat a stimulus for the UK, which has made it hope to restore high-level exchanges with China as soon as possible.

It should be said that Cleverly's views on China are not really "friendly to China," at best, they can only be said to have returned to a relatively normal diplomatic track. In peacetime, which country does not need "constructive" relations? Who would like aggressive and bullying ways of communication? However, such a normal logic has to be carefully expressed in public in the UK, and those saying this have to bear the huge pressure from anti-China members of parliament.

This uncomfortable period for adjustments between China and the UK as well as between China and Europe seemingly will continue for some time. We welcome Cleverly's positive remarks, at least it can be seen a little possibility of a turnaround in China-UK relations, but we remain cautious about how much it will be implemented in the UK's China policy. Here, we want to remind Cleverly and other European politicians of a hidden danger, that is, they must strictly adhere to the one-China principle and never interfere in the Taiwan question that is purely China's internal affairs. This importance cannot be overstated.

Judiciary avoided collision course

Qamar Bashir



If the election date is announced, PDM will suffer significant losses on a number of fronts. To begin, it will prohibit the government from making major policy decisions or announcements during the run up to elections to ensure that the elections are fair and that the government does not use its power to influence the election's outcome. Second, in order to maintain neutrality in the run-up to the elections, the government will be restricted from using public resources such

The entire nation is captivated by the tense standoff between the supreme court and constitution on one side and the government and its extension, the legislatures on the other. Though the judiciary had all the power pieces on its side of the chessboard while its opponent had none and its king was fully exposed, the judiciary showed great restraint and grace by delaying the execution of the king, giving its opponent a second chance to rearrange its pieces and, instead of an all-out bloodbath, creating a win-win situation for both sides. While the supreme court's order to hold elections on 14th May is still in effect and the government was to im-

plement its order of providing Rs. 20 billion today (27th April, 2023), which it failed to do, and the entire nation was expecting Shahbaz Sharif's sacrifice, however, the court showed grace to the prime minister and its coterie for the time being and gave them another chance to commit agreed upon election date either for the Punjab assembly or the entire assemblies. Both parties, albeit reluctantly, held negotiations upon election dates though in a tense atmosphere, which was however a welcome development that helped to calm the nation's frayed nerves. Both parties carefully stacked their cards, revealing some while concealing others, and reaffirmed their stated positions at the outset before returning to confer with their respective leadership and agreeing to reconvene on April 28, 2023. All stakeholders are putting as much pressure on its opponent as possible in order to gain advantage and edge. The Supreme Court stated that after hearing the parties' concerns, it has reserved the order and will announce it when deemed appropriate. By doing so, the sharp and lethal sword of contempt of court hung directly over the heads of those in the chain of command who refused to allocate Rs. 20 billion to the election commission. Before entering into negotiations, the PML(N) threw numerous spoils. First, it threatened that elections would not be held unless a level playing field was created, implying an honorable and fully exonerated return of Mian Nawaz Sharif to lead the PMN(N) during the elections. The second spoiler demanded an investigation into the election 2018 and to hold accountable all those responsible for rigging and engineering including General Retired Qamar Javaid Bajwa and Lt. General Retired Faiz and their associates, Retired Justice Khosa Saheb, and Imran Khan himself. Its third spoiler was the demand that elections for all assemblies should be held on the same date .i.e. 8th October, including the Punjab assembly elections out of fear that the PTI is likely to win the Punjab assembly elections with a huge margin which will guarantee their victory in the general elections, which would annihilate the PML(N) from the entire country as the PPP will remain firmly installed in Sindh and enjoy the power of the second largest province. Due to its naivety, compulsion, or being forced by vested interests, the PML(N) became the most vulnerable victim of regime change, being blamed for the deteriorating state of the economy, hyperinflation, which has pushed 18 million more people below the poverty line and caused two million more people to lose their jobs. PMN(N) is also blamed for dismal and pitiful projected GDP growth of 0.5% compared to last year's unprecedented and unexpected growth of 6%. This forecast is the lowest in the region, even lower than Afghanistan, which is projected to grow by 1.5% in 2022-23; all the more reason for PML(N) to buy more time to stabilize the economy, improve reserves, stimulate the economy, and reduce inflation before committing to elections.

If early elections are held, Moulana Fazal Rahman will be the biggest loser. Now that he is the leader of the PDM, he will only be relevant until elections are held, and it is written on the wall that he will lose. His heir is being trained as a minister in the Federal Cabinet and is relishing the first ever taste of protocol, luxury of being a minister, and devouring the perks and perquisites attached to it, which they fear will be lost once the elections are held, so they are pushing the government and the parliament toward a collision course to give them a few more months of luxury and comfort. However, realizing the wind's direction, his outright rejection of any ne-

gotiation appeared to soften when PDM minus him entered into negotiation with PTI in their attempt to avert impending disaster. To remain relevant, he was forced to say that the PDM can enter into negotiations if they are brokered by the election commission. His softening of stance demonstrates unequivocally that the Supreme Court's strategy is working.

The PPP appears to have only one agenda: to maintain their power base in Sindh and to oppose any move that could lead to the imposition of a one unit in Pakistan. Mr. Bilawal, who had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be trained in statehood under the capable and experienced guidance of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, was the only one who seemed concerned about the imposition of one unit, which he fears will deprive them of Sindh, which they inherited from Late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed as their fiefdom. It seems that they have already conceded defeat in Punjab and KP, so it is in their best interests to postpone the elections as long as possible to allow them to enjoy power in the federal government as much as possible.

The phony opposition led by Raja Riaz has its own vendetta. He and his associates would fight tooth and nail to postpone elections as long as possible so that they could continue to enjoy the luxury of being a member of parliament, which they fear and rightly so will lose because they are well aware of the general public's hatred for them as being turncoats and lotas.

If the election date is announced, PDM will suffer significant losses on a number of fronts. To begin, it will prohibit the government from making major policy decisions or announcements during the run up to elections to ensure that the elections are fair and that the government does not use its power to influence the election's outcome. Second, in order to maintain neutrality in the run-up to the elections, the government will be restricted from using public resources such as media channels or public spaces for campaign activities. Third, the government will be subjected to increased scrutiny by the media, opposition parties, and the general public. Any blunders or scandals could wreak havoc on the government's reputation and electoral prospects. Fourth, the government's long term planning will be disrupted by a shift in focus to the election campaign, and finally, if the government is defeated in the election, they will vacate their positions and make way for a new government.

The PTI has the most at stake and will be the ultimate and biggest winner if early elections for the Punjab assembly or all the assemblies are held on the same day. Every day is significant for PTI. For them, the current state of the economy, the threat of terrorism, and the government's failure to control inflation are all gold and receipts to win elections. They have their own pressure cards, which they keep close to their hearts and only show when necessary. The first card was agreeing on a date for the election, whether on May 14th or in July, but guaranteed by the Supreme Court and the establishment. Second, all assemblies are disbanded, and neutral caretakers governments are established. Third, dissolve the current caretaker setups in Punjab and KP, as they have completed their mandated 90-day period and their continuation will be illegal and unconstitutional. If the election date is set and neutral governments are formed, the PTI will have complete freedom to launch an election campaign with full force, without fear of intimidation or harassment. They will benefit from increased

media and public attention on political issues in order to promote their platforms and policies. During the run up to the elections, they will have an equal opportunity to campaign and access public resources such as media coverage and public spaces for campaigning. They will have the freedom to issue a rallying cry to opposition supporters, encouraging them to become more engaged and mobilized, and to increase turnout at rallies and other campaign events. Because the current government is unpopular or ineffective, the announcement of an election date will provide a boost to the PTI as disillusioned voters seek an alternative which would help the PTI gain momentum and instill confidence in their victory. Lastly, the establishment, the elephant in the room. Once the election date is announced, the establishment will be in a difficult position, as the entire regime change, the launch of the PDM, and the ousting of Imran Khan were their idea. Keeping in mind their hostile and tense relationships with Imran Khan, the Establishment would like to delay the elections as much as possible to help the PDM improve the economy, bring inflation down, and roll out some public oriented high value projects in an attempt to win for them some political capital, while simultaneously attempting to weaken the PTI by fomenting internal strife, as they did when they split the PTI into the Jehangir, Aleem Khan and Raja Riaz factions and discredit Imran Khan to erode his political capital as much they can. But, unlike, in the past they are not going to have a free ride as all their previous weapons of discredit have been blunted by Imran Khan and rejected by the public in general. This time, they must come up with more inventive or lethal means to prevent Imran Khan's rise to power.

The supreme court's strategy to compel the PDM and PTI to soften their adamant positions and belligerent behavior has finally succeeded. They have agreed to meet tomorrow at 3 p.m. (28th April 2023) with the understanding that they will continue to discuss election dates within the confines of the Constitution, as mandated by the Supreme Court. It is time for them to set aside their personal egos, have compassion for the nation and its unfortunate citizens, and demonstrate the best behavior possible, which includes maintaining a high level of civility and respect for each other, approaching the process with a spirit of cooperation and compromise, avoiding demands and ultimatums, and focusing on finding common ground. To reach an agreement on the election date, both parties should be willing to make concessions and compromises, which may include adjusting the timing or duration of the election period to meet the needs of both parties. During the negotiation process, both parties should be transparent about their intentions and motivations in order to build trust and ensure that negotiations are conducted in good faith. They should agree on rules and regulations governing the conduct of the election and ensure that all parties have equal access to resources such as media channels and public spaces. They should commit to upholding the law and ensuring that all election-related activities are conducted in accordance with applicable legislation and regulations, including rules regarding campaign finance, use of public resources, and conduct during the election period, in order to ensure a free and fair electoral process that is accepted by all parties.

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

India's G20 Meeting in Jammu and Kashmir: A Disturbing Attempt to Silence Dissent and Legitimize Control

Sheikh Abdul Momin

By hosting this meeting, India is not only disregarding the UN Security Council's resolutions calling for the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and undermining the efforts of the international community to resolve the long-standing conflict in the region but also trying to put a veil on the human

India's decision to host a G20 meeting in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of international law and a brazen attempt to legitimize its illegal occupation of the region. The move has been met with strong condemnation from Pakistan which has been raising the issue on different international forums and demanding a peaceful resolution of the conflict since the partition of India in 1947. The decision to host the G20 meeting in the UN-recognized disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir is nothing short of an attempt to hide the ground realities in the region where India is engaged in massive human rights abuses. India's actions in Jammu and Kashmir have been widely condemned by human rights organizations and the international community. The Indian government has imposed a communications blackout and curfew in the region, which has resulted in widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and torture. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been denied their basic human rights, including freedom of speech, movement, and assembly. The occupying forces have started a settler colonial project where they are busy in illegal land grabbing and demolition of the properties of native Kashmiris. People are barred from offering prayers in the main mosques of the region, in complete violation of the religious freedom. By hosting this meeting, India is not only disregarding the UN Security Council's resolutions calling for the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and undermining the efforts of the international community to resolve the long-standing conflict in the region but also trying to put a veil on the human rights violations in the region.

Moreover, India's move to host the G20 meeting in Jammu and Kashmir is a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit an occupying power from altering the status of the occupied territory. By hosting the meeting in Jammu and Kashmir, India is attempting to give the impression that it has legitimate control over the territory, which is not the case. India's move to host the G20 meeting in Jammu and Kashmir also raises serious concerns about the safety and security of the delegates attending the meeting. The region is one of the most militarized zones in the world, with a large number of Indian troops deployed in the area to suppress any dissent that goes against the military administration in the area. The ongoing conflict in the region has also resulted in numerous human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, which have been documented by various international human rights organizations. India's decision to host the G20 meeting in Jammu and Kashmir is also a blatant disregard for the aspirations of the people of the region, who have been struggling for their right to self-determination for decades. By hosting the meeting in this internationally recognized disputed region, India is sending a message that it does not care about the aspirations and rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and is willing to use any means necessary to maintain its illegal occupation of the region. On one hand the oppressed people of the territory are denied their basic rights and on the other hand, India is trying hard to convince the international community that everything in the internationally recognized disputed territory is fine and that it is, like any other state of the country, its own part. This move by India is not only illegal but also counterproductive. It will only

further escalate the tensions between India and Pakistan and make it more difficult to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. It will also create an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty in the region, which will negatively impact the lives of millions of people in Jammu and Kashmir. India is, with dangerous connotations, promoting the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir and presenting it as a region with great potential for investment and growth. By showcasing its economic potential, India hopes to convince the international community that Jammu and Kashmir is a prosperous and thriving region and that the world can safely invest here. This is done to promote the dangerous project of settler colonialism where Kashmiris will be dispossessed and their land controlled illegally for the furtherment of settler colonialism in the region. By inviting leaders from other G20 countries to visit Jammu and Kashmir, India is trying to show that the region is open to the world and that it welcomes international participation and engagement.

India is also using the G20 meeting to counter Pakistan's narrative on Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has been highlighting the human rights abuses and political repression in the region, and India is trying to present a counter-narrative that emphasizes peace, stability, and economic development. India is using the G20 meeting to present Jammu and Kashmir as a region that is open for business, peaceful, and stable. However, this approach ignores the ongoing human rights abuses and political repression in the region and does not address the underlying issue of the disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir.

—The writer hails from Indian occupied Kashmir

Briefs

Govt offers to dissolve NA after budget

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the government's proposal before Khan. Following the second round of talks – which was held Friday in Senate's Committee Room – the sides decided to consult with their top leadership and allies over the proposals presented during the meeting. Both delegations were hopeful of concluding on Tuesday, but PTI warned that the talks could "derail" at any point if the law enforcers keep arresting its workers. In conversation with journalists after the talks, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said progress has been made. Without disclosing, he said both sides have presented their proposals. "There is no deadlock in the talks. PTI and the government's committees will meet on Tuesday at 11am," he said, elaborating that the meeting has been postponed till next week as both sides need to discuss the proposals with their leadership.

Talks only if govt willing to dissolve...

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court on the matter of simultaneous elections. "If elections are not held on May 14 it means Constitution is torn apart," said the PTI chief, adding that the Constitution is supreme not the Parliament. The PTI chief also criticised former army chief General (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa for imposing a "band of thieves" on the country.

PM lauds Sudan evacuation efforts

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Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar and Secretary Foreign Affairs for efficiently supervising the overall work. He also praised the Pakistani Ambassador in Sudan Mir Behrose Reki, Head of Chancery Muhammad Saad, Defence Attache Col. Muhammad Haroon, and Commercial Attache Atta Ullah. The prime minister specifically paid tributes to the staff members of the Pakistani Embassy in Sudan Muhammad Bilal Shafiq and Rashid Khan for their efforts in this regard. The prime minister directed the concerned authorities to continue to work with full vigour until the safe return of all Pakistanis from Sudan.

Ex-COAS' statement...

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take pride in its "operational preparedness and utmost combat worthiness". "Pakistan's Armed Forces always did and will continue to keep their weapons, equipment and battle-hardened human resource ever ready for the defence of the motherland," said the ISPR. The statement comes after journalist Hamid Mir revealed in a TV show that General (ret'd) Bajwa in a meeting with 20-25 journalists had stated that Pakistan was not in a condition to fight a war with India.

FO slams Indian...

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dialogue between Pakistan and India on all disputes including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir," she added. The spokesperson rejected any insinuation that links Islamabad with terrorism anywhere including by Indian authorities. She said: "We believe that recent Indian comments in this regard are unwarranted and have no basis." Regarding the upcoming Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers Conference in India, Baloch said Pakistan has always been committed to regional cooperation and we will also play a role in strengthening and success of the SCO. She said any negative statements and development could not dissuade Pakistan from playing its part in the organisation of which Pakistan is also an equal member.

Rishi Sunak says 'UK, Italy aligned' as he meets Meloni

Meloni told Sunak that "tackling traffickers and illegal migration is something that your government is doing very well. I'm following your work and I absolutely agree with your work and I think there are many things that we can do together."

LONDON: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak declared that Britain and Italy are "very aligned" in values as he welcomed far-right Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni on Thursday for talks focused on migration, defense and the war in Ukraine. While Sunak meets leaders of all political stripes from around the world, he had notably warm words as he greeted Meloni at 10 Downing St., the British leader's official residence. The Conservative prime minister praised Meloni's "very careful handling of the Italian economy." "I think the values between our two countries are very aligned, which is why we can work so well together on shared challenges, whether it's responding to Putin's illegal invasion in Ukraine, where again I pay tribute to your leadership, but also tackling illegal migration, which is something that is common to both of us," Sunak said. The two



governments share an interest in stopping migrants reaching their countries by boat. Sunak's administration is passing a bill through Parliament that will deny the right to asylum to anyone who arrives in the U.K. without permission. The legislation

has been condemned by refugee groups and the United Nations' human rights body. The government also plans to send migrants who arrive by boat on a one-way trip to Rwanda, an equally controversial plan that is being blocked by legal challenges.

Meloni, whose far-right Brothers of Italy party leads Italy's right-wing coalition government, has led a crackdown on people-smugglers and on rescue ships operated by charities that she says encourage migrants to risk dangerous voyages from north Africa

across the Mediterranean. Meloni told Sunak that "tackling traffickers and illegal migration is something that your government is doing very well. I'm following your work and I absolutely agree with your work and I think there are many things that we can do together." Meloni said "there is much more that we can do on many topics on which we are on the same side – defense, Ukraine." Unlike some far-right populists in the West, Meloni has taken a strongly pro-NATO, pro-European position on Russia's war in Ukraine. After their meeting the two leaders were due to have a private tour of Westminster Abbey, where King Charles III will be crowned on May 6. A group of protesters gathered outside the gates of Downing Street as the leaders met, holding signs that read "No to fascist Meloni" and chanting: "Refugees in, Meloni out." – AP

Shoaib Khoso assumes charge as DG PSB



Khoso took charge of his post after the notification issued by the Establishment Division as Director General PSB (MP II scale) on contract basis for a period of three years

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Newly appointed Director General of Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Shoaib Khoso has assumed charge as DG PSB after the approval of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif. Shoaib Khoso holds a Master's degree in Finance and also has foreign education in his credentials, topped the merit list with secured over 80 present marks in the following interviews conducted by a panel recently under the supervision of Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC). Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved the appointment of Shoaib Khoso after reviewing the summary sent by the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination for the post of director general of Pakistan Sports Board. Meanwhile, Khoso took charge of his post after the notification issued by the Establishment Division as Director General PSB (MP II scale) on contract basis for a period of three years.

Mayweather to fight John Gotti III in exhibition

MIAMI: Former world boxing champion Floyd Mayweather is to take on John Gotti III, the grandson of the notorious former New York crime boss, in an exhibition bout in South Florida in June. Mayweather retired from boxing in 2017, unbeaten in 50 bouts, but continues to appear in fights that do not count towards his career record. The 30-year-old Gotti had a 5-1 record in MMA fights with his most recent appearance a loss to Nick Alley in 2020. After switching to boxing, Gotti has a 2-0 record. The fighter is the grandson of John Gotti, the head of the Gambino crime family who died in prison in 2002. Gotti, speaking at a press conference with Mayweather, said he had been a fan of Famer Mayweather since he was a young child but that he was ready to take him on in the ring in Sunrise. "Make no mistake, June 11, I'm bringing bad intentions to that man," he said. "And I don't care if it's an exhibition or not, you started to fight me. It's no quarter. So it's kill or be killed." Mayweather has previously fought reality television stars and YouTube fighters in some of his exhibitions but



Gotti promised he would be a tougher opponent. "I think I should take the fight to him," he said. "I'm going to show him different looks, something that these past YouTubers, whatever you want to call them, didn't do because they all suck." Mayweather said he had been trying to set up a fight with Gotti for two years and was a friend of his father,

John Gotti Jr. "I'm friends with his dad. That's what people don't know. I've always been friends with the Gotti family. That's what a lot of people don't know," Mayweather said. "For 27 years, I've been competing at the highest level. And I will continue to have fun, entertain, until I'm ready to say, you know what? Enough is enough." – Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Players of Tent Pegging Competition are, warm up their selves before starting the competition during "Annual Islamabad Championship 2023" at F-9 Park in Federal Capital. – Online

Klopp warns Liverpool revival far from complete

LONDON: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said on Friday his side are not yet "out of the woods" as they try to finish a see-saw season by qualifying for the Champions League. Wednesday's 2-1 win away to West Ham was Liverpool's third successive win, extending their unbeaten run in the Premier League to five matches. Liverpool continue their quest for a top-four finish at home to Tottenham on Sunday,

where a win for Klopp's men would also derail Spurs' bid for a place in next season's Champions League. But Klopp said the team that were beaten in last season's European showpiece final by Real Madrid is far from back in a truly consistent groove. "It is, for me, too early to speak about consistency," he told a pre-match press conference. "Winning three games is not for me consistent, it is good but can only be the start of something." The German added: "It is about consistency you show in performances even more than results. For the outside world it is the result but for us it must be performances because that is what we work with. "I am happy with that in the moment because in all the games, as different as they were, I saw a lot of things we want to see in the games and that is then really good." – APP

Verstappen tops fiery Baku practice

BAKU: World champion Max Verstappen led the one and only practice session for the Azerbaijan Grand Prix as Formula One returned with a bang on Friday. A one-month break since racing in Melbourne had given teams the time back at their factories to try and come up with ways to reduce Red Bull's early supremacy. Wins for Verstappen in Bahrain and Australia with his teammate Sergio Perez scoring in Saudi Arabia has left the grid playing catch-up on the streets of the Azerbaijani capital. Complicating matters is the new-look race weekend with Friday morning's lone practice session followed by qualifying for Sunday's race. Saturday is now a standalone day devoted to the sprint, with a shortened qualifying version dubbed 'the Sprint shoot-out' now shaping the grid for the 100-kilometre (62-mile) dash. This is the first of six sprints this season, double the number held in 2021 and 2022. That gave the practice session on the notoriously hard to navigate streets of Baku added jeopardy, proving encouraging for some like Red Bull but disastrous for others, notably Alpine. Perez had led early before Fernando Alonso flying this season in the rejuvenated Aston Martin as Lewis Hamilton came in with a brake issue, with George Russell following his Mercedes teammate back to the garage. Yuki Tsunoda was the first to feel Baku's infamous bite with a spin in the first quarter of an hour, his AlphaTauri's rear right tyre ripped to pieces. Then disaster struck Alpine, flames flickering from the back of Pierre Gasly's car. The Frenchman tried to nurse his stricken car back to the pits but with the fire quickly becoming a bonfire he wisely hopped out, prompting the first red flag of the weekend and plenty of work for the Alpine mechanics to get his car fit for qualifying in a few hours time. – Agencies

Mushahid for early completion of Pak-Iran...

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we were able to prevent the decline and stagnation in the volume of exchanges between the two countries, and most importantly to register the unprecedented record of two billion and two hundred million dollars (\$2.2 billion) in the amount of trade volume between Iran and Pakistan'. The ambassador said, the opening of two official border crossings after 73 years, agreement on the construction of 6 new border markets (one of which is completed and ready for operation and the other two are on the verge of completion), the completion of the first phase of the electricity transmission project to Pakistan and the increase in the amount of electricity export from 100 MW to more than 200 MW, which can be potentially increased to 500 MW, launching ITI cargo train (from Islamabad to Tehran and Istanbul), have been among the achievements made in this period of mission. Great progress has been made in other fields of co-operation including cultural, scientific, defense and security, about which I ignore expressing due to the time constraints, he further said. While dilating upon the future relations the ambassador said, in the current situation, priority should be given to the use of existing capacities and possibilities in the economic field, tourism and mutual investment between Iran and Pakistan. The capacities of the commonalities and links in the various areas of history, civilization, language, religion, geography, culture and so on should be availed for the betterment of the life of the people and for the development of the indigenous region which is a homeland to all of us and our next generations.

Nation stands...

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police and intelligence community have risen to the challenges and neutralised the threats to our national security is simply outstanding." He lauded the PAF leaderships to make the Pakistan Air Force a truly professional, progressive and high-tech organisation. He recalled the recent example of the PAF's true professionalism when it showed befitting and determined response to the Indian aggression in February 2019. "The whole world saw how our brave sons humiliated the Indian air force and show of exceptional skill and expertise," he added. With respect to the economic challenges, the prime minister said that the global economic crisis adversely affected all walks of life in the country. However, he vowed not to let the people at the mercy of the disruptions in the global markets.

3 soldiers martyred...

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In two other encounters with terrorists in Amir Kalam and Tajbi Khel areas of the district, the army's media wing said three more terrorists, including terrorist commander Musa Khan, were eliminated. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the seven killed terrorists, according to the ISPR.

Ban on UN women...

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Women have been barred from most secondary education and universities, prevented from working in most government jobs as well as NGOs and blocked from public spaces such as gyms and parks. Earlier Friday, a senior Taliban leader warned the UN Security Council to give up its "failed policy of pressure".

Imran gets protective...

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Police have allowed only Mr Khan's vehicle to enter the court premises while the bomb disposal squad has cleared the courtroom before his appearance. The case was filed on Apr 7 and Mr. Khan have been alleged to incite public the institutions. The case was registered by Magistrate Manzoor Ahmad in Ramna police station.

Manchester City now in driving seat

Time appears to be running out for bottom club Southampton after their defeat by Bournemouth on Thursday left them six points from safety zone with five games left

LONDON: According to some of the headlines after Manchester City's crushing defeat of title rivals Arsenal this week the sky blue ribbons can already be fastened to the Premier League trophy. Their 4-1 thrashing of the long-time leaders at The Etihad wrenched control of the race out of Arsenal's hands and put City firmly in control of their destiny. But City boss Pep Guardiola is too long in the tooth to assume a fifth league title in six seasons is now a formality. The reaction to City's victory in the so-called title decider was understandable. It was their seventh

successive league win and left them two points behind Arsenal with two games in hand, having trailed by eight not long ago. Victory for a relentless City at Fulham on Sunday will take them into the lead and, should they achieve that, it really will be their title to lose, especially with home games against struggling West Ham United and Leeds United up next. "I have a feeling the next three games will dictate a lot," he said. "Fulham have come from the Championship and this season have been amazing. We play at home against Leeds and West Ham. We feel comfortable here with the crowd."

After their mauling at City, Arsenal have the weekend off to lick their wounds and regroup after their home clash with Chelsea was shunted to Tuesday on police advice. But there is no respite for the teams battling at the other end of the table to avoid being relegated. Time appears to be running out for bottom club Southampton after their defeat by Bournemouth on Thursday left them six points from the safety zone with five games left. Southampton go to third-placed Newcastle United on Sunday to face a side that has scored 10 goals in two games and appear

on the cusp of a return to the Champions League. The two clubs immediately above Saints, Everton and Leicester City, meet on Monday in a true 'six-pointer'. Nottingham Forest climbed out of the drop zone with a priceless victory against Brighton & Hove Albion on Wednesday and victory at Brentford on Saturday would put even more pressure on Everton and Leicester. Leeds, who are above Forest on goal difference, travel to almost-safe Bournemouth on Sunday. With Fulham comfortable in 10th place and Bournemouth

and Forest on course for survival, it could be only the fourth time in Premier League history that all three teams promoted from the Championship avoid relegation in their first season up. The last time that happened was in 2017-18 when Newcastle, Brighton and Huddersfield all stayed up. Tottenham Hotspur's chances of a top-four finish are almost over though they did show some fight to draw 2-2 with fourth-placed Manchester United on Thursday in Ryan Mason's first game in interim charge, four days after a 6-1 drubbing at Newcastle. Spurs in fifth go to Liverpool, who are seventh,

on Sunday in a match that could go a long way to decide which of the two clubs can salvage a Europa League qualification spot. Tottenham have 54 points, the same as sixth-placed Aston Villa, with Liverpool on 53, having played a game less. Liverpool are seeking a fourth successive win and, belatedly, have joined the Premier League party. "This season taught us lessons that I didn't want to learn but the most important lesson in football is getting the three points at the weekend or midweek," manager Jurgen Klopp said. – Agencies

Briefs

Iran calls for
multilateralism
at SCO meeting

NEW DELHI: Iran's defense minister has warned about growing attempts by the West and US-led NATO military alliance to create a unipolar world, saying the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should be after consolidation of balanced policies and expansion of multilateralism. Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani made the remark in a meeting of SCO's defense ministers in the Indian capital of New Delhi on Friday. Ashtiani pointed to the positive role played by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in regional and international developments over the past decades, saying the SCO's achievements are indicative of the realities and future horizons of the strategic organization. "Since its establishment, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, by following an intelligent, influential and role-playing path, has now become an instrumental institution in global trends and a guarantor of peace and stability and respect for the rights of nations," Ashtiani told the meeting. The minister touched on the "inevitable" role and position of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.—Agencies

Public support for British monarchy is falling

LONDON: A new study revealed that only three out of 10 Britons believe that a monarchy is "very important", as support towards the monarchy nosedives to a record low. As the upcoming coronation ceremony of King Charles III approaches, in an eyeopener, a new survey by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) says that 29 percent of those quizzed said the monarchy was "very important", 26 percent said it was "quite important", 20 percent said it was "not very important" and 25 percent said it was "not at all important / abolish". "British Social Attitudes data shows that public support for the monarchy has fallen to a record low," the study read. Conducted for this year's British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) and based on over 6,638 interviews, the study shows that people agreeing with a monarchy have dropped to the lowest percentage since the study began in 1983. In 2022, when the queen's platinum jubilee took place, 35 percent of responders said the monarchy is "very important", which contributed to the first increase since 2012. "Whilst we are observing a downward trend in support for the monarchy, it is clear from the data that important national events and celebrations, such as jubilees, marriages and births, have a clear and positive effect on society's views towards the monarchy.—DNA

Turkish plane comes under gunfire in Sudan

ANKARA: A Turkish military plane on a mission to evacuate Turkish citizens from conflict-torn Sudan came under gunfire, the Turkish National Defense Ministry said on Friday. A Turkish C-130 evacuation plane, which was headed to Wadi Seidna Air Base for the evacuation, came under small arms fire, said a ministry statement. The plane landed safely, and no injuries were reported, the statement added. Earlier, speaking on the continuing evacuation, the ministry said: "The first group of our citizens was safely brought to Türkiye by planes belonging to the Turkish Armed Forces." Evacuation efforts will continue until all Turkish citizens are transported out of Sudan, it added. A ceasefire that came into force at Tuesday midnight was the latest attempt to stop the fighting that first erupted on April 15. At least 460 people have been killed and more than 4,000 injured in clashes between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since the conflict began.—Agencies

HC Zaheer Janjua lauds Pakistani students abroad

He urged them to dedicate their full time and energies to their education and acquisition of high-end skills to be better prepared for the challenges of the modern-day world



DNA

OTTAWA: Pakistani students studying abroad are the real ambassadors of Pakistan and their role and contribution in introducing our country's culture, clothes, food, sports, spectacles and music to their

peers and general populations abroad cannot be overemphasized. "It is a matter of great satisfaction that our students while studying abroad, enthusiastically participate in various extracurricular activities to express their national identity and culture," said Pakistan High Commissioner to Canada, Zaheer A. Janjua, while participating in a cultural fair organized by Pakistani students studying in a local university in Ottawa. The fair was organized by the Pakistan Student Association, University of Carleton, Ottawa, in a local park. A large number of Pakistani students as well as Canadian

students of Pakistan origin and other nationalities participated and enjoyed Pakistani food and sports. High Commissioner Zaheer A. Janjua mingled with the students and participated in kite flying and other sports. He lauded the students for arranging the event and taking pride in displaying their

identity and culture through various manifestations. He also appreciated the students for regularly participating in the events of the Pakistani High Commission and Consulates. He said that the doors of Pakistan High Commission are always open for our students. Our students are our

asset and future, and the leadership of the country and nation will be in their hands in the coming years. He urged them to dedicate their full time and energies to their education and acquisition of high-end skills to be better prepared for the challenges of the modern-day world.

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Türkiye, Azerbaijan ink protocol for joint UAV development

ANKARA: Turkish drone magnate Baykar and Azerbaijan signed a goodwill protocol Thursday on the joint manufacturing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Haluk Bayraktar, the CEO of Baykar, and Deputy Defense Minister of Azerbaijan Agil Gurbanov signed the protocol during Teknofest, Türkiye's premier aerospace and technology festival held at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport. Ramiz Tahirov, the commander of Azerbaijan's Air Force, also attended the ceremony. Speaking at the ceremony, Bayraktar pointed out that today there is very close and strong cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye in UAV technol-

ogy with the understanding of "one nation, two states." "We are here today with Deputy Defense Minister of Azerbaijan Agil Gurbanov and Azerbaijan to further this cooperation. Together with Air Force Commander Ramiz Tahirov, we signed a joint goodwill protocol, and our goal is to further the strong cooperation between our countries," he said. Bayraktar said that Bayraktar Technologies Azerbaijan was established by Baykar in the capital Baku to develop advanced generation technologies, autonomous technologies and artificial intelligence that support new generation technologies. Baykar also introduced the mini smart

cruise missile "Bayraktar Kemanekş" for the first time during the festival. Speaking to Anadolu Agency (AA), Baykar Platform Engineering Team leader Burak Özbek said Bayraktar Kemanekş has been developed to raise the attack capability of the Bayraktar TB2 unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) against strategic targets. He added that the missile could be integrated with all other UAVs that they developed in addition to the Bayraktar TB2. Özbek said they are currently in the flight testing stage for the cruise missile, which they started working on last year, aiming to launch serial

production in 2023. With a weight of 35 kilograms (77 pounds), Bayraktar Kemanekş can fly for up to one hour. As part of the Teknofest festival, the 8th Istanbul International Invention Fair (ISIF'23) has started with inventions from 31 countries. A total of 424 domestic and foreign inventions are set to be featured at ISIF'23. The opening ceremony was held with the participation of Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank. Varank said that young people and inventors would have the opportunity to showcase their work at the fair, which will bring inventors and investors together.—Agencies

IMF calls on ECB to keep hiking rates to tame inflation

ANKARA: The IMF on Friday called on European Central Bank (ECB) to keep hiking rates to tame persistently high inflation mainly driven by the Russia-Ukraine war. Europe faces the difficult task of sustaining the recovery, defeating inflation, and safeguarding financial stability, as its strong exit from the pandemic was interrupted by the war which slowed growth, triggering inflation and financial stress, IMF European Department head Alfred Kammer told a news briefing before the release of a regional economic outlook report. "Faced with such uncertainty, central banks should maintain tight monetary policy until core inflation is unambiguously on a downward path back to central bank inflation targets," he said, adding that further hikes in policy rates are required in the euro area. The eurozone gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to grow 0.8% this year, upwardly revised from 0.5% previously forecast in October, the IMF said. The monetary fund cut its eurozone growth forecast for next year by 0.4 points to 1.4%. Growth in Europe's advanced economies is foreseen to slow to 0.7% this year following growth of 3.6% last year, while emerging economies (excluding Türkiye, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine) will also see a sharp decline from 4.4% to 1.1%, Kammer said. Eurozone inflation is foreseen to average 5.3% in 2023 and 2.9% in 2024, above the ECB's target of 2%.—APP

Pope calls for accepting migrants on Hungary visit

BUDAPEST: Pope Francis, starting a trip to Hungary, on Friday pointedly warned of the dangers of rising nationalism in Europe and told the Budapest government that accepting migrants along with the rest of the continent would be a true sign of Christianity. In a hard-hitting speech to government leaders including Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has had a series of run-ins with the European Union, Francis also urged a rejection of "self-referential forms of populism" and strictly nationalist interests. He called for a return to the "European spirit" envisioned by the founders of modern Europe after World War Two, saying nations had to "look beyond national boundaries". Speaking on the day that Russia hit Ukraine with the first large-scale air strikes in nearly two months, Francis made another appeal for an end to the war there, calling for "creative efforts for peace" to drown out those he called "soloists of war". The three-day visit is his first trip since he was admitted to hospital for bronchitis in March. Looking cheerful, Francis, who has a knee ailment, used a cane to walk by welcoming dignitaries and children in national dress at the airport. In recent arrivals, he used a wheelchair. Asked by reporters about his health on the flight from Rome, the pope joked, saying "I'm still alive" and "stubborn weeds never die". He also walked with a cane to greet journalists individually in their section of the plane whereas on some recent trips he remained seated and the journalists went to him. Francis is keeping a promise of an official visit to Hungary after a stop of only seven hours to close a Church congress in Budapest in 2021 on his way to Slovakia left many feeling slighted. Orban 59, and the pope have differing views on handling migration from the Middle East and Africa to Europe, with Francis believing migrants fleeing poverty should be welcomed. Orban, whose government built a steel fence on the border with Serbia to keep out migrants, has refused to let Hungary be transformed into an "immigrant country.—DNA

Pakistan-EU counter terrorism dialogue takes place

DNA

BRUSSELS: The European Union-Pakistan Counter Terrorism Dialogue was held in Brussels on 27 April 2023. The Dialogue offered an opportunity to engage in important discussions on counter-terrorism cooperation, as part of a wider engagement on Security matters in the framework of the

2019 Strategic Engagement Plan. Both sides strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirmed their determination to jointly combat terrorism by increasing cooperation on the prevention and countering of violent extremism, offline and online radicalization, and combating terrorism financing. They also discussed counter terrorism

cooperation in multilateral fora such as UN and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, which the EU co-chairs. The Dialogue provided an opportunity to exchange views on regional and global challenges, including the wider security implications of the situation in Afghanistan. The meeting offered an opportunity to explore concrete ways of assisting Pakistan's efforts in ad-

ressing the growing challenges posed by the evolving threats of terrorism. The respective delegations were led by Ms. Benedikta Von Seherr-Thoss, Managing Director, Common Security and Defence Policy at the European External Action Service and Mr. Abdul Hameed, Director General for Counter Terrorism at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.



Renewed focus on Syria could reignite peace efforts

NEW YORK: Recent diplomatic developments have led to a "potentially important juncture" in efforts to advance the political process on Syria, according to the U.N. special envoy for Syria. "This renewed attention on Syria is very important if it can act as a circuit breaker and unlock long-stalled efforts to move the political process forward," Geir Pedersen told the U.N. Security Council on Thursday. He said they have seen renewed diplomatic attention on Syria in the aftermath of the Feb. 6 earthquakes, referring to the Astana players — Russia, Türkiye and Iran — and new openings of engagement between Arab countries and the Syrian regime. After Feb. 6, regime leader Bashar Assad agreed to open additional border crossings for international aid to cross from Türkiye into opposition-held northwest Syria, while the United States and European countries relaxed some of their sanctions on Damascus. In recent weeks, Saudi Arabia, which once

backed Syrian opposition groups fighting to oust Assad, sent its Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan to Damascus for the first time since the kingdom cut ties with the Assad regime more than a decade ago. Assad, with the help of his main allies Iran and Russia, later regained control over much of Syria, and Saudi Arabia has said in recent months that isolating him was not working. "With renewed attention on Syria, particularly from the region, that could assist our efforts in advancing a political solution to this conflict in line with Resolution 2254," Pedersen said. "But for this renewed attention to help unlock progress, many actors will need to take concrete steps, not just one set of actors." U.N. aid agency official Lisa Doughten said the current scale of humanitarian need in Syria is "unprecedented" and the Feb. 6 earthquakes added more death and destruction to parts of northern Syria already worn down by

more than a decade of civil war. "Even before the earthquake, 15.3 million people — more than half of the total population — required humanitarian assistance and protection support. This number, I fear, only stands to grow," she said. "The protection needs provoked by the earthquakes are enormous." Turkish Ambassador to the U.N. Sedat Onal also pointed out increasing signs of a tendency toward greater engagement in the region following the disaster. "We think that every initiative is important and valuable, as far as it is part and parcel of a holistic and coordinated approach to finding viable solutions to the existing problems through a credible political process," he said. "We hope that this can open a window of opportunity, and it can be seized by all stakeholders," he added. The Astana format is a peace process launched in 2017 to establish a cease-fire and bring conflicts under control in Syria.

Officials from all sides, Ankara, Moscow, Tehran and Damascus, periodically convene to consult on a solution and address general issues in the war-torn country but to little avail. A thaw in ties between Ankara and Damascus following the earthquakes has also tipped the regional balance in a more positive direction. With Moscow striving to open a channel of dialogue between Türkiye and the Assad regime, the defense ministers and intelligence chiefs of the four countries assembled twice in the past six months. Any normalization between Ankara and Damascus would reshape the Syrian war since Turkish military and tactical backing has been vital to sustaining moderate Syrian opposition in their last significant territorial foothold in the northwest. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself indicated he could meet Assad to smooth out the strain. However, Assad has preconditioned high-level talks on ending Turkish presence in Syrian territories. An-

karah has thousands of troops in northern Syria where it has been fighting against terror groups like the PKK and its local branch YPG, which often attacks both Turkish land and local residents. The terrorists have been controlling much of the region, including Syrian natural resources like oil wells in northeastern provinces, since Assad's forces withdrew in 2012, a marked obstacle to establishing territorial integrity in the country. Most recently, defense ministers of four countries met in Moscow for what has been described as "fruitful and positive" talks. "As always, we underlined that we respect Syria's sovereignty rights and its territorial integrity and that the only reason we are present in Syria is to fight terrorist organizations including the PKK/YPG and Daesh," Defense Minister Hulusi Akar told reporters Wednesday. The safe return of displaced Syrians was on the agenda, as well, he said, noting that Ankara and Damascus could cooperate on the matter.—DNA

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BBC chairman Sharp resigns

LONDON: The chairman of Britain's BBC on Friday resigned following a report that found he breached the government's code for public appointments over a loan. Richard Sharp was recommended for the job in fall 2020 because he assisted — to a "very limited extent" — then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson secure a loan, according to the report by barrister Adam Heppinstall. Sharp was investigated over his appointment to the iconic broadcaster's helm, when he was reported to have helped facilitate an £800,000 (\$995,000) loan guarantee for Johnson, weeks before he was appointed the BBC chair by Johnson. The report also told how Sharp communicated to Johnson that he wanted to apply for the BBC chairman role in November 2020 but that Sharp would not be independent of the prime minister if he was appointed. "I've always maintained the breach was inadvertent and not material, which the facts he lays out substantiate," said Sharp in a televised statement following the report. "Nevertheless, I have decided that it is right to prioritize the interests of the BBC. I feel that this matter may well be a distraction from the corporation's good work, were I to remain in post until the end of my term." BBC Director-General Tim Davie thanked Sharp for his service to the BBC and the "drive and intellect" he brought: "Working with him over the last two years has been rewarding and Richard has made a significant contribution to the transformation of and success of the BBC." —APP

Pence testifies before federal grand jury

WASHINGTON: Former Vice President Mike Pence testified Thursday before a federal grand jury investigating efforts by ex-President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 election, according to reports. Several US media outlets reported that Pence spent several hours at the federal courthouse in Washington, D.C. as part of an ongoing investigation into Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021 Capitol insurrection. The testimony marked the first time in US history that a vice president testified about a president he worked with. It came after a US federal appeals court on Wednesday rejected Trump's attempt to prevent Pence from testifying, citing executive privilege. The latest order from the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals came after Trump's legal team filed an emergency motion to block a lower court's decision directing Pence to testify. Neither Trump nor Pence immediately commented on the reports. In February, Special Counsel Jack Smith issued a subpoena to Pence to testify in an ongoing probe into potential federal crimes related to efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.—Agencies

US helping to 'kill Russians': Moscow

Moscow: The US is directly contributing to the deaths of Russians by providing military and financial aid to Ukraine, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday. She was reacting to a Kommersant interview with Lynne Tracy, the US ambassador to Moscow, who stated that Washington "does not view Russians as enemies." "The Russian people are getting killed with targeting done by the US, money [provided] by the US, weapons [supplied] by the US, and by the hands of a regime that was brought to power by the US as a result of a coup orchestrated by the US," Zakharova wrote on Telegram, referring to the Western-backed 2014 uprising in Kiev that ousted the democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovich. In an interview published in Russian newspaper Kommersant on Thursday, Tracy said she supports informal contacts between Americans and Russians.—Agencies

Briefs

Iranian president to visit Syria next week

BEIRUT: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will visit Damascus next week, a senior regional source close to the Syrian government told media on Friday. The visit will be the first by an Iranian president to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since war broke out in Syria in 2011. With military help and economic support from both Iran and Russia, Assad was able to turn the tide of the conflict and regain control of most of his country. The senior regional source told media that a warming of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as a thaw in Arab states' isolation of Syria, had paved the way for the visit.

The Syrian daily al-Watan, which is close to the government, reported that Raisi's visit would last two days and would be capped by a string of agreements, particularly on economic cooperation. Iran has previously provided lines of credit to Damascus and imports phosphate from Syrian mines.

This month, regional sources revealed that Iran had secretly brought weapons and other military equipment to Syria by disguising the transfers as part of the relief effort following the devastating February earthquakes in Syria and Turkey. - Agencies

Dubai ruler appoints new second deputy

DNA

DUBAI: Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum on Friday appointed another of his sons as a deputy ruler of the emirate, following the death of his brother and long-serving deputy ruler Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2021.

Dubai now has first and second deputy rulers, the decree published by the Dubai Media Office said. The decree appointed as first deputy ruler Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, one of Sheikh Mohammed's sons who has been a deputy ruler since 2008 and is currently the United Arab Emirates' finance minister.

Newly appointed to the role of second deputy ruler is Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, another of Sheikh Mohammed's sons and the chairman of the Dubai Media Council.

ECP submits Elections funds report in SC

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Friday submitted a report to the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan regarding the provision of funds for the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly elections, ARY News reported. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) filed the report at the SC's Registrar's Office.

The ECP in its report stated that the electoral watchdog had not received Rs21 billion for the elections in two provinces as per the apex court's directives.

At the last hearing before Eidul Fitr, the SC had asked ECP to submit a report on the provision of election funds. The top court also directed political parties to hold talks on April 26 and come up with a response by April 27 after giving stakeholders a chance to reach an agreement.

During the hearing, Attorney General of Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Awan told the court first contact between the government and the opposition was held on April 19 and it was decided to hold a meeting on April 26. Later, the hearing was adjourned by the SC. The CJF remarked that the 'appropriate' verdict will be released in today's hearing and the SC will not give any timeline.

Major Russian air strikes kill 21 in Ukraine cities

Kyiv says counterattack nearly ready with 'iron fist'

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Kyiv said on Friday it was nearly ready to launch a huge ground assault to retake occupied land, after Russia hurled missiles at cities as people slept overnight, killing at least 21 civilians in its first large-scale air strikes in nearly two months. The war is coming to a crucial juncture after a months-long Russian winter offensive that gained little ground despite the bloodiest fighting so far. Kyiv is preparing a counteroffensive using hundreds of tanks and armoured vehicles sent by the West, hoping to drive Russia out of the nearly a fifth of the country that it occupies and claims to have annexed. "As soon as there is God's will, the weather and a decision by commanders, we will do it," Ukrainian De-

fence Minister Oleskii Reznikov told an on-line news briefing. Ukraine was "to a high percentage ready" to launch its campaign, he said. Its new modern weapons would serve as an "iron fist". In the central town of Uman, firefighters battled a raging blaze at a residential apartment building that had been struck on an upper floor by a Russian missile. Officials said at least 19 civilians were killed there, including several children. Rescue workers clambered through a huge pile of smouldering rubble, carrying a body away on a stretcher. A man wearing a face mask sobbed as he watched, and a woman came to comfort him. "No one is left," said Serhii Lubivskiy, 58, who survived inside a flat on the seventh floor, rescued by firefighters from the balcony where he escaped with his wife after

the explosion blocked their front door. He wept as he took a deep drag from a cigarette and looked up at the smouldering gaps in the building where adjacent flats had been blasted away. "My neighbours are gone. No one is left," he said. "Only the kitchens were left standing." The wave of Russian missile attacks overnight was the first since early March. Russia had launched such attacks almost weekly for most of the winter, but they tapered off as spring arrived, with Western countries saying Moscow was running out of missiles. Moscow said the targets of its overnight strikes were locations of Ukrainian reserve troops, which it had struck successfully, preventing them from reaching the front. It supplied no evidence to support this. In the southeastern city of Dnipro, a missile struck a house, killing a

two-year-old child and a 31-year-old woman, regional governor Serhiy Lysak said.

The capital Kyiv was also rocked by explosions in the early hours, as were the central cities of Kremenchuk and Poltava, and Mykolaiv in the south. Two people were wounded in the town of Ukrayinka just south of Kyiv, officials said.

Closer to the front, in Donetsk, an eastern city controlled by Russian proxies since 2014, a Russian-installed official said seven people had been killed by Ukrainian shelling that hit a minibus.

The Ukrainian military said it had shot down 21 out of 23 cruise missiles fired by Russia. Moscow says it does not deliberately target civilians. Kyiv says strikes on cities far from the front lines have no military purpose apart from intimidating and harming civilians, a war crime.

PM announces plans for \$10-14 billion refinery: Malik

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik on Friday said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had announced to establish a refinery that would cost between \$10 to \$14 billion. Speaking at a news conference, the minister stated that the government had been actively working on a new energy policy that would focus on creating energy resources from LPG, LMG, and solar. The policy would also promote energy conservation to ensure sustainable development, he added.

Musadik emphasized that the new policy would bring an end to the monopoly of a few companies that had been exploiting consumers by charging exorbitant prices. The policy would encourage competition among companies, which would lead to competitive prices for consumers. Landlords and building owners would also no longer be able to exploit tenants by forcing them to pay high energy bills for privately supplied energy resources.

In addition, he added, the government had made it possible to obtain oil from Russia at discounted prices, a feat that previous governments had failed to achieve. He also urged the people to adopt an energy conservation culture not just for themselves, but also for future generations. - APP

Brazil's Lula decrees six new Indigenous reserves

BRASILIA: Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Friday decreed six new Indigenous reserves, the first after a dearth of such expansion under his farright predecessor Jair Bolsonaro. Under the decree, Indigenous people are guaranteed exclusive use of natural resources on these lands, considered by scientists as a bulwark against Amazon deforestation - a major challenge in the fight against global warming.

Lula signed the official decrees on the final day of a gathering of Indigenous people from around the country in the capital Brasilia. "It is a time-consuming process, but we are going to make sure that as many Indigenous reserves as possible are legalized," the president said.

"If we want to achieve zero deforestation by 2030, we need registered Indigenous reserves." Under four years of Bolsonaro, who had vowed to not cede "one more centimeter" of land to Brazil's Indigenous communities, average annual deforestation had increased by 75 percent compared to the previous decade. Bolsonaro instigated policies that favored the agriculture and logging industries, which are mostly responsible for deforestation. - APP



ISLAMABAD: PM Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of Cabinet committee on energy. - DNA

Masood wants US to restore military sales for Pakistan

- Cautions about serious perils of policy of imbalance in South Asia

DNA

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Masood Khan said it was important that the US restores - for Pakistan - Foreign Military Financing and Foreign Military Sales, suspended by the previous Administration. Addressing a conference on "The Future of Pakistan-US relations" at renowned US think-tank Wilson Centre in Washington, he cautioned about serious perils of policy of imbalance in South Asia. He also urged US to "revive its role on strategic stability in South Asia".

He said after a brief period of uncertain-

ty, Pakistan and US were successfully recalibrating and rejuvenating relations in wake of changing circumstances. Terming Pak-US ties as "a relationship of the future generations", he said the results in a short span of time were impressive. Referring to frequent high level contacts between Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Pak-US dialogues on health, energy, climate change, counter-narcotics, counterterrorism and defence and the recently held Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Ministerial Council meeting, the ambassador said that these processes were producing results and

defining pathways for future growth. He highlighted confluence of shared values and ideas that bind the people of Pakistan and the United States and brought them into alliances for advancing shared strategic purposes including rolling back aggression in Afghanistan and combating the scourge of terrorism. The ambassador said that Pakistan's foreign minister would be attending SCO Conference in Goa in early May. He said his country valued the US encouragement to India and Pakistan to engage, but beyond that, the US could act as a catalyst to help resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute which has kept the region on the brink of war.

US urges Pak to implement IMF reforms

WASHINGTON: The United States of America has urged Pakistan to implement the conditions laid forth by IMF in order to put the country back on track leading to stable economy. The South Asian country has been scrambling to revive the IMF loan programme for months amid depleting foreign exchange reserves. It hopes release of the crucial funds in coming days as it has met the global lender's conditions, including assurances for external finances. "The reform(s) that Pakistan and the IMF agreed to are not easy, but it's crucial that Pakistan take these actions to bring the country back to sound financial footing, avoid falling into further debt and grow Pakistan's economy," said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Horst while addressing a conference on "The Future of Pakistan-US relations" at renowned US think-tank Wilson Centre in Washington. She said that Pak-US relationship was "one of the most consequential for each other, for South Asia and for the world. - DNA

Spain, Portugal swelter as April temperature records broken

Spain's southern city of Cordoba registered 38.8 Celsius (101.8 Fahrenheit) at its airport

CORDOBA: Mainland Spain and Portugal have broken temperature records for April, as the Iberian neighbours swelter in an early-season heatwave that has exacerbated a long drought in some regions. Spain's southern city of Cordoba registered 38.8 Celsius (101.8 Fahrenheit) at its airport on Thursday, beating the previous record of 38.6 C in the eastern city of Elche in 2011, weather agency AEMET said on Friday. Spain's absolute April record remains the 40.2 C reached in 2013 on Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands. In neighbouring Portugal, the temperature in the central town of Mora reached 36.9 C, breaking the record of 36.0 C set in April 1945, its weather agency said. Temperatures started dropping on Friday in Portugal but the heatwave persisted in parts of Spain. On Friday, Madrid opened its urban "beach" - a series of splash fountains along the Manzanares river - a month earlier than usual. "Just imagine how summer is going to be if we are having this much heat in spring," said Patricia Solozaga as her daughter Sofia played happily under the jets of water. AEMET forecast cooler weather from Saturday. - Agencies

Heavy battles in Sudan despite truce

KHARTOUM: Fighting raged in Sudan on Friday, despite rival forces agreeing to extend a truce aimed to stem nearly two weeks of warfare that has killed hundreds and caused widespread destruction. In the war-ravaged western Darfur region, scores have been killed in days of bitter urban battles in the city of El Geneina, the United Nations says.

Black clouds rose over the capital Khartoum as foreign governments scrambled to organise mass evacuations of their citizens, with Turkey's defence ministry reporting Friday that one of their military transport aircraft had come under fire. There have been multiple truce efforts since fighting broke out on April 15 between Sudan's army led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanded by his former deputy and fellow coup leader Mohamed Hamdan Daglo. All have failed.

On Thursday, the two sides agreed to extend a repeatedly broken ceasefire for three more days, with the United States, Saudi Arabia, the African Union, the UN and others hoping it would help forge a "more durable cessation of hostilities". Since a power struggle between Bur-

han and Daglo erupted into violence, fighter jets have pounded RSF positions in densely packed districts of Khartoum, as fighters on the ground exchanged volleys of artillery and heavy machine gun fire.

In some parts of the city of some five million people trenches have been dug, as gunmen battle each other street by street. At least 512 people have been killed and 4,193 wounded in the fighting, according to health ministry figures, although the real death toll is likely much higher.

Fighting has also spread across Sudan, especially in long-troubled Darfur, where witnesses reported intense conflict and looting. The Darfur Bar Association, a civil society group, said fighters were "launching rockets at houses" in the West Darfur state capital, El Geneina, some 1,100 kilometres (685 miles) west of Khartoum. It also reported firing from "rifles, machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons". "There is no food except what people have stored at home," one resident said, asking not to be named. Analysts have warned that conflict between the army and RSF could spark multiple other militias to exploit the chaos and settle old scores. UN human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said

96 people were reported to have been killed in El Geneina since Monday. The UN was "concerned at the serious risk of violence escalating in West Darfur", Shamdasani said, warning that the hostilities between the military and RSF "have triggered intercommunal violence". Fighting has spread "nearly all over the city" and fighters have looted and torched "markets, public buildings, aid warehouses and banks", the Bar Association added.

It urged Burhan and Daglo to "immediately stop this foolish war that is being waged on the backs of civilians". Darfur is still reeling from the devastating war that raged in the 2000s when then hardline president Omar al-Bashir crushed ethnic-minority rebels by creating the Janjaweed militia to carry out atrocities, a force that later formed the basis of Daglo's RSF. The scorched-earth campaign left at least 300,000 people dead and close to 2.5 million displaced, according to UN figures, and saw Bashir charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court. In El Fasher, state capital of North Darfur, medics are struggling to cope with an influx of wounded, said Mohamed Gibreel from Doctors Without Borders (MSF). - Agencies

Government allows up to 20% rise in drug prices

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the federal cabinet on Friday gave its approval for a 20% hike in prices of essential drugs for a second time in less than three months, making them out of the reach of the poor people amid soaring inflation. The decision was made during the ECC meeting held with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Ishaq Dar, according to a statement issued by the Finance Division. The ECC, on February 10, approved an increase in the prices of 20 medicines, including paracetamol.

"To ensure continuous availability of drugs in the market, the ECC allowed as a one-time dispensation, allowed manufacturers and importers to increase their existing MRPs of essential drugs equal to 70% increase in CPI (with a cap of 14%) and MRPs of all other drugs and lower priced drugs an increase up to 70% in CPI (with a cap of 20%) on the basis of average CPI for current year i.e 1st July, 2022 to 01st April 2023 with condition that it should be considered as an annual increase for the financial year 2023-24 and no increase under this category will be granted in next financial year," read the statement.

Border Health Services issue advisory on Mpox

ISLAMABAD: The Border Health Services on Friday issued Mpox (Monkeypox) advisory to the health authorities to enhance screening of inbound passengers at all international airports on the recent case detection in the country. According to an official of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, the ministry and National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) at the National Institute of Health (NIH) are vigilantly monitoring the situation. He added they are monitoring the situation both at the national and global levels while keeping all the relevant stakeholders on board for ensuring preparedness, timely response, and containment of Mpox cases in Pakistan. He said that the NIH, provincial health departments and Border Health Services at all Airports, District Health authorities at Islamabad and provinces have been advised to ensure surveillance through laboratory diagnostics, contact tracing, rapid identification of suspected cases and clusters of infections as well as the source of infection in order to provide optimal clinical care, isolate cases to prevent further transmission, identify, manage and follow-up contacts to recognize early signs of infection, identify risk groups for infection and for severe disease, protect frontline health workers, and tailor effective control and prevention measures. He said that as there is no evidence of localized transmission of Mpox as of now in Pakistan, the risk of the international spread of disease from Pakistan remains low. WHO does not recommend any restrictions on trade on the currently available information regarding Mpox outbreaks. - DNA

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