



# Islamabad POST

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**China's Xi Jinping willing to call Ukraine's Zelenskiy**

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**Kremlin sees no prospect of China mediation**

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**Hafeez gets MCC honorary life membership**

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## Briefs

**Elections will ensue chaos**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: As the Election Commission of Pakistan is gearing up for holding elections in Punjab on May 14, Federal Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah reiterated on Thursday that controversial elections would ensue chaos in the country. Addressing a ceremony at the Lawyers Complex, the PML-N Punjab president said the PML-N believed in serving people adding that the lawyers' fraternity was an essential part of our community. "The Lawyers Complex will incur Rs2billion in cost for construction and it will be completed in a year," he added. He went on to say that an attempt was being made to hold controversial elections adding that the PML-N was not afraid of elections.

**Imran Khan weakening democracy**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to the prime minister on Kashmir Affairs, Qamar Zaman Kaira, accused former PM Imran Khan of weakening democracy during a National Assembly session on Thursday. Mr Kaira's statement came in response to the ongoing debate surrounding the implementation of court decisions regarding the Punjab elections. According to the PPP leader, the court created a crisis and was involved in dividing the nation. He further criticized the judiciary, saying that they should not only give orders but also suggest ways to run the country. Mr Kaira also highlighted the demand for a full court bench to hear the Punjab and KP election case, which was not paid heed to by the court.

**Sehr, Iftar Timing**

**Ramazan 16, 1444**

Sehr: 04:21 am  
Iftar: 06:37 pm  
Fiqua-e-Jafria  
Sehr: 04:11 am  
Iftar: 06:47 pm

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North Korea ready to hold nuclear test at any time - Page 07

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## Resolution passed NA rejects SC's Punjab polls verdict Calls it a 'minority decision', urges PM to not obey it

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Thursday passed a resolution rejecting the decision of a three-member bench of the Supreme Court in the Punjab elections delay case. The resolution was moved by Balochistan Awami Party legislator Khalid Magi, who read it out on the floor of the house. "This house rejects the minority decision of the three-member bench and binds the prime minister and the cabinet not to implement the unconstitutional and unlawful decision," Magi said as he read out the resolution. The resolution referred to an earlier one passed in the NA on March 28. It stated that the previous resolution had demanded the implementation of the "majority decision taken by four SC judges" and that the top court should refrain from meddling in the country's political and administrative affairs. "But it was not accepted," the resolution said, lamenting that the "stance of no political party barring one was heard". "Instead, parliament's clear resolution and the majority decision of the four judges were completely ignored and the minority opinion of the three-member bench was imposed." The resolution said this was in violation of the apex court's traditions, precedents and procedures. "Parliament rejects the minority decision of the three-member bench and in accordance with the Constitution and law, declares that the decision of the majority bench is in force". The resolution said the house also endorsed the verdict issued by the Justice QaziFaez Isa-led bench regarding the postponement of cases filed under Article 184 (3) of the Constitution until amendments were made to Supreme Court

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## PM calls NSC meeting today

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Shehbaz Sharif has convened National Security Committee (NSC) meeting on Friday amid ongoing political, economic and terrorism challenges. The meeting will be attended by cabinet members of the prime ministers, services chiefs and others. Sources said the heads of the intelligence agencies would brief the participants on overall security situation in the country. They would also give briefing on security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab where the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has announced elections on May 14 in line with the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Sources added that the ongoing economic turmoil would also come under discussion as the South Asian country is reeling under record inflation amid delay in revival of the loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Pakistan's loan programme is yet to materialize months after it imposed additional taxes and increased energy prices and allowed free floating of currency to meet conditions laid forth by the IMF. The nation has missed multiple deadlines to revive the deal.

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## Army committed to defend sovereignty

COAS visits forward areas along Line of control (LOC)

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir said on Thursday that the army was resolved to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan against "all kinds of threats". According to a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the army chief made the remarks while visiting forward areas along the Line of Control (LOC) today. The army chief was received by the Rawalpindi Corps Commander and briefed on the situation along the LoC and operational preparedness of the deployed formations. The ISPR statement said Gen Munir met officers and troops on the forward positions and emphasised upon the troops to extend all-out support to the local population, remain steadfast and discharge their duties with utmost sincerity and devotion.



"The COAS appreciated officers and men for maintaining continued vigil, remarkable operational preparedness and high state of morale," it stated. "Pakistan Army is resolved to defend sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan against all kinds of threat," the ISPR quoted the army chief as saying. He also said that the army was determined to support the "just cause of Kashmiris and seeks resolution of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with UN resolutions".

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## US envoy assures Dar of support to overcome crises

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador Donald Blome Thursday called on Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar. The minister, during the meeting, spoke about the deep-rooted historic and durable bilateral relations with the United States on economic and trade fronts, said a news release. Finance Minister Dar briefed the envoy about the country's economic outlook and the challenges being faced by it.

He shared the pragmatic policy decisions being taken by the government in order to arrest the economic decline and to steer the economy towards a positive trajectory leading to economic stability and growth. The finance minister also informed the envoy on the progress in talks held with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and reiterated

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## IMF receives Saudi Arabia's assurance

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Dr Aisha Ghaus Pasha said on Thursday that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has received a commitment from Saudi Arabia regarding funding for Pakistan. Last month, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar had said that financing commitments from friendly countries were the last hurdle in securing the IMF deal, which Pakistan needs to stave off default. In a parliamentary address last week, Prime Minister Shehbaz

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif inaugurates Islamabad Lawyers Complex. - DNA

Apex Court verdict

## PM urges stakeholders to respect law

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday said the government would accept the decision of the full bench of the Supreme Court in the case for elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Speaking at the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Islamabad Lawyers Complex here, he said however, those judges who recused themselves should not be made part of that bench. He recalled that Justice Munir was the creator of the principle of necessity which took Pakistan in a certain direction. He said, "We respect Supreme Court and justices and their decisions should apply to everyone." Talking about proceedings of the Supreme Court in the case for elections,

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## IHC extends Khan's bail in eight cases

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court has extended PTI Chairman Imran Khan's interim bail in eight cases including the Judicial Complex attack until April 18. The IHC on Thursday also accepted former prime minister's applications seeking exemption from appearance in all the eight cases. The court, however, ordered Imran Khan to appear before the trial court on April 18. While hearing a plea for providing security to Imran Khan, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) earlier sought the rules about security to former prime ministers. "If a prisoner is in jail, he also has rights.

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## Govt disobeying SC orders

# PTI says ready to hold nationwide protest movement

Fawad hopes the institutions will back the Constitution

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice President Fawad Chaudhry has said that they are ready to launch a nationwide movement if the incumbent government rejects the Supreme Court's (SC) verdict, media reported on Thursday. Fawad Chaudhry said that national institutions will protect the Constitution. He added that it is inevitable to end political instability to bring economic stability to the country. The PTI vice president expressed hopes that the national institutions will back the Constitution instead of a government. He admitted that the government has the right to file a review petition against the SC verdict in the election delay case. He announced that PTI will launch a massive movement if all constitutional paths are closed. "There is only one way to delay election if the government commits a constitutional violation and martial

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## PTI moves SC for KP election date

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Thursday filed a petition in the Supreme Court, pleading with the court to order the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) governor to announce the date of the elections. The development comes a day after a three-member bench of the top court set aside an order of the Election Commission of Pakistan to put off the polls in Punjab, ordering elections on May 14. The apex court had ruled that it would look into the matter related to polls in KP if

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## Iran, Saudi top diplomats meet

Both the countries agree to resume flights

BEIJING: The foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met in Beijing on Thursday, paving the way for normalised ties under a surprise China-brokered deal. Tehran and Riyadh announced an agreement last month to restore relations that had been severed seven years ago. The shock rapprochement between Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and Iran, has the potential to reshape relations across a region characterised by turbulence for decades. Iranian Foreign

Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan "negotiated and exchanged opinions with the emphasis on the official resumption of bilateral relations and the executive steps towards the reopening of the embassies and consulates of the two countries", Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement. Saudi state TV channel Al Ekhbariya reported that the two ministers held a meeting in Beijing to "discuss implementing the agreement", airing footage of the pair shaking hands in front of Saudi and Iranian flags and then talking and smiling.

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## Briefs

## NA rejects SC's Punjab...

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Rules 1980 regarding the CJP's discretionary powers to form benches. Referring to the SC registrar's circular disregarding the order, the resolution said that it viewed the move "to stop the implementation of this decision through an executive circular" with deep concern. Commenting on the larger SC bench's decision to override Justice Isa's order, the resolution said the House had reservations over the fixing of this matter before a "controversial bench" for hearing in haste and "the issuance of an immediate ruling in it within a few minutes".

## PM calls NSC...

FROM PAGE 01  
The Washington-based lender has asked the cash-strapped Pakistan to seek commitments for new loans from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) before it releases the funds. However, hopes have been rekindled for receiving the much-needed loan tranche stalled since last year as the global lender confirmed that it had received assurance from Saudi Arabia for providing new loan worth \$2 billion to Pakistan.

## US envoy assures...

FROM PAGE 01  
The commitment of the government to complete the programme. Donald Blome on the occasion expressed confidence in the policies and programmes of the government being taken for the economic sustainability of the country and the socio-economic uplift of the masses. He extended his support to further promote bilateral economic, investment and trade relations between both countries. The two sides also exchanged views on matters of common interest and showed their interest in enhancing the existing bilateral relations between the countries. They also talked about various economic avenues in which both countries can further strengthen their ties.

## IMF receives...

FROM PAGE 01  
Sharif had also said that the IMF wants external financing commitments fulfilled from friendly countries before it releases bailout funds. The international lender has been negotiating with Islamabad since early February to resume \$1.1 billion in funding held since November, which is part of a \$7 billion bailout agreed in 2019. With central bank reserves falling to critical levels, hardly enough for four weeks of imports, the IMF tranche is critical for the country as it will also unlock other external financing avenues, helping Pakistan avert a default on its obligations. "IMF has indicated to us that they received correspondence from Saudi Arabia on the funding commitment," Pasha said. "Our situation has improved and talks with UAE are also underway," Pasha said, adding that Pakistan would need a similar commitment from the Emirates as well before things with the IMF progress.

## PTI says ready to...

FROM PAGE 01  
law is imposed. The nation will decide its fate if martial law is imposed." He alleged that the government is amending judicial laws just to facilitate PML-N Quaid, Nawaz Sharif. Fawad Chaudhry said that the crisis is prevailing due to the stubbornness of the government in not implementing the Constitution which states to organise elections in 90 days after the dissolution of the assembly. The PTI leader said that the rulers want to snatch the voting rights of the nation. He added that all decisions of the caretaker ministers will be unconstitutional after April 22. He asked the election commission to send a reference to the Supreme Court and begin the process of constituting a new caretaker government.

## UAE Ambassador's Football cup 2023



ISLAMABAD: The Football team of the Embassy of United Arab Emirates won UAE Ambassador Football Cup 2023. In first picture Ambassador of UAE, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran and Thailand posing for a picture with the winning team; in second picture the captain of the winning team gets trophy from the Ambassador of UAE Hamad Alzaabi and in the third picture players holding Ambassador of UAE to celebrate their win. – DNA

## Empower Sports will support Pakistani girls to excel in sports

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) Women's Development Committee Chairperson Malika Junaid said that Pakistani women have potential in volleyball and other sports to shine the county name as well as Empower Sports also aims to empower women in different sports to bring medals at international level. Talking to media Malika Junaid, who is also founder of Empower Sports Academy based in United States, said that we are support-

ing the national women's volleyball team in the first phase and planning their various training camps to improve their technique and skills, adding that we want to bring women's volleyball team to higher level by providing good coaching from foreign coaches for some good results in the international competitions. "Pakistan women's volleyball team will play international events including South Asian Games", Malika said, adding that we organised the national women's volleyball championship recently held in which we



have prepared a pool of talented players as well. She said that the aim of Empower Sports Academy is to empower women in sports through providing all possible facilities and environment which they need to excel their fitness, skills and game in different sports as they have the potential to zeal the country's name globally. "By providing the positive environment in women's sports, a large number of other female players will also be attracted towards the sports", Malika said adding that every stakeholder including busi-

ness community should have to play their positive role for a good cause as our aim is not only to provide opportunities for women to only play sports but also to develop the capacity on them to lead, train and support many more girls. "Pakistani-origin living in the United States said that her efforts are not only to create a balance in the society but also to highlight the awareness among the people that if the best platform is provided to women athletes, she can bring pride to the country through bringing medals", she concluded.

## Benzema hits treble as Madrid smash Barca

BARCELONA: Karim Benzema struck a hat-trick as Real Madrid hammered Barcelona 4-0 at Camp Nou to reach the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, progressing 4-1 on aggregate. Vinicius Junior opened the scoring just before the break as Carlo Ancelotti's side mounted a spectacular comeback from their one-goal semi-final first leg deficit, with Benzema adding a second-half treble. After netting three at the weekend against Real Valladolid in La Liga, Benzema repeated the trick to humiliate Barcelona on a painful night for coach Xavi Hernandez in front of almost 95,000 distraught fans. Los Blancos trail their arch-rivals by 12 points in La Liga and were beaten by Barca in the Spanish Super Cup final in January, but triumphed here to reach the Copa final for the first time since 2014, where they will face Osasuna. "It was a complete game -

when you play a complete game, you win 4-0 like that," said Ancelotti. "This is the most important moment of the season and when we're at the right temperature (like this), we're good." Madrid turfed out the record 31-time cup winners with a muscular performance on a spiky night in Barcelona, where they also ended a demoralising run of three consecutive Clasico defeats. Barcelona's Sergi Roberto said letting in Vinicius' goal on the stroke of half-time was a huge blow. "Their goal at the end of the first half killed us, we didn't deserve to let in that goal. I think we were better in the first half," the midfielder told RTVE. "We created more chances that we didn't put away, and that goal hurt our morale. In the second half they scored the second and we couldn't play our game." The Catalan said defeat would not damage Barcelona's title bid in the final weeks of the season.

"Now we have a considerable points distance, it will not affect us, we have to continue and go for the league," he added. Xavi was without injured quartet Ousmane Dembele, Pedri, Frenkie de Jong and Andreas Christensen, and eventually it told. The game started at a furious pace and intensity, both teams keen to reach the final, but absolutely desperate not to be knocked out by the other. Barca coach Xavi was booked for protesting a foul as tempers boiled over, while Gavi and Vinicius were also issued yellow cards as they scrapped. Thousands of Barcelona fans chanted Lionel Messi's name in the 10th minute, amid speculation he could leave Paris Saint-Germain, and they would have dearly loved some of the Argentine's magic. Los Blancos took the lead in stoppage time at the end of the first half, when they showed their prowess on the counter-attack. – APP

## 'Tennis missed a chance to ban Russians'

LONDON: Women's world number one Iga Swiatek says tennis authorities missed an opportunity to ban Russian and Belarusian players outright after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but the moment has passed to do so now, she told the BBC. The 21-year-old Pole has been a staunch supporter of her Ukrainian rivals criticising the WTA for not doing enough to support them. Unlike other sports which imposed an outright ban following the invasion in February 2022, tennis officials permitted those from Russia and Belarus to continue playing, but as neutral athletes. They were allowed to play three of the four Grand Slam tournaments, with Wimbledon the exception. Authorities punished Wimbledon organisers by not awarding the tournament ranking points, but Russian and Belarusian players will be able to compete this year after the ban was lifted. Both countries were also barred from team events like the Davis Cup, in which Russia were the defending champions. "I heard that after World War Two, German players were not allowed as well as Japanese and Italian, and I feel like this kind of thing would show the Russian government that maybe it's not worth it," Swiatek told the BBC. "I know it's a small thing because we are just athletes, a little piece in the world but I feel like sport is pretty important and sport has always been used in propaganda. – Agencies

## Six stadiums to host Asian Cup

DOHA: Six of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums will be used for the Asian Cup to be staged in the Gulf state next January, the AFC has announced. But the Lusail stadium used for the World Cup final and the iconic 974 stadium made from containers will not be part of the 24-nation tournament to run from January 12 to February 10. The Asian Cup was originally meant to be held this year in China but was switched and delayed because of the country's coronavirus restrictions. Asian Football Confederation president Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa said that based on Qatar's hosting of the World Cup last year the Asian Cup will be "a true spectacle never before experienced in Asian football history." "We have every faith that they will showcase their unrivalled hosting capabilities, state-of-the-art infrastructure and warm hospitality." – Agencies

## Hafeez awarded with MCC honorary life membership

DNA

LAHORE: Former Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez was awarded with Honorary Life Membership by the Marylebone Cricket Club on Wednesday. Hafeez played 55 Tests, 218 ODIs and 119 T20Is over the course of his international career while accumulating over 12,000 runs. The all-rounder was also a handy off-spinner with more than 200 wickets for Pakistan. Hafeez was a member of the Pakistan

team, which clinched the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy and represented his country in three 50-over (2007, 2011 and 2019) and six T20 World Cups (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2021). His last international match was the ICC Men's T20 World Cup semi-final in November 2021. Complete list of players honoured by MCC Merissa Aguilera – West Indies (2008–2019), M.S. Dhoni – India (2004–2019), Jhulan Goswami – India (2002–2022), Jenny Gunn – England (2004–2019),

Muhammad Hafeez – Pakistan (2003–2021), Rachael Haynes – Australia (2009–2022), Laura Marsh – England (2006–2019), Eoin Morgan – England (2006–2022), Mashrafe Mortaza – Bangladesh (2001–2020), Kevin Pietersen – England (2005–2014), Suresh Raina – India (2005–2018), Mithali Raj – India (1999–2022), Amy Satterthwaite – New Zealand (2007–2022), Yuvraj Singh – India (2000–2017), Anya Shrubsole – England (2008–2022), Dale Steyn – South Africa (2004–2020), Ross Taylor – New Zealand (2006–2022) "We are thrilled to be able to announce our newest cohort of Honorary Life Members of MCC, as we prepare for the new international summer," Guy Lavender, Chief Executive and Secretary of MCC, said.

## PTI moves SC for KP...

FROM PAGE 01  
any petition is filed in this regard. The petition, filed by KP Assembly Speaker Mushtaq Ghani, pleaded with the apex court to order the government to give the date of the elections nearest to the period of 90 days. "The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) should be directed to issue the election schedule as soon as it gets the date," it demanded. "All the federal and provincial institutions should be ordered to support the ECP for the elections," it added.

## Iran, Saudi top...

FROM PAGE 01  
In a readout from state broadcaster CCTV, Beijing hailed "the first official meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries in more than seven years" and Beijing's "active mediation" in the diplomacy. During phone conversations in March, the ministers had vowed to meet during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which ends later in April. Saudi officials had said the ministerial meeting was the next step in restoring ties, and an Iranian statement last week spoke of "the constructive path of relations between the two countries."

## PM urges stakeholders

FROM PAGE 01  
he mentioned that a nine-member bench was formed which was later shortened to three members as some judges recused. In the same case, political parties were not made part of the proceedings despite requests, he noted.

## IHC extends Khan's...

FROM PAGE 01  
Today, we are judges, tomorrow we won't be. Everyone has rights. What level of security is provided to former prime ministers?" IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq inquired from the additional attorney general.



## Briefs

### Funeral of martyred soldier held

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Funeral prayers of Sepoy Hamid Rasool who embraced martyrdom during an Intelligence Based Operation (IBO) in Shin Warsak, South Waziristan District, were offered at Frontier Corps (FC) Headquarters Wana initially and subsequently in his hometown Jaswal, district Rawalpindi with full military honours. Senior serving & retired Officers/ Soldiers including the injured comrades of the same operation, relatives and a large number of people from civil society attended the funeral prayers. Armed Forces of Pakistan stand firm against the nefarious designs of enemies to spoil the hard-earned peace. Such sacrifices will not go in vain and further strengthen our resolve to take the fight against terrorism to its logical conclusion.

### China concerned over Palestine situation

BEIJING: China on Thursday expressed deep concerns over Israeli police clashes with Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and called on all parties, Israel in particular, to show calm and restraint and immediately stop all words and deeds that might heighten tensions, in order to prevent further escalation of the situation. China is deeply concerned over the recent escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Mao Ning said during her regular briefing held here. She said that the issue of Jerusalem's status is complicated and sensitive and added, parties concerned should act in accordance with relevant UN resolutions, and earnestly respect and maintain the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Mao Ning said that in the meanwhile the international community needs to act with a stronger sense of urgency and take concrete steps in advancing the two-state solution, work for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question at an early date, and realize the peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. According to reports, on April 5, Israeli police clashed with Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, leaving many Palestinians injured. - APP

### Rupee stages recovery against US dollar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Thursday was the day for the Pakistani rupee to rebound and gave the US dollar a taste of its own medicine in the interbank market. According to the information forwarded by the forex dealers, the local currency hit back at the greenback recovering by Rs1.85 on the heels of some positive news on the economic front, and was currently being traded at Rs286. On Wednesday, negative economic indicators and uncertainty about IMF programme revival pushed the rupee towards a record low against the US dollar. The rupee closed at 287.29, a loss of Rs2.25 or 0.8%. This is the lowest level for the Pakistani rupee since it hit 285.02 against the greenback in March this year. However, some positive news developed on Wednesday evening after the markets were closed including a statement from the governor of State Bank of Pakistan, suggesting the International Monetary Fund can make a good news about Pakistan anytime. The SSBP governor speaking in Islamabad further said the IMF can make a good announcement for Pakistan anytime as the country has fulfilled all the public finance and monetary requirements as demanded by the global lender.

# Bakhmut: Wagner advances as Ukraine readies offensive

## Russian mercenaries say they have seized the centre of Bakhmut as Ukraine's troops train for new offensives

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Russian forces spearheaded by mercenaries of the Wagner Group seized the centre of the eastern city of Bakhmut during the 58th week of the war. Yet Ukrainian defenders were still holding the Russian army at bay, and their commanders said the Russian offensive was now clearly waning. At the same time, pro-Russian civilians were evacuating southern occupied regions as thousands of Ukrainian soldiers completed their overseas training for a counter-offensive that could come later this month. Wagner mercenaries made advances into the centre of Bakhmut on March 31. Geolocated footage showed them within 400 metres (1,300 feet) of the town hall. Two days later, after an overnight battle Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

described as "especially hot", geolocated footage showed Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin raising a Russian flag over the city hall. "From a legal point of view, Bakhmut has been taken," Prigozhin said in an audio message. Wagner was also understood to have gained complete control of the AZOM industrial complex. By April 3, Russian forces had likely advanced in southern Bakhmut closer to the Avangard Stadium, and Russian military bloggers claimed on April 4 that Wagner forces captured the Bakhmut-1 railway station. Zelenskyy appeared to reassure Ukrainians wary of a repeat of the siege of Mariupol, when he said "corresponding decisions" would be made in Bakhmut as the situation developed. Some 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers were taken prisoner last year from the Azovstal plant when they were surrounded by Russian forces and were ordered to surrender.

Yet Russia's attacks were fewer in number, Serhiy Cherevaty, spokesman for Ukraine's eastern forces, said. "If earlier the occupiers stormed our positions from 35 to more than 50 times a day, in recent days their number has decreased from 17 to 25," Cherevaty said on April 1. "The enemy will not be able to significantly change his so-called 'metre by metre' tactics ... and, as the Kharkiv operation showed, these metres occupied by the enemy return to us very quickly." British military intelligence agreed that Russia's winter campaign to seize the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by March 31 was flagging. "Eighty days on, it is increasingly apparent that this project has failed," it said. "Russian forces have made only marginal gains at the cost of tens of thousands of casualties," the ministry wrote. Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar

said Bakhmut had been Russia's most expensive battle of the entire war in men and matériel. Russian casualties certainly seemed to be going up. On April 2, the Ukrainian defence ministry estimated the Russian dead of the previous week at a staggering 4,000. Russian military bloggers said the campaigns for Bakhmut and Avdiivka to the south had to be won in time to prepare defences against a Ukrainian counter-offensive they thought likely to come between Orthodox Easter, on April 16, and Labour Day, May 9. "If our army cannot solve these problems, then larger-scale offensives are not even worth thinking about," said one. "In some areas, the enemy is noticeably nervous, because time is against them, and there are fewer human resources for storming our positions," said Ukraine's commander of ground forces Col-Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi.

### Gandapur arrested; Imran condemns arrest

-Claims he has been arrested on orders from 'above'

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur was on Thursday arrested in Dera Ismail (DI) Khan following a five-hour-long standoff. According to details, the police arrested the PTI leader from the premises of Peshawar High Court Dera Bench. The police team - headed by DPO Dera - shifted Ali Amin Gandapur to an unknown location. The former federal minister was present in the premises of High Court for almost 5 hours. Reports said that former federal minister for Kashmir affairs and GB was arrested from outside the high court premises as he had taken refuge in the court to avoid arrest. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the United States of America to Pakistan, Donald Blome calls on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar. - DNA

## Israel retaliates after intercepting rockets from Lebanon

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant had been briefed on the details of events on Israel's northern border, a ministry spokesman said

JERUSALEM: The Israeli army said it intercepted rocket fire from Lebanon Thursday after clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians inside Islam's third-holiest site drew warnings of retaliation from around the region. Israel then struck targets in southern Lebanon, state media in Lebanon reported, without giving any details of any casualties. "A rocket was fired

from Lebanon into Israeli territory and was successfully intercepted," an army statement said as Israeli media reported a "salvo" of projectiles had been fired. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which came amid heightened tensions after Israeli police clashed with Palestinians inside Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque before dawn Wednesday and

again in the evening. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was "receiving continuous updates about the security situation and will conduct an assessment with the heads of the security establishment," his office said. Emergency services reported a man had been lightly wounded by shrapnel and a female was injured while running to the shelter. Warning sirens sounded in the town of Shlomi and in Moshav Betzet and the Galilee in northern Israel, the army said. "The minister will soon conduct a situation assessment with senior officials in the defence establishment." - APP

## Rashid dares govt to move reference against judges

ISLAMABAD: Awami Muslim League president and former interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has dared the PDM ruling alliance to bring a reference against three judges as the entire nation is standing behind the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Speaking behind the Islamabad High Court here on Thursday, Rashid said 240 million people were standing like a rock with the apex court judges. He said it was only Maryam Nawaz's wish to move a reference against honourable justices. They are planning to table a resolution [against judges] in the parliament, he said and added that many such resolutions have been passed in the past. Regarding elections in the Punjab, the former minister taunted the ruling alliance that they were not eligible to go the



masses. "The nation is preparing for elections, they are trying to evade the vote. Out of 13 parties [in the PDM], candidates of only three parties have submitted their nomination papers," Rashid added. He ridiculed the government saying that they have no opinion of theirs as "vote [masses] is not with them." He claimed that Imran Khan has a day ago said that they would be humiliated. Imran's popularity has increased by their foolishness, he continued. "They were conspiring [against us] but we will use people's power against them," Rashid quipped. He criticised the government for adding to their miseries and said people were dying in an attempt to get a bag of flour. - DNA

## Israeli raid risks igniting violence: Arab League

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the situation had been caused by "extremists" who barricaded themselves inside the mosque with weapons, stones and fireworks

### OIC holds an emergency meeting

JEDDAH: The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will hold an emergency, open-ended meeting of the Executive Committee at the level of Permanent Representatives, on Saturday, 8 April 2023, at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting called for by the State of Palestine and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is expected to discuss the incursions and attacks carried out by the Israeli occupation forces against Al-Aqsa Mosque and worshippers therein. It is anticipated that the OIC Secretary-General, Mr. Houssein Ibrahim Taha, will address the meeting to highlight the serious developments that the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinians in general are going through, because of the repeated Israeli attacks. - DNA

NEWS DESK

CAIRO: The Arab League on Wednesday strongly condemned an Israeli police raid on Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, saying it put regional stability at risk. In a statement issued after an emergency meeting on the incident, the League condemned what it called "crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces against defenceless Muslim worshippers" in the mosque. The pre-dawn raid risked "igniting a spiral of violence that threatens security and stability in the region and the world", it added. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the situation had been caused by "extremists" who barricaded themselves inside the mosque with weapons, stones and fireworks. Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit had earlier condemned the raid in a separate statement. "The extremist approaches that control the policy of the Israeli government will lead to widespread confrontations with the Palestinians if they are not put to an end," he said.

## Kremlin sees no prospect of Chinese mediation

MOSCOW: The Kremlin on Thursday said it saw no "prospect" for China to mediate the Ukraine conflict and that it had "no other way" than to press on with its offensive. The comments came as French President Emmanuel Macron was in Beijing to try to dissuade China from supporting Moscow's campaign. "Undoubtedly, China has a very effective and commanding potential for mediation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "But the situation with Ukraine is complex, so far there are no prospects for a political settlement," he said. He was asked about China's potential role of mediator after Macron told Chinese leader Xi Jinping he was counting on him to "bring Russia to its senses". "At the moment, there are no other ways

for us aside from the continuation of the special military operation," Peskov also said, using the Kremlin term for its offensive. President Putin meanwhile met the leaders of four Ukrainian regions - Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson - that he claimed to have annexed despite never fully controlling. "Our goal is to push (Ukraine's forces) back to a distance where they won't be able to inflict any damage on us," he said. The televised talks otherwise bore a striking resemblance to Putin's usual meetings with the heads of other Russian regions. The leaders made a point of discussing snowfall, gas distribution and vegetable storage, with almost no mention of the armed conflict. - Agencies

## Japan mily helicopter missing with 10 on board

The helicopter belonged to the army's branch in the southern Kumamoto region, according to Public broadcaster NHK

TOKYO: A Japanese military helicopter with 10 people on board disappeared from radar on Thursday near an island in the southern region of Okinawa, army officials said. The aircraft had been on a reconnaissance mission when it went missing in the afternoon, in what the Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF) described as an "aerial accident". Search and rescue operations are ongoing, GSDF chief of staff Yasunori Morishita told reporters. "To rescue everyone who was on board as soon as possible, we will continue

to do our utmost... using the vessels and aircraft of the maritime and air self-defence forces, as well as coast-guard patrol ships," he said. What appeared to be an aircraft part had been found, but it was not clear whether it belonged to the helicopter in question, Morishita said. Two pilots, two mechanics and six crew members were on board, including a GSDF general from the 8th division, he added. The helicopter belonged to the army's branch in the southern Kumamoto region, according to public broadcaster NHK. After taking off from Okinawa's Miyako island before 4:00 pm, it was scheduled to have returned after an hour-long flight, NHK said. "Saving lives is our utmost priority," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said while briefly addressing reporters, as officials scrambled to assess the situation. - APP

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