



Islamabad POST

Thursday, April 13, 2023

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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US Congressman writes to Blinken over Pak HR violations

Detailed News On Page-08

Armenian provocation pre-planned

Detailed News On Page-07

Lewandowski hopes to play with Leo Messi

Detailed News On Page-06



8-member larger bench formed

Clipping CJP powers: SC takes up case today

The parliament recently approved the bill which would become law on April 20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: An eight-member bench of the Supreme Court will begin hearing today (Thursday) three petitions challenging the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill 2023 that aims to curtail the chief justice's powers, including those related to suo motu and formation of benches. Earlier this week, the bill was passed by a joint sitting of parliament after President Dr Arif Alvi returned it. Subsequently, three separate petitions were filed by Raja Amer Khan, Chaudhry Ghulam Hussain and Mohammad Shafay Munir, among others, under Article 184(3) of the Constitution, asking the top court to set aside the bill. The bench will be headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial and comprises Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Sayeed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Ayesha Malik, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Shahid Waheed. The petitions will be heard at 11:30am on April 13, according to the supplementary cause list uploaded on the Supreme Court website. The bill has also been challenged in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) by lawyer Saeed Aftab in a separate plea. The federal government got the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Bill, 2023, passed in a joint session of parliament on Monday after President Arif Alvi returned it last week. The president had returned the bill to parliament for reconsideration, citing Article 75 of the Constitution, and stating that it prima facie travels beyond the competence of parliament and can be assailed as colourable legislation. During the much-anticipated sitting, the house approved an amendment to the SC bill, under which a judges' committee meeting would be convened to devise rules and

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Delay in funds: SC issues notices

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notices to several officials, including the attorney general for Pakistan (AGP) and the secretary of finance, over the delay in the release of funds for holding elections to the Punjab Assembly. A three-member Supreme Court bench, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial, had directed the electoral body to hold elections in Punjab on May 14, and the federal government to provide funds amounting to Rs21 billion to ECP by April 10. However, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) submitted a report to the apex court on Tuesday stating that the federal government had not provided funds for the polls. Subsequently, the apex court issued notices to the AGP, finance secretary, ECP secretary, ECP director general (law) and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor to appear for an in-chamber hearing at 11am on April 14. The notice stated that non-provision of funds for holding the polls was "prima facie disobedience". "The consequences that can flow from such prima facie defiance of the court are well-settled and known. "Every person who embarks upon,

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DERA GHAZI KHAN: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visits Free Flour Distribution Point. – DNA

3 terrorists killed in Bajaur
IBO: ISPR
Milantants were killed on April 11 during an intense exchange of fire

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed three terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district, the military's media wing said Wednesday. The militants were killed on April 11 during an intense exchange of fire between them and the security forces, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement, after which weapons and ammunition were also recovered. ".... [the militants] remained actively involved in multiple terrorist activities against security forces as well as extortion and target killings of innocent citizens," the statement mentioned. "Locals of the area appreciated the

Continued on Page 06

Distribute free atta PM resolves to provide maximum relief to people

The Prime Minister examined a distribution point of free flour bags

DNA

DERA GHAZI KHAN: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed government's commitment to provide maximum relief to deserving people in the wake of inflation. He was talking to the people during a visit to free flour distribution points in Dera Ghazi Khan. The prime minister inquired about the problems faced by the beneficiaries of the scheme gathered there to receive free flour bags under the PM's Special Ramadan Package and directed the concerned authorities to immediately resolve all their issues. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb also accompanied him. He was informed that so far, some 4.9 million flour bags had been distributed among the deserving families in the Dera Ghazi Khan Division. On the occasion, the prime minister said the

distribution process of free flour was going on smoothly under the supervision of the caretaker Punjab Chief Minister. He also directed giving priority to women, the elderly and the handicapped during the distribution process. He also personally distributed free flour bags among the elderly as well as differently-abled people. PM Shehbaz said the country was facing challenges but with the blessings of the Almighty, the coalition government was on track to steer it out of the crisis. He said for the first time in history, the government was providing free flour to the needy. After Ramadan, he said the government would continue subsidies on wheat flour for the deserving. He also expressed his resolve to build Pakistan as per the vision of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. Meanwhile, representatives of the Girls Guide Association also met with the prime minister at the distribution point.

Briefs

Salaries, pensions before Eid: Marriyum

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Wednesday said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has issued directives for the payment of salaries and pensions to the government employees for the month of April before Eid-ul-Fitr. The prime minister had formally directed Finance Minister Ishaq Dar for the payment of salaries and pensions before Eid-ul-Fitr for the convenience of the employees, she said in a statement.

Canadian envoy calls on Commerce Minister

ISLAMABAD: Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms. Leslie Scanlon on Wednesday called on Federal Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed Qamar to strengthen the trade ties between two countries. – DNA

Sehr, Iftar Timing

Ramazan 22, 1444
Sehr: 04:12 am
Iftar: 06:41 pm
Fiqae-Jafria
Sehr: 04:02 am
Iftar: 06:51 pm

'Implementing SC orders crucial'

Fawad says SC gave 3 orders for Punjab polls

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President Fawad Chaudhry said on Wednesday that the Supreme Court (SC) had given three instructions to the federal government regarding the Punjab elections, media reported. In a Twitter message, Fawad Chaudhry said that the SC directed the federal government to disburse Rs21 billion to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for the Punjab elections. The Punjab chief secretary and inspector general (IG) were directed to devise a security plan, whereas, the secretary defence was ordered to ensure the availability of forces for security duties. Chaudhry said that the top court also gave a procedure to the federal government for enforcing its orders. The top court summoned the officers in person and sought factual reports from them. He added that it is necessary to implement the SC orders, otherwise, the existence of the top court as an institution would be put into danger. In another tweet, Fawad Chaudhry said that vengeful actions are being taken against the PTI leaders and workers. He claimed that Imran Khan's aide on security Iftikhar Ghuman was 'abducted' in a 'fake case'. He condemned the arrest of Iftikhar Ghuman by the authorities. Meanwhile, PTI Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry hailed Brad Sherman's letter, saying:

Continued on Page 06

Military establishment still playing role: Qureshi

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said that the military establishment was and still is playing a role in political affairs. "They [the establishment] are saying that they have nothing to do with [political] affairs, this is not true. They are definitely involved. They were and are involved," said Qureshi, in an interview on Dawn News show 'Live with Adil Shahzeb' aired on Tuesday night. The former foreign minister made the remarks when he was asked about the way forward in the current political crisis and whether the military could play a part despite their avowed stance of staying away from the political affairs of the country. "This is not true that they have nothing to do with political affairs. With due respect,

Continued on Page 06

Hina to attend Afghan moot

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar will lead the Pakistani delegation in the 4th Meeting of the Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan which would be held in Samarkand on April 13. "On the sidelines of the meeting, the minister of state will hold bilateral meetings with leaders of other participating delegations," a Foreign Office press release said. The Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan

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IMF confident of reaching staff-level agreement soon

Pakistan also likely to get UAE 'assurance' for \$1 billion

CENTRELINE REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Wednesday expressed confidence in reaching a staff-level agreement (SLA) soon with Pakistan as the nation faces one of its worst economic turnouts. IMF Director Middle East and Central Asia Department Jihad Azour's made the comments during a meeting with the Pakistani delegation, which is present in the United States to attend the IMF/World Bank Spring meetings. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Moham-

ad Ishaq Dar attended the meeting through Zoom from Islamabad, a statement from the Finance Division said. "Jihad Azour [...] expressed his confidence that Staff Level Agreement (SLA) will be signed soon followed by the IMF Board's approval," the statement mentioned, which comes as a ray of hope for the struggling country. Azour hoped that Pakistan would continue towards its progress on the reforms in various sectors and complete the programme in time and "IMF will play its positive role in bringing economic stability in Pakistan". Pakistan has completed all prior ac-

tions required for securing the IMF loan tranche and the only reason behind the stall in the programme is commitments from friendly countries. The \$350 billion economy is getting closer to securing the loan as Saudi Arabia has already committed \$2 billion in funds, while sources said the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is likely to assure the global lender that it will provide \$1 billion to Pakistan by this week. The funds are part of a \$6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019, which analysts say is critical for Pakistan to avert defaulting on external payment obligations.

Holidays in Gilgit-Baltistan

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SERENA HOTELS

National Days and Armed Forces Days

APRIL

- April 04/Senegal
National Day
- April 07/W. H. O.
World Health Day
- April 12/Somalia
Armed Forces Day
- April 15/DPR Korea
The Day of the Sun
- April 16/Denmark
National Day
- April 17/Iran
Army Day
- April 17/Syria
Independence Day
- April 18/Zimbabwe
Independence Day
- April 24/Holy See
Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate
- April 25/DPR Korea
Armed Forces Day
- April 26/Tanzania
National Day
- April 27/Sierra Leone
Independence Day
- April 27/South Africa
Freedom Day
- April 30/Sweden
Birthday of His Majesty
- April 30/Netherlands
Birthday of Queen



Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
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

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



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

UAE envoy's message on eve of Zayed Humanitarian Day

The principles of Sheikh Zayed, contributed to reach the white hands of the UAE and goodness and giving over more than five decades to all countries of the world: Hamad Alzaabi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of United Arab Emirates in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, affirmed that "Zayed Humanitarian Day" is an annual national occasion through which we salute the values established by the Founding Father Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in the fields of giving, generosity and cohesion, and it is the humanitarian message that the wise leadership of UAE carried, consequently the UAE, with this approach, became a global model and an example to follow in advancing and developing humanitarian initiatives.

The Ambassador Al Zaabi in his speech on the occasion of "Zayed Humanitarian Day" which falls on the 19th of Ramadan every year, said: "The principles of Sheikh Zayed, contributed to reach the white hands of the UAE and goodness and giving over more than five decades to all countries of the world through support and assistance and charitable and humanitarian initiatives and projects and providing aid and relief, which spread hope and happiness, and consolidate the foundations of security, peace and stability for societies suffering from wars and various natural disasters."

His Excellency added that Zayed Humanitarian Day comes in recognition of the role of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, as the UAE leadership, government and people were keen to commemorate this memory by following his approach of giving and continuing the humanitarian and welfare work, inspired from his wisdom.

H.E. Al Zaabi said that Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan followed his footsteps, and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE continues the path of goodness and giving, the reason that the UAE has for many years ranked first in the world as the largest donor of humanitarian aid.



His Excellency pointed out that the charitable and humanitarian initiatives and projects implemented by the UAE and its humanitarian organizations in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are a practical translation of the directives of the wise leadership, which has been keen to adopt many humanitarian initiatives to provide aid and support in all fields within the framework of the well-established historical relations between the two friendly countries and peoples.

The Ambassador added that this humanitarian support from the wise leadership represents continuation of the approach and journey of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in the areas of humanitarian field, as his planting has become ripe fruits across the Islamic Republic of Pakistan through the construction of roads, bridges, schools, colleges, hospitals, health clinics, water supply projects, vocational training centers and infrastructure facilities.

The Whitelist will serve as a reference point for Google to validate the regulator's approved apps before listing them on Play Store with effect from May 31, 2023, said a press release issued here. The list will be updated as and when an app gets approved or rejected by SECP.

The Whitelist contains the names of approved apps owned by licensed Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), as well as the apps of licensed NBFCs which were operating as on December 27, 2022, and have applied for approval.

Cyber security certification from a PTA-approved firm, certifying that the apps don't get access to customers' personal data. Circular 15 mandates compliance with digital lending standards, inter-alia the placement of adequate cybersecurity measures and controls to ensure confidentiality, integrity and the restriction from accessing borrowers' phone books or photo galleries.—APP

SECP publishes Digital Lending Applications Whitelist

ISLAMABAD: Pursuant to Google's updated policy for digital lending apps from Pakistan, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has published a Whitelist of Digital Lending Applications on its website.

The Whitelist will serve as a reference point for Google to validate the regulator's approved apps before listing them on Play Store with effect from May 31, 2023, said a press release issued here. The list will be updated as and when an app gets approved or rejected by SECP.

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Cars' sale decreases 50.30% in 9 months

ISLAMABAD: The sale of cars during the first nine months of the current fiscal year 2022-23, has dropped by 50.30 per cent as compared to the same months of last year, the latest data released by the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA).

According to the data, as many as 85,776 cars were sold during July-March 2022-23 as opposed to 172,612 units during July-March 2021-22.

The breakup figures showed that 12,381 units of Honda Civic and City were sold during the corresponding period of the year 2022-23 as compared to the sale of 28,830 units last year, thus showing a dip of 57.05 per cent.

Toyota Corolla and Yaris cars sales also decreased by 63.39 per cent as it went down to 15,994 units the current year from 43,695 units in the same period of the previous year.

However, Suzuki Swift's sales went up by 1627.16 per cent as sales increased to 8,584 units from 497 units last year. Sale of Suzuki Cultus decreased to 6,233 units during the current year, whereas during the same period last year, the sale was recorded at 17,686 units while the sale of Suzuki WagonR also decreased to 5,022 units from 16,916 units in the same period of last year. Suzuki Alto's sales also witnessed a sharp decline of 42.25 per cent from 53,241 units to 30,744 units during the months under review.—APP

Worst inflation resulting in human tragedy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt on Wednesday said the country is facing the worst nutritional, educational and psychological crisis due to increasing inflation and shrinking income.

Managing food has become a problem for the majority of the population as profiteers and hoarders have been given a free hand, he said. Sha-

hid Rasheed Butt said that people are taking children out of school and putting them to work to get some additional income to survive. People all across the country are facing problems, but the worst situation is in the former FATA and in Balochistan.

The business leader said that hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity have become common in the country. On one hand, the World Food Organization is saying that at least fifteen million people in Pakistani need immediate help to fill their stomachs

and seven million children need emergency nutrition. While on the other hand, the elites have looted the treasury, therefore the public cannot be provided with any facilities including treatment, education, and clean drinking water. Shahid Rashid Butt said that falsification of inflation and poverty data does not reduce inflation in the country and for this practical steps will have to be taken, which is not possible at the moment because politicians and several important institutions are engaged in the battle

for power. Bangladesh has substantially improved food security, food diversity, maternal and reproductive health. The Bangladesh government is providing clean drinking water, education and proper sanitation and vitamins are added to flour, rice and edible oil for public health, while the situation in Pakistan is different. The largest population and the largest number of flour mills are in Punjab, where essential nutrients are not added in the flour, he informed.

PSL rights: PAC orders action

Dr Nauman Niaz has already been suspended and at present four cases were pending in Sindh High Court, two in Lahore High Court and one in Islamabad High Court

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly on Wednesday issued directives for taking action against all those involved in the illegal transfer of Pakistan Super League broadcast rights to ARY Channel. The committee meeting chaired by Noor Alam Khan Member of National Assembly (MNA) gave the observation that during the previous regime, the rules were flouted for the benefit of a private TV channel.

The committee ordered to stop of the salary and all perks and privileges of former Director of Sports PTV Dr. Nauman Niaz. "Action will be taken against whoever is involved in this matter", Noor Alam Khan maintained.

Sheikh Rohail Asghar opined that the former information minister was involved in this matter. He suggested that the committee should summon Dr Nauman Niaz to know what did he have to do with this whole matter and then the committee will understand the whole story. Secretary Information and Broadcasting Sohail Ali Khan briefed the PAC on the process

of granting the PSL rights to ARY Channel and ongoing hearings of the matter in different courts.

The Secretary of Information informed the committee that the rights were acquired by a consortium that included ARY and PTV and the PTV also participated in the bid.

The chairman and the members of PAC asked the information secretary why no action was so far?

He said that the PTV had conducted an inquiry and the case has been sent to Federal Investigation Agency. The committee members asked why those involved in the shady deal were not suspended which harmed the national exchequer.

Sohail Ali Khan informed that

Dr Nauman Niaz has already been suspended and at present four cases were pending in Sindh High Court, two in Lahore High Court and one in Islamabad High Court. He said it was the view of the PTV that the broadcasting rights were not given in a proper and transparent manner. He said that there were courts stay orders on the issue and the MoIB was awaiting the judgments of the courts.

AIOU awards research grants to faculty

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Vice Chancellor (VC) of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Prof Dr Nasir Mahmood on Wednesday said that national universities needed to focus on research-based solutions to social and economic problems. VC said this while addressing the prize distribution ceremony of Research Publication and Research Project Grants 2022-23. He said, "The purpose of giving research publication grants is to encourage students and faculty members in conducting the best research."

"Research-based solutions can bring recognition to the institution and the country at national and international levels." Dr Nasir said, "Although universities are known for their research to



work good teaching should also be encouraged."

He congratulated the faculty members and others who received the award and directed them to do better in the field of research. The VC directed the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC) to consult the faculty members and start the best teacher award the next year. Principal officers, faculty members, and research grant awardees participated and attended the ceremony which was organized by the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC). Two hundred thirty-two awards were given to faculty members, administrative staff, and students under Research and Publication Grants. Prize for publication of a paper in category Y is Rs/20,000, for publication in category X - /25,000 and - /30,000 cash prizes for publication of a paper in the W category. Additional Director of ORIC Dr Saima Nasir explained in detail the aims, services, goals, and achievements of ORIC. It is pertinent to mention here that AIOU gives cash prizes to students and faculty members for writing a book or publishing a research paper in HEC-recognized journals. Transport and accommodation facilities are also provided to faculty members to attend conferences and present research papers.

G-20 nations urged not to visit IOJK

ISLAMABAD: Senior APHC leader Nayeem Ahmed Khan has made a passionate appeal to member countries of Group Twenty (G-20) urging them to refrain from participating in the group's upcoming events being purposefully hosted by India in the UN-recognized disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. In a statement issued here Wednesday, the illegally incarcerated Hurriyat leader, while condemning the Modi government's crafty move, reminded the members of G-20 that Jammu and Kashmir is an issue that has been on the UNSC's agenda for more than 70 years.

Termining the Indian move as a deep-rooted conspiracy to deflect world attention away from the real issue, Khan said that G-20 members who have a remarkable human rights track record should skip the summit events being held in the disputed region.—APP

'Addressing mental health issues govt's top priority'

ISLAMABAD: Head of the prime minister's strategic reforms Salman Sufi Wednesday said that the government was taking practical steps to address 'mental health' issues and well-being of the nation on a priority basis that had remained a long-neglected component of healthcare service in our society. In a move aimed at improving mental health services in the country, the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has launched a new mobile application called "Humraaz" and a helpline service 1166 to support public, he said while talking to a private news channel.

He said the Humraaz mobile application was available for both Android and iOS devices, adding, this app was providing users with a wide range of mental health resources, including self-help tools, counseling services, and access to mental health professionals. 'Humraaz' first ever government let mental health service would remove the taboo around the mental health issues, he added.

This app was now offering psychotherapy, daily activity monitoring, connection with professionals, chatbots, WhatsApp support and appointment booking, he further explained.

He said that it was a matter of serious concern that 25 percent of the country's population was suffering from mental health-related issues. "The aim of the initiative is to provide consultation services and to help improve the health and quality of life of people suffering from deteriorating mental health," said Salman Sufi, adding, the initiative was being launched on directions of the PM.

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Briefs

PM issues directives for payment of salaries before Eid

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyung Aurangzeb on Wednesday said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has issued directives for the payment of salaries and pensions to the government employees for the month of April before Eid-ul-Fitr. The prime minister had formally directed Finance Minister Ishaq Dar for the payment of salaries and pensions before Eid-ul-Fitr for the convenience of the employees, she said in a statement. Meanwhile, the finance minister had instructed for the immediate implementation of the directions of the prime minister in this regard, she said.—APP

President condoles with families of martyred troops

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday condoled with the family members of the soldiers recently martyred in terrorist attacks in various areas of the country. The president contacted the family members of Naek Fazal Janan over phone, who embraced martyrdom in South Waziristan on April 8. He also expressed condolence to the family members of Naek Zaeer Ullah Mehsood and Naib Subedar Hazrat Gul who were martyred in Khyber Barra on April 8. President Alvi also telephoned brother of Sepoy Hamid Rasool who was martyred in South Waziristan on April 5. The president paid tributes to the martyrs for sacrificing their lives in war against terrorism. He said the whole nation was united to completely uproot the menace of terrorism from the country. The president prayed to Allah Almighty for elevation of ranks of the martyrs in paradise and grant of courage to bear this irreparable loss. He also thanked their families on behalf of the nation.—APP

Islamabad Police to curb signal violation

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police has decided to accelerate efforts to ensure the implementation of traffic laws and take strict action against those involved in violation of red-signal. The police spokesperson said that Islamabad capital police have decided to assign a task to the traffic congestion unit for taking stern action against those violating red signals while additional squads would be constituted for the purpose. A special campaign is already underway to check violations while various squads would perform duties on main roads and boulevards of the city and take action against the violators. A police spokesperson said that efforts are underway to ensure a disciplined traffic system in the city.—APP

Market committee urged to act against artificial inflation

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah urged the newly elected office bearers of the Islamabad Capital Territory Market Committee to play their active role in providing relief to the public. He was addressing the oath-taking ceremony of the market committee members held at the Fruit and Vegetable Market, Islamabad on Wednesday. Information Minister Marriyung Aurangzeb was also present on the occasion. Rana Sanaullah congratulated the newly-elected committee members and urged them to do their best in curbing artificial inflation. He also asked the members of the market committee to play a role against elements involved in hoarding, profiteering, smuggling and their facilitators.—APP

ICCI, MIUC sign MoU to promote academia-industry connections

UBG Secretary General Zafar Bakhtawari and others also spoke at the occasion and stressed the need of promoting cooperation between ICCI and RIS in areas of mutual interest

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Metropolitan International University College and Roots International School System to renew discounts for its members and promote industry-academia linkages. For this purpose, an MoU signing ceremony was held at ICCI and in the presence of Chamber President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Convener, ICCI MoU Implementation Committee and Waleed Mushtaq, CEO, Metropolitan International University College (MIUC) and Roots International School System (RIS) signed the MoU.

The main objective of the MoU is to strengthen industry-academia linkages, promote entrepreneurship in students and prepare them as per needs of the industrial and business sector. Both institutions agreed to strengthen mutual cooperation for the benefit of the industrial sector and students. MIUC and RIS will provide reasonable discounts in admission fees, tuition fees and security fees to the children of ICCI members and employees.



ICCI will help promote entrepreneurship among students of MIUC & RIS, support students in research projects for the benefit of industry and academia and also help in training and skills development of students. Speaking at the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the youth are the future of Pakistan, so there is a need to foster entrepreneurship in youth so that after completing

education, they start their own business, create jobs for others and contribute to strengthen the economy. He said that ICCI will conduct business plan competitions among the students of MIUC and RIS and connect the students who come up with innovative business ideas, with investors so that they can turn their business ideas into viable products and brands. He lauded MIUC & RIS for providing quality education to students

and hoped that the renewal of MoU between MIUC & RIS and ICCI would yield beneficial results for the business community and the students. Waleed Mushtaq, CEO, MIUC & RIS, said that their educational system is playing an effective role in the socio-economic development of the country by providing better education and training to the youth. He said that RIS was started in April 1988 and now it has emerged

as the third largest education system in the country with 50 campuses across Pakistan in which over 10,000 students are studying. He said that RIS now wants to develop as a global education system to provide high quality education to the youth of Pakistan as well as other countries. He said that he wants to work with ICCI to strengthen academia-industry so that the students can play an active role in the development of the industrial sector. Fad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI, appreciated the efforts of MIUC & RIS to prepare students on modern lines and said that ICCI will support in the commercialization of business ideas of their students. Engr. Azharul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that the Chamber wants to establish an academy in cooperation with RIS which can provide the necessary guidance to the business community to promote businesses as per the requirements of the present day. UBG Secretary General Zafar Bakhtawari and others also spoke at the occasion and stressed the need of promoting cooperation between ICCI and RIS in areas of mutual interest.

PIA assures public of uninterrupted operations

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has addressed concerns about non-payment of salaries and reassured the public that its operations are not affected. In a press statement released on Wednesday, the PIA spokesman said that although the airline is facing financial difficulties due to the country's economic situation, it has paid the salaries of staff in Groups I to IV on time. However, he added, there has been a delay of a few days in the salaries of officers and other officials, which will be paid in the next few days. The spokesman clarified that PIA officers, including pilots, are fully engaged in fulfilling their responsibilities with complete dedication and persistence, and that the airline is fully functional and operational. Several national dailies carried a news story expressing concerns that the national carrier's operations would be affected, as its pilots were reportedly considering boycotting flights as a protest against the non-payment of their pending salaries, even during the month of Ramadan.

In response, the PIA spokesman urged the public not to believe such reports, which he said were baseless and misleading and being spread by elements with ill motives to disrupt PIA's operations. The spokesman also emphasized that there was no fear about the impact of non-payment of salaries on the airline's operations and that despite the challenges faced by PIA, the airline remains committed to providing safe and efficient air travel to its passengers.—APP

NAVTTTC asked to set quality standards

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Husain Wednesday said that NAVTTTC should set appropriate quality standards to ensure that Pakistani graduates from technical training institutes are accepted in foreign markets. He stated this while taking a briefing from Chairman National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) Shahid Khan. Senior officials of the ministry including Secretary Education Waseem Ajmal Chaudhry also attended the meeting. Furthermore, provincial DGs of NAVTTTC were also present via online link. Rana Tanveer Husain said, "There is a dire need for NAVTTTC to perform at its full capacity." He said, "It is imperative that our training is internationally accredited in order to ensure the acceptability of the Pakistani workforce in foreign markets such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Europe."

He also highlighted the need to give equal importance to imparting technical education to women and trans-genders. Rana Tanveer said that KSA offered to fully fund a technical institute that will aim at providing students the technical skills needed to succeed in KSA market. He said that co-ordination with KSA on this project is on going and that it will become a platform for modern technical education for the Pakistani youth. He emphasized the need to work diligently and complete the on going projects at maximum speed. He urged the management to be pro-active in their approach and enhance the productivity of their institutions so that the youth of Pakistan can be put on the track to success.

Rana Tanveer said that it is the utmost duty of all of government departments to work with integrity and perform their duty in the most honest and productive manner. Rana Tanveer said that there needs to be cohesiveness within departments as well. He emphasized the need to increase productivity in the most effective and efficient manner.

MOITT launches 70 projects worth Rs 65bln

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication through the Universal Service Fund (USF) had launched some 70 projects of optical fiber cable (OFC) and broadband infrastructure development in four provinces at a cost of Rs 65 billion. "In the province of Sindh alone, 20 projects of NGBSD and OFC worth Rs 16.3 billion have been started so far in 20 districts, including Tharparkar, Nawabshah, Khairpur, Larkana, Badin, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Mirpurkhas, and Dadu," said an official of the Ministry of IT. He said that projects of connectivity of the un-served and under-served communities of Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) provinces had also been launched. The Ministry, he said, through USF aimed to connect all the citizens of the country as digitalization had become a priority for businesses and communities. Under its Next Generation Optic Fiber (NG-OF) Network and Services program, USF had contracted over 16,000 km of Optic Fiber Cable (OFC) to benefit 31.5 million populations across the country. About the Karachi IT Park, he said, it would be a gateway for an innovative future and a strengthened economy. "Karachi IT Park is the largest IT project of its kind in Pakistan, which will benefit not only the citizens of Karachi but also the IT professionals and companies of Sindh and the rest of Pakistan," he added. The IT parks across the country provide a place where innovative businesses could develop and prosper in a favourable environment. Most Software technology/IT parks provide ample space for business development. Governments all over the world often invest in these technology parks to boost their regional and national economies. He said technology parks must comply with basic infrastructure requirements such as clean facilities and ample working space. However, tech parks were also equipped with the latest technology and telecommunication facilities that make it easy to establish and manage a business. The range of services offered by the parks was closely linked to the functions that they had to fulfil, he said, adding the benefits of the technology parks were not limited to enterprises and tenants of the parks, but also for companies outside the parks. The benefits of technology parks included a boost in the knowledge-based economy, entrepreneurship, and the latest technologies, he said.—APP

Railways to run five special trains

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has announced the operation of five special trains to facilitate the travel needs of the public during the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. These trains will operate from Karachi to Lahore and Karachi and Peshawar to various locations across the country, providing a comfortable and convenient mode of transportation for passengers. The schedule for these trains was recently released by the railway department. The first of these special trains will leave Karachi for Peshawar Cantt on April 18, while the second will depart from Quetta to Rawalpindi on the same day. On April 19, the third special train will run from Karachi to Lahore, providing a convenient and affordable option for those travelling between the two cities. The fourth train will be from Rawalpindi to Quetta on April 26, offering a comfortable journey for those who need to travel between these two cities during the Eid holidays. Finally, the fifth and last special train will run from Lahore to Karachi on April 27, enabling passengers to travel from Lahore to Karachi with ease and comfort.—APP



Whistle-blower's identity: FBR asked to submit report

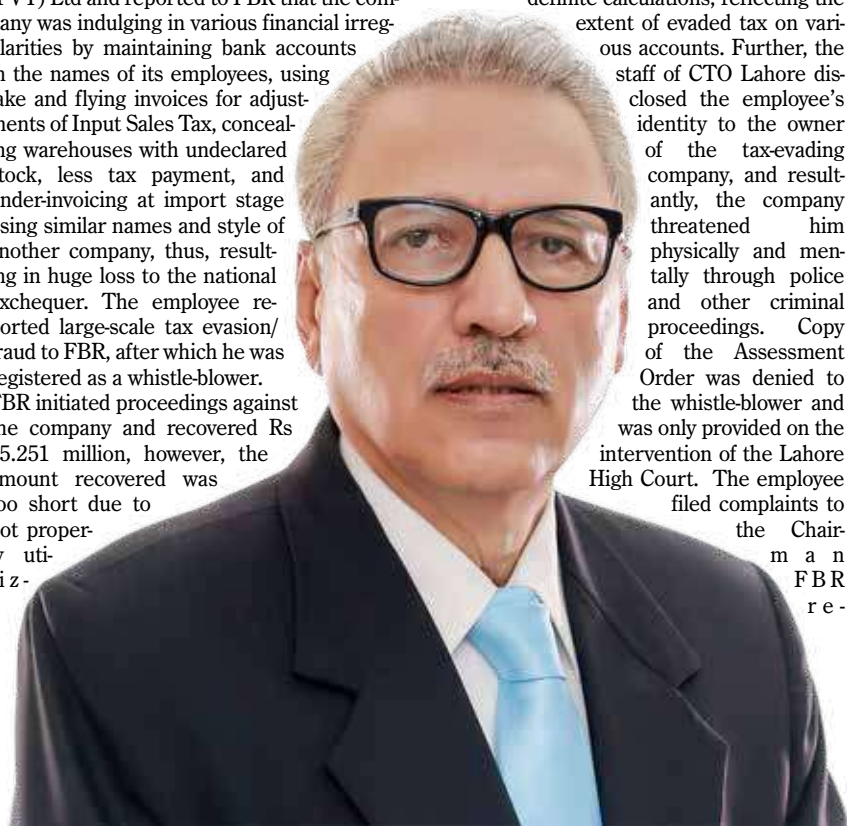
FBR initiated proceedings against the company and recovered Rs 15.251 million, however, the amount recovered was too short due to not properly utilizing all annexures provided by the complainant. FBR ignored and misread all annexures with definite calculations, reflecting the extent of evaded tax on various accounts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has directed the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to submit a report to the Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) explaining how the identity of a whistle-blower, who had reported large scale tax-evasion/fraud by a private limited company, was leaked to his employer and consequently he had to face threats by the tax-evading company. He further directed FBR to explain why it could not fully utilize the information provided by the whistle-blower to recover the maximum Sales Tax amount from the company that caused loss to the national exchequer. The President gave these remarks while rejecting a representation filed by FBR against the order of FTO directing FBR to revisit its relevant Assessment Order, provide an opportunity for hearing to the whistle-blower, and fully utilize the information provided by him for the recovery of the evaded Sales Tax. The President in his decision expressed displeasure that full advantage of the information about the various alleged financial irregularities by the company was not taken by FBR and even the identity of the whistle-blower was disclosed. "This is abhorrent to the whistle-blower concept and legislation. Instead of taking advantage, the FBR has been very lax in its attitude", he said. He further directed that a report must also be submitted to FTO within 60 days as to why this happened. As per details, Mr Mu-

hammad Ilyas (the complainant) was serving as an Accountant in M/s Northern Toolings (PVT) Ltd and reported to FBR that the company was indulging in various financial irregularities by maintaining bank accounts in the names of its employees, using fake and flying invoices for adjustments of Input Sales Tax, concealing warehouses with undeclared stock, less tax payment, and under-invoicing at import stage using similar names and style of another company, thus, resulting in huge loss to the national exchequer. The employee reported large-scale tax evasion/fraud to FBR, after which he was registered as a whistle-blower. FBR initiated proceedings against the company and recovered Rs 15.251 million, however, the amount recovered was too short due to not properly utilizing all annexures provided by the complainant. FBR ignored and misread all annexures with definite calculations, reflecting the extent of evaded tax on various accounts. Further, the staff of CTO Lahore disclosed the employee's identity to the owner of the tax-evading company, and resultantly, the company threatened him physically and mentally through police and other criminal proceedings. Copy of the Assessment Order was denied to the whistle-blower and was only provided on the intervention of the Lahore High Court. The employee filed complaints to the Chairman and FBR re-

garding less assessment but without any result. Feeling aggrieved, he took up the matter with FTO. During the proceedings of the Ombudsman, FBR raised objections over the jurisdiction of FTO on the ground that the issue related to the determination of liability of tax and interpretation of laws, rules and regulations with respect to which legal remedies were available. FBR further contended that the whistle-blower had submitted his written statement regarding tax evasion of Rs 5 million and all the information provided by him was confronted and an appealable Assessment Order was also passed, therefore, the matter had already been finalized so a fresh round of complaint was unwarranted. FTO rejected the stance of FBR and stated that it was a case of not fully utilizing the information in a matter where duty and taxes were evaded by using various tactics. FTO further held that the complainant's contention regarding tax fraud by the company carried weight and therefore, it was in the interest of justice that he be given another opportunity to present his viewpoint before FBR. It further directed to revisit the Assessment Order, dated 30.12.2016 under Section 45A(4) of the Sales Tax Act, 1990, and pass a fresh speaking appealable order after affording the opportunity of hearing to the complainant and after fully utilizing the information provided by him and submit a compliance report. Instead of complying with the order, FBR chose to file a representation with the President against the order of the FTO.



Russia's hostage-taking

The Biden administration's designation of the American reporter Evan Gershkovich as "wrongfully detained" by Russia is not merely a statement of the obvious, but unlocks additional resources to secure his release and shows that the US is rightly prioritising his case. Gershkovich, of the Wall Street Journal, was detained on 29 March on a reporting trip to Ekaterinburg, and was formally charged last Friday. The Federal Security Service alleges that he has committed espionage; the rest of the world recognises this as another shocking instance of the state's pursuit of hostage diplomacy, and an attack on independent journalism.

Unlike the arrest last year of the US basketball player Brittney Griner – detained for possessing a small amount of cannabis oil and ultimately freed in a prisoner swap for the arms dealer Viktor Bout – this case appears not merely opportunistic, but calculated and approved from the top. Gershkovich also faces far more serious charges of espionage. Another US citizen, the former marine Paul Whelan, is serving a 16-year sentence of hard labour on spying charges after he was seized in late 2018; he too has been deemed wrongfully detained.

Gershkovich is the first American journalist to have been held in this manner in modern Russia; the last such case was the Soviet Union's arrest of Nicholas Daniloff, in 1986. While the primary goal of his detention appears to be the acquisition of another bargaining chip – to exchange for Russian spies detained overseas – it also sends a chilling message to his colleagues, especially since he was fully accredited by the foreign ministry.

Of course, like other overseas journalists who have had to decide whether to remain in Moscow or try to cover Russia from outside its borders, the 31-year-old was well aware of the risks. He had documented the growing repression under Vladimir Putin, tweeting last summer that "Reporting on Russia is now also a regular practice of watching people you know get locked away for years". Friends have said that Gershkovich believed it was his professional duty to continue reporting, and felt privileged to be able to do so when Russians could not. Despite the welcome intensity of US efforts to free Gershkovich, the grim reality is that this may well be a very long and protracted process. While he has now seen his lawyers, they were not allowed to attend his initial hearing. He has still not been permitted a consular visit. He should be granted full consular and legal access. As dozens of editors around the world have written in a joint letter calling for Gershkovich's release, this unjust arrest has sent the message that journalism in Russia is criminalised. Gershkovich should never have been detained. He should now be released.

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US-Philippines military drills

The United States and the Philippines kicked off their "shoulder-to-shoulder" joint military exercises on Tuesday.

The Balikatan exercises, which will run up to April 28, are reportedly the largest in decades, involving more than 17,600 US, Philippine and Australian military personnel, and include a live-fire drill in the South China Sea. Although Manila insists the exercises are meant to bolster its capabilities for coastal defense, and don't target any country, everything surrounding them seems to indicate something different. Particularly when viewed within the tricky present geopolitical context. Manila may have no malicious intentions when it comes to relations with Beijing. After all, despite their contradicting territorial claims in the South China Sea, the two governments have managed to prevent the disputes from disrupting the more important pragmatic cooperation that have served both sides well. That is why relations between China and the Philippines have remained on good terms under both former president Rodrigo Duterte and current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. China is the Philippines' No 1 trading partner, and may contribute even more to Manila's economic ambitions as Beijing places greater emphasis on good-neighborly ties. As both countries' leaders have correctly observed, the potential of bilateral cooperation is tremendous. The increasing US engagement with the Philippines, however, is obviously less about prosperity, more about consolidating military deployments under its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which has a declared purpose of countering what it claims to be the "threat" posed by China. Manila may argue that by giving the US military access to four more military bases last week under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement it is only looking to upgrade Philippine national defense. And President Marcos has reportedly assured Beijing those bases would not be allowed to be used for offensive action. But the locations of the four new bases, three facing north toward the island of Taiwan and one near the Nansha Islands, clearly add to Beijing's concerns about US intentions in the region. The Chinese embassy in Manila has criticized the EDCA bases as part of a US attempt to "encircle and contain" China. And Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the ongoing exercises "would only lead to more tensions and less peace and stability in the region".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin met with their Philippine counterparts in Washington on Tuesday and what they discussed will determine the parameters of the two countries' military cooperation. China has made clear its views, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin on Monday urging the two countries not to let their military cooperation intervene in the South China Sea disputes, let alone harm Chinese sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime and security rights and interests. It is to be hoped that Manila does not let itself be intimidated or coerced by Washington into sacrificing the interests of the Philippines to the US' strategy to contain China.



Follow the constitution or set aside

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Today's deadlock between Pakistan's federal government and the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) over the conduct of elections is continuing.

The PTI has held a big meeting at the famous Minar-e-Pakistan Tower grounds in Lahore as the opening of election campaign. Addressing to a large gathering of supporters, party workers and former parliament

Pakistan's soaring political tension is an opportunistic struggle for power. It has pushed the country in a political tinderbox. Not any regard is displayed on either side for the ongoing suffering of ordinary Pakistanis, who continue to pay the price for the country's long history of political instability.

Today's deadlock between Pakistan's federal government and the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) over the conduct of elections is continuing. The PTI has held a big meeting at the famous Minar-e-Pakistan Tower grounds in Lahore as the opening of election campaign. Addressing to a large gathering of supporters, party workers and former parliament members, Former Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced a program to save Pakistan's failing economy. A series of events has persisted nearly a year in his quest to return to the Prime minister office. Khan's campaign is enjoying widespread popular support and has succeeded in mobilizing the public, which is building pressure on the ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif who is not agree for early elections. The coalition government, however, is determined to hold off polling as long as possible for provincial and national assembly elections. To justify the delay, the embattled government has referred to the country's unpreparedness for the elections because of se-

curity threats from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant group in the coming months. It has justified the possibility of terrorist attacks against officials and innocent civilian population. But behind this argument lies what has been a unfamiliar constitutional dilemma for Pakistan.

There is a question, in which circumstances and by whose authority should national security concerns take precedence over constitutional obligations and the rule of law?

Confrontational views intensified when the Electoral Commission of Pakistan, claiming its inability to hold fair and just elections in light of the security situation and financial problems, mandated late April to early October and ignored the constitution by postponing the given provincial elections. This came after the army announced its failure to provide security for the polls due to continued engagement in counter-terrorism operations.

Khan, who is currently dealing with multiple government-initiated charges for alleged criminal behavior, has sought the intervention of Pakistan's Supreme Courts. In the recent moves of the PTI leader stated that the Election Commission and the Sharif government are engaging to break the constitution. To pushing back the government, PTI went to the Supreme Court to get legal support. Through a suo motu notice the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of

Pakistan suspended the Election Commission and government's extra-constitutional measures.

Now, what did the Supreme Court Chief Justice Umar Atta Bandial play his role to break the political deadlock in Pakistan is whether acceptable for all stake holders? Against a backdrop of such questions about the rapprochement and impartiality of the judiciary among bar associations and senior judges, the chief justice has emerged as a central character in the political drama but many believe that the verdict of the Chief Justice is controversial. Khan has become a victorious in the Supreme Court; however, there is a possibility that the government and the security establishment will play a significant role in the game of Pakistani politics, whether or not they choose to implement their decision.

For the first time in Pakistan's history, the ruling coalition government appeared to be trying to implement the country's infamous "ideological necessity" without formally announcing it or seeking the approval of the Supreme Court.

In response to the question of who has the authority to make extraordinary changes in the timing of general elections in Pakistan, in the past, there is not any precedent, it is the military establishment and the political elite are responsible that will determine when the situation is constitutional and we have to follow the constitution or to set aside.

The US should not worry about China-Gulf relations

Sultan Barakat

All of this has naturally left the Americans quite anxious, especially about the engagement of its Gulf allies with Beijing.

But Washington has to recognise that its own diplomatic decision-making under the Obama administration, with its "pivot to Asia", triggered fears in the region about a US departure. And it is not just Gulf countries that are worried. In a personal communication with one of the authors, a former European Union ambassador to Iraq referred to the lack of Western engagement in Iraq as a "catastrophic negligence" with "high costs" and said that "China is now building partnerships with Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE

The foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met in Beijing in the first formal meeting of the two countries' top diplomats in seven years, on April 6, 2023 [Handout via Al Jazeera] In the span of just six months, China has made great diplomatic strides in two regions the United States considers of vital importance: the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In November, Beijing struck a deal with Doha to supply liquified natural gas over 27 years – the longest such agreement to date, which came as the US's European allies struggled to secure their own gas supplies. In February, it put forward a "peace plan" to end the war in Ukraine, positioning itself as a powerful mediator.

And then in early March, China brokered a Saudi-Iran rapprochement which led to the restoration of full diplomatic relations between the two archenemies.

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But Washington has to recognise that its own diplomatic decision-making under the Obama administration, with its "pivot to Asia", triggered fears in the region about a US departure. And it is not just Gulf countries that are worried. In a personal communication with one of the authors, a former European Union ambassador to Iraq referred to the lack of Western engagement in Iraq as a "catastrophic negligence" with "high costs" and said that "China is now building partnerships with Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and other regional players in an attempt to occupy the vacuum" that the West has left.

The Americans are scrambling to prove that the "pivot to Asia" would not mean diminished influence in the Gulf. But Washington should not obsess too much about the re-

gion's relationship with China, as it remains quite superficial. Instead, it should be more concerned about Israel's engagement with Beijing and the destabilising role it is playing in the region. In recent years, trade volumes between China and the Gulf have indeed increased. Four out of the six Gulf Cooperation Council states now have significantly larger bilateral trade with China than with the US. This could be worrying for Washington, but it must understand that Chinese energy needs remain at the heart of the China-Gulf ties. In other words, these relations are primarily transactional rather than strategic. The recent Chinese-brokered Saudi-Iran deal could mean that China is attempting to transcend this nature of the relationship and compete with the US for regional influence, but surpassing the US's standing will be quite a challenge. The US remains the top security partner of the Gulf and maintains multifaceted relations with Gulf states, which encompass not just trade but also close military, diplomatic, cultural, educational and social ties. The hurried abandonment of the Chinese military base in the UAE after an intervention from Washington in 2021 reflects this reality. By contrast, Israel has maintained substantial technological cooperation with China since the 1980s. There have even been accusations that Israeli companies sold sensitive high-tech military equipment to Beijing, although the sales have reportedly stopped under US pressure.

Still, Israel has continued to sell spyware to the Chinese authorities and has welcomed large Chinese investments in its tech sector, which reached \$325m in 2018. For a long while, the Israeli authorities failed to regulate investments in companies involved in dual-use technology production,

which has made Washington nervous.

Trade relations between China and Israel have blossomed, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In 2021 bilateral trade reached \$22.8bn. Chinese companies also won tenders for large infrastructural projects, such as a strategic port near Haifa, which has worried US defence officials given the potential for Chinese espionage on US navy vessels docking there.

The Chinese and Israeli governments are also negotiating a free trade agreement; if signed, it will be the first in the Middle East. In other words, Israel is way ahead of the Gulf in the depth of its relations with China and has engaged in practices that may be much more threatening to US interests than the energy deals the Gulf countries have struck with Beijing.

What is more, Israel has played a role as a spoiler of regional stability. It has fuelled tensions with Iran and encouraged conflict. It has also engaged in attacks on Iranian soil and sought to undermine the Iran nuclear deal which the US put much effort into negotiating. Given Washington's own efforts to reach an agreement with Tehran, the Saudi-Iranian deal, brokered by China, should not be seen in a negative light. If the US wants to curb Chinese influence in the region, then it should look to Israel, not the Gulf. Its engagement with the region, on the other hand, would benefit from clear reassurances of its reliability as an ally and respect for the internal dynamics and economic aspirations of the Gulf states. It would be wise for the Americans to start talking to the Arabs the way they talk to the Israelis – as equal partners.

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Briefs

Clipping
CJP powers:
SC takes up
case today

FROM PAGE 01 regulations regarding the suomotu matters. The amendment was proposed by PML-N lawmaker Shaza Fatima Khawaja. As per the amendment, the chief justice of Pakistan or any other member of the committee can call the meeting until the rules and regulations are finalised. Now the bill will be presented before the president once again for his assent. If the head of the state does not give his approval within 10 days, it would be deemed to have been given.

Delay in
funds: SC
issues...

FROM PAGE 01 encourages or instigates disobedience of the court can be held liable and accountable." The notices stated that provision of funds for holding polls was a more important matter than pursuing a contempt of court case. The notice directed the SBP chief to come to the hearing with the record of all resources at the central bank's disposal. It also directed the finance secretary to come to the court with records. The ECP secretary was also asked to bring all records related to polls for Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies.

'Implementing
SC orders
crucial'

FROM PAGE 01 "Letter by a senior member of USA Congress Foreign Affairs committee to Secretary Blinken shows the growing concerns of international community on the HR abuses in Pakistan by a fascist government." He called on the European Union and United Kingdom parliamentarians to "raise the issue of human rights abuses in their jurisdictions as well".

Military es-
tablishment
still...

FROM PAGE 01 they played a role (in the past) and are still playing a role in political affairs," he added. When asked about the extent of the army's role in the present political affairs, Qureshi said: "That's another debate so let's let that be, but the country is sinking, there is a [political] stalemate and we are on the verge of an economic and constitutional crisis [...] there is a perfect storm in the making, should the institutions shut their eyes?"

3 terrorists
killed in...

FROM PAGE 01 operation and expressed their full support to security forces, determined to eliminate menace of terrorism from the area," the ISPR added. The latest IBO comes security forces have ramped up operations against terrorists after terror incidents witnessed a rise across the country, leading to the death of civilians and law enforcers.

With militancy on the rise, the National Security Committee (NSC) last week decided to kick start an all-out comprehensive operation against militant outfits to root out the menace of terrorism from the country.

Hina to
attend...

FROM PAGE 01 mechanism was established in 2021 on Pakistan's initiative with a view to evolving a regional approach to the situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan hosted the first meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Neighbouring Countries on September 8, 2021, and participated in the second meeting held in Tehran, Iran in November 2021, and the third meeting held in Tunxi, China in March 2022. "The mechanism will contribute towards forging a consensus among the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, who are the most direct stakeholders of the situation in the war-torn country."

Syria to reopen embassy
in Tunisia after 10-year

Syria's decision followed a similar move by Tunisia on April 3 when President Kais Saied instructed his foreign minister to begin procedures to appoint an ambassador to Damascus. "In response to the initiative of the President of the Tunisian Republic, ... the Syrian government ... decided to reopen the Syrian embassy in Tunisia and to appoint an ambassador soon"

DAMASCUS: War-torn Syria will reopen its diplomatic mission in Tunisia and appoint an ambassador there, Damascus and Tunis say in a joint statement. The announcement on Wednesday came after more than a decade of strained ties. Syria's decision followed a similar move by Tunisia on April 3 when President Kais Saied instructed his foreign minister to begin procedures to appoint an ambassador to Damascus. "In response to the initiative of the President of the Tunisian Republic, ... the Syrian government ... decided to reopen the Syrian embassy in Tunisia and to appoint an ambassador soon," the joint statement said, according to SANA, Syria's official news agency.

"Out of both sides' keenness to restore the Syrian-Tunisian relations to their normal track, consultation and coordination are ongoing between the foreign ministers ... to further consolidate the deep-rooted ties of brotherhood binding Syria and Tunisia," the statement added. Saied had said last month that he planned to restore diplomatic relations with Syria. Tunisia's move is the latest example of Arab outreach to the internationally

Syrian FM Faisal Mekdad
visit KSA since 2011

RIYADH: Syrian foreign minister Faisal Mekdad has arrived for a visit to Saudi Arabia, as ties between Damascus and Riyadh grow, and a restoration of relations between the two Arab countries becomes increasingly likely. Mekdad arrived in Jeddah on Wednesday having been invited by the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, both Saudi and Syrian state media reported. The visit is the first by a Syrian foreign minister to Saudi Arabia since 2011, when the war in Syria began. Saudi Arabia supported the Syrian opposition, but ties have thawed in recent months. Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has largely defeated the opposition with Russian and Iranian backing. Saudi Arabia will host a meeting of regional foreign ministers on Friday to discuss the return of Syria to the Arab League. Saudi state media reported last month that discussions were being held between Damascus and Riyadh to resume consular services, after media reports emerged of a possible restoration of ties. Diplomatic efforts have gained momentum since Saudi Arabia agreed to a rapprochement with Iran, a key ally of the Syrian government, last month. - Agencies

isolated government in Damascus. Engagement with Syria has gathered pace since it and Turkey were hit by devastating earthquakes in February. Since the disaster, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has received calls and aid from

Arab leaders, momentum that analysts say he could leverage to bolster regional support. This year, al-Assad has visited Oman and the United Arab Emirates, which restored ties with Damascus in 2018. Last month, Saudi Arabia said it had started

talks with Damascus about resuming consular services.

Tunisia expelled Syria's ambassador in 2012 over the al-Assad government's repression of peaceful protesters that triggered more than a decade of civil war. About half a million Syrians have been killed and millions displaced since 2011. The Syrian government was bolstered when Russia intervened on its side in the war in 2015. It has since regained control over much of the territory it lost in the early stages of the conflict.

The two countries' diplomatic rupture, undertaken when former President Moncef Marzouki was still in office, was strongly criticised by the Tunisian opposition at the time. In 2015, Tunisia took a step towards re-establishing relations when it designated a consular representative to Damascus to "follow" the situation of Tunisians in Syria. Nine Arab countries are set to meet in Saudi Arabia this week to discuss moves to end al-Assad's isolation. The Arab League, which suspended Syria in 2011, is expected to hold a summit in Riyadh in May.

Lewandowski
hopes to play with
Messi next season

Barcelona fans have chanted Messi's name in the 10th minute - representing his former Barca shirt number - in their last two matches, including a 0-0 draw against Girona on Monday in La Liga

BARCELONA: Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski would love Lionel Messi to return to the Catalan club from Paris Saint-Germain this summer, he said on Tuesday. The 35-year-old Argentine World Cup winner left Barca in 2021 when the club could not afford to renew his contract and his PSG deal expires in June.

Amid whistles from PSG supporters who see Messi as a symbol of the club's mistakes in chasing star signings instead of building a competitive team, Barcelona are openly courting the forward. "Messi belongs to Barca and if he returns it would be something incredible," said Lewandowski. "We know that his place is here, in Barcelona. I don't know what will happen, but I hope that next season we can play together." Messi is the club's all-time top goalscorer and many consider him the best player in the history of football. The playmaker scored a record 672 goals in 778 matches for Barcelona, winning 35 trophies, after joining the club at 13-years-old and developing at their feted La Masia youth academy.

Barcelona fans have chanted Messi's name in the 10th minute - representing his former Barca shirt number - in their last two matches, including a 0-0 draw against Girona on Monday in La Liga. "Leo generates excitement, they have chanted his name in two games now, we'll see what happens," said Barca coach Xavi Hernandez after the derby clash. Lewandowski, top scorer in Spain, could not find the net for the league leaders against Girona and, speaking at a charity event, said he had been carrying an injury. "I took a blow from (Real Madrid defender Eder) Militao in the game against Madrid and I could not walk," added Lewandowski, referring to Barcelona's 4-0 thrashing by Los Blancos in the Copa del Rey last week. - Agencies



TASHKENT: Pakistan ambassador to Uzbekistan, Ahmed Farooq presented his credentials to Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. DNA

Djokovic
needs time to
adapt to clay

MONTE CARLO: Novak Djokovic returned to the ATP Tour with an "ugly" straight-sets win over Ivan Gakhov at Monte Carlo and while the world number one has had extended preparation on clay this year he said he needs more time to adapt to the surface. Djokovic, who is not vaccinated against

Covid-19, was unable to play at Indian Wells and Miami last month as he failed to obtain a waiver to enter the United States. He spent the time training on clay ahead of the French Open, where he will target a 23rd Grand Slam, but the Serbian's 7-6(5) 6-2 win over Russian qualifier Gakhov on Tuesday showed he needs more time to get into a rhythm. "Throughout my career I needed one, two weeks of tournaments to really start to play the way I want to. It's the case again this year, though I trained for three weeks and felt good playing practice points," Djokovic told reporters. "But it's different when you play a match, especially today (Tuesday) was quite windy on the court, so not easy to find the rhythm, to have the ball right, the ball toss and playing a lefty, playing someone that has not much to lose. "All these things play a factor in the way you feel on the court. I'm really glad I overcome the first step, because I hope things will be better and easier from this point." The Australian Open champion said the level of his tennis was "not very high" at the moment and he was not sure when it would pick up. - APP

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Modric rejects enormous
offer from Saudi Arabia

MADRID: Real Madrid's veteran midfielder Luka Modric has rejected an enormous offer from Saudi Arabia, according to Spanish media. The Croatian is keen on retiring in Madrid despite being offered a contract worth 30 million euros per season in Saudi Arabia. The 37-year-old's contract with Real Madrid will expire at the end of the current season. He joined the Los Blancos in 2012 and has played a key role in five Champions League titles. "I am doing everything I can to give my best and

deserve the chance to continue here. I can't do more, I have always had a very good relationship with the club and that's not going to change," Modric said in February earlier this year. "Just like last year, there's no rush, we're halfway through the season and there are many challenges ahead. I'm focused on that, on getting back to my best level, let's see what happens," he added.

In 2018, Modric also ended the long reign of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo by winning the Ballon

d'Or for the first time. Madrid will face Chelsea on Wednesday at the Santiago Bernabeu in a first leg Champions League quarter-final clash. Madrid, who are keen on winning the trophy for the sixth time in 10 seasons, have looked in great touch in recent matches, notching up 12 goals in their last three games, including the 4-0 triumph against Barcelona. Madrid lost 3-2 on Saturday in La Liga against Villarreal but coach Carlo Ancelotti had made six changes to keep his key players fresh for the match

against Chelsea. Striker Karim Benzema is also peaking at the right time after scoring consecutive hat-tricks against Real Valladolid and Barcelona. "He's hit the switch," said Ancelotti after the Clasico triumph. "Working in the international break has helped him, he's in good shape to make the difference." The Italian likened his team to a boiler, hitting the right temperature at the right time. "When the team is close to a title, the temperature of the boiler goes up," Ancelotti warned at the start of March. - Agencies

Jordan's sneakers sell
for record \$2.2 mln

A PAIR of signed, game-worn Michael Jordan sneakers from the 1998 NBA Finals fetched a record \$2.2 million on Tuesday, making them the most valuable sneakers ever sold, auction house Sotheby's said. The Air Jordan 13 "Breds" - short for "black and red" - were worn by Jordan in the second game of the Finals during his final season with the Chicago Bulls, referred to as the "Last Dance". Jordan scored 37 points in the game and led the Bulls to a 93-88 win over the Utah Jazz. He went on to win his sixth and final NBA Championship and was named the Finals MVP. Sotheby's said Jordan gifted the sneakers to a Jazz ball boy after the game as thanks for finding a lost jacket. They were the final pair of Breds that Jordan wore in a game. They are the only complete pair of sneakers worn by Jordan in an NBA Finals game that have been photo-matched and authenticated by the MeiGray Group, the official authenticator of the NBA, the auctioneers added. The previous record for a pair of sneakers was held by a pair of Kanye West's Nike Air Yeezy 1s, which Sotheby's sold for \$1.8 million in 2021. Sotheby's also auctioned Jordan's jersey from the opening game of the 1998 Finals for \$10.1 million in September 2022, which became the most expensive piece of game-worn sports memorabilia ever sold. - Agencies

'Monster' Haaland beats season scoring record

LONDON: Erling Haaland and Germany striker Mario Gomez told BT Sport. Haaland only touched the ball 28 times, fewer than any other starting player either for or against Chelsea. Striker Karim Benzema is also peaking at the right time after scoring consecutive hat-tricks against Real Valladolid and Barcelona. "He's hit the switch," said Ancelotti after the Clasico triumph. "Working in the international break has helped him, he's in good shape to make the difference." The Italian likened his team to a boiler, hitting the right temperature at the right time. "When the team is close to a title, the temperature of the boiler goes up," Ancelotti warned at the start of March. - Agencies

did so much work for other players in the game. "He was never going to be off the score-sheet when City score three goals." Since the invention of the Premier League in 1992-93,

no player has scored 45 goals in all competitions... until now. Ruud van Nistelrooy hit 44 goals for Manchester United in 2002-03 and Mohamed Salah did the same for Liverpool in 2017-18. Dutch striker Van Nistelrooy and Egyptian Salah both took 52 games

to hit those 44. Haaland broke their record despite playing 13 games fewer. Van Nistelrooy was in his second season with United when he managed it, and Salah did it in his first year at Liverpool, but he had played in England for Chelsea before.

Haaland may have been born in Leeds, but he moved to Norway at the age of three and had never played in England until this season. He has scored a wider range of goals than the others, with 28 goals coming via his preferred left foot. Salah scored 36 of his with his left foot, with 33 of Van Nistelrooy's coming from his right. Haaland has netted 10 with his right foot and seven with his head. Salah managed six and two respectively, with four left-footed goals and seven headers for Van Nistelrooy. None of Van Nistelrooy's goals came from outside the box, with Haaland only doing it once - but Salah scored five. With penalties, there is a huge

range. Haaland has six, Salah only scored one that season and Van Nistelrooy bagged a huge 12. The last English top-flight player to score more in a season was Clive Allen of Tottenham in 1986-87, when he hit 49 goals in all competitions for Tottenham. Haaland's 45 goals also breaks his previous best goalscoring season. In 2019-20 he netted a total of 44 goals, 28 for Salzburg and 16 for Dortmund. This was his 11th Champions League goal of the season, also a personal best. Only Van Nistelrooy (12 in that 2002-03 season) has ever scored more for a Premier League side. Haaland is City's top goalscorer in a season, a record he broke almost a month ago and has extended since. Tommy Johnson's 38 goals in 1928-29 had been the club record for 94 years. - Agencies

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Babar Azam
improves
T20I ranking
after latest
update

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan captain Babar Azam has moved up one place to third in the T20I batter's rankings after the latest update issued by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday. Azam's teammate Mohammad Rizwan is in second place, meanwhile India's Suryakumar Yadav is still at the top of the list. Azam and Rizwan will have the opportunity to close the gap on Yadav, who is currently playing in the Indian Premier League (IPL), since the duo will be in action during the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand, which starts on April 14 in Lahore. "Babar moved up to third on the rankings that were updated by the ICC on Wednesday and will get further opportunity to make inroads on Suryakumar when Pakistan commence their five-game T20I series against New Zealand on Saturday," the ICC stated.

"Both Babar and Rizwan sat out Pakistan's most recent T20I series against Afghanistan and will be keen to score freely against the Black Caps, who are coming off a narrow 2-1 series triumph over Sri Lanka at home. "While Suryakumar currently holds a commanding lead at the top of the T20I rankings for batters with 906 rating points, second-placed Rizwan (811) and third-placed Babar (755) could make gains while the India star is plying his trade in the IPL. "Ironically, it was Devon Conway's absence from New Zealand's series against Sri Lanka that led to Babar improving one place to third on the latest set of rankings, with the Kiwi batter also at the IPL with the Chennai Super Kings."

No Pakistan player is in the top 10 of the ICC bowler's rankings in T20Is, with all-rounder Shadab Khan being the highest-ranked in 12th place. Shadab is also the only Pakistan player in top 10 of the all-rounder's rankings for T20I after securing fourth place.

Schedule of New Zealand tour of Pakistan

14 Apr - 1st T20I, Lahore

15 Apr - 2nd T20I, Lahore

17 Apr - 3rd T20I, Lahore

20 Apr - 4th T20I, Rawalpindi

24 Apr - 5th T20I, Rawalpindi

27 Apr - 1st ODI, Rawalpindi

29 Apr - 2nd ODI, Rawalpindi

3 May - 3rd ODI, Karachi

5 May - 4th ODI, Karachi

7 May - 5th ODI, Karachi

NDMA
predicts more
devastating
floods this year

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) predicted that there is a 72% chance of devastating floods in Pakistan this year. In a briefing to Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the Chairman NDMA Lieutenant General Inam Haider said that the rapid increase in the temperature, glacier melting and early monsoon can result in floods. He said that the NDMA and climate change ministry are monitoring 17 satellites and 36 flood early warning systems will be placed. The Chairman NDMA informed the committee if similar catastrophic floods like last year happened now then the country will land in a huge economic crisis.

Earlier, the National Flood Response Coordination Committee's (NFRCC) latest figures showed that the catastrophic floods in Pakistan resulted in the destruction of over 1,76,153 acres of crops, 4,66,366 homes affected, and over 2,16,974 cattle. In Balochistan, over 3,90,201 homes have been affected while 124 people have lost their lives amid floods. In Gilgit Baltistan, 23 people were reported dead, and 8,479 homes were affected due to floods. Sindh suffered a loss of 10,721 acres of crops, 3,603 cattle and 26 lives lost. Over 33,301 homes were affected, 85 dead, and at least 10,048-acre crops were affected by floods in KP.

Briefs

Eva Kaili released from prison

BRUSSELS: Eva Kaili, the Greek MEP who has become the most recognisable face of the corruption scandal engulfing the European Parliament, was on Wednesday granted her release from prison after more than four months behind bars. The lawmaker will now be placed under house arrest with an electronic bracelet, her lawyer, Sven Mary, confirmed to Euronews. "I will not give more commentary, besides the fact that this is a logical decision that took too long to be taken," Mary said in a brief statement. The information was also confirmed by the Belgian Federal Prosecutor's Office. The decision came as a surprise since it was announced a day before a scheduled appearance before a judge on Thursday morning. Kaili will undergo regular hearings to either prolong or revoke the electronic surveillance. The Greek lawmaker was first arrested on 9 December, when she was reportedly caught in the act and her parliamentary immunity was immediately lifted. The 44-year-old lawmaker was then charged with participation in a criminal organisation, corruption and money laundering, and later moved to the Haren prison, located on the outskirts of Brussels, as part of her pre-trial detention. Her arrest sent shockwaves across Brussels and brought to light an investigation into a cash-for-favours scheme that involved "large" sums of money and "substantial" gifts allegedly paid out by Qatar and Morocco in order to influence European policy-making. Both countries deny any wrongdoing.—Agencies

Gun violence affects half of US families

WASHINGTON: About half of American families have been affected by a gun-related incident while one in five said they have personally been threatened with a gun, according to a recent survey. About 54% of US adults said they or a family member have experienced a gun-related incident, according to the survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation. The survey showed 21% were personally threatened with a gun while 19% said a family member was killed by a gun, which includes death by suicide. Some 17% of respondents said they have personally witnessed someone being shot, 4% indicated they have used a gun in self-defense and 4% were injured in a shooting. The survey showed that gun-related injuries and deaths "disproportionately" affect people of color in the US. Thirty-one percent of Black adults have personally witnessed someone being shot while the figure for Hispanic adults was 22%. About 84% of adults said they have taken at least one precaution against possible gun violence affecting their families.—APP

Russia eyes building its own space station

MOSCOW: Russia is working to building its own space station, organizing missions to the moon and launching serial production of spacecraft, head of the country's space agency Roscosmos said on Wednesday. Speaking to Russia's TASS news agency on Cosmonautics Day, which marks the first manned space flight on April 12, 1961 by Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, Yuri Borisov said the construction of Russian Orbital Service Station and organization of moon missions are key priorities in space exploration. Russia also continues development of a new manned spacecraft Oryol (Eagle) and launching serial production of space aircraft, he added. Asked about space tourism, the official said talks are underway with representatives of a number of foreign countries who want to travel to outer space. "Negotiations are at different stages. You will learn about the results after reaching agreements and concluding contracts," he said.—DNA

Leaked US intel claims Serbia would arm Ukraine

Serbia recognizes Ukraine in its entirety, including areas occupied by Russia since 2014, while Kyiv refuses to recognise independence of Kosovo, Serbia's predominantly Albanian former province

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Serbia has agreed to supply arms to Kyiv or has sent them already, according to a classified Pentagon document, despite the country's professed neutrality in the Ukraine war and refusal to sanction Russia over its 2022 invasion. The document, a summary of European governments' responses to Ukraine's requests for military training and "lethal aid" or weapons, was among dozens of classified documents posted online in recent weeks in what could be the most serious leak of U.S. secrets in years. The document is marked Secret and NOFORN, prohibiting its distribution to foreign intelligence serv-

ices and militaries. It is dated March 2, and embossed with the seal of the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Serbia's Defense Minister Milos Vucevic dismissed the document's assertions as "untrue" in a statement on Wednesday. "Serbia did not, nor will it be selling weapons to the Ukrainian nor the Russian side, nor to countries surrounding that conflict," Vucevic said. Entitled "Europe [Response to Ongoing Russia-Ukraine Conflict]," the Pentagon document in chart form lists the "assessed positions" of 38 European governments in response to Ukraine's requests for military assistance. The chart showed that Serbia declined to provide training to Ukrainian

forces, but had committed to sending lethal aid or had supplied it already. It also said Serbia had the political will and military ability to provide weapons to Ukraine in the future. In his statement, Vucevic said there was a possibility that Serbia-made weaponry and ordnance could "magically appear" in the conflict, but "that has absolutely nothing to do with Serbia." "Someone clearly wants to drag Serbia into that conflict, but we are diligently maintaining our policies," he added. President Aleksandar Vucic's office did not respond to a request for comment but the Serbian foreign ministry issued a statement denying that the country is supplying mili-

tary equipment to Ukraine. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to questions about the document's reference to Serbia and has previously declined to comment on the leaked documents. Vucic's government has professed neutrality in the Ukraine war, despite the country's deep historic, economic and cultural ties with Russia. "If this document is accurate, it either shows Vucic's duplicity vis a vis Russia or he's under enormous pressure from Washington to deliver weapons to Ukraine," said Janusz Bugajski, an Eastern European expert with the Jamestown Foundation, a foreign policy institute. The Justice Department is investigating the leak, while the Pentagon is assessing

the damage done to U.S. national security. The Pentagon chart divided the responses to Ukraine's requests for aid into four categories: countries that had committed to provide training and lethal aid; countries that had already provided training, lethal aid or both; countries with the military ability and the political will "to provide future lethal aid." Austria and Malta were the only two countries marked "No" in all four categories. Malta's foreign ministry did not immediately reply to a request for comment. Austria has said its neutrality prevents it from military involvement in the conflict and while it supports Ukraine politically it cannot send the country weapons.

The disclosure of the chart comes just over a month after documents posted in a pro-Russia channel on the Telegram global messaging app purportedly showed the shipment of 122mm Grad ground-to-ground rockets to Kyiv in November. The documents included a shipment manifest and a Ukrainian government end-user certificate. Moscow said in March it had asked Belgrade for an official explanation of the alleged deliveries, the state-run TASS news agency quoted Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying. Arms manufacturer Krusik Corp. of Valjevo denied providing rockets or other weaponry to Ukraine. Vucic called the allegations "a notorious lie."

China issues revised rules for military recruitment

DNA

BEIJING: The State Council and the Central Military Commission of China has issued a set of revised rules regarding military recruitment on Wednesday. The main aim of the move is to provide institutional guarantees for consolidating national defense and building strong armed forces. The new regulation, with 74 articles in 11 chapters, focuses on recruiting more high-caliber soldiers, standardizing and optimizing conscription procedures, and improving the system's efficiency. The document will come into effect on May 1, 2023.

4 killed in firing inside military station in India

NEW DELHI: A man opened fire indiscriminately inside a military station in India's northern state of Punjab on Wednesday morning killing four persons, said the Indian Army. The identities of the assailant and those killed have not been ascertained yet. The incident occurred at around 04:35 a.m. local time inside the Bathinda Military Station in Punjab. The assailant was reportedly not wearing a military uniform. The station's quick reaction teams were activated and the area was cordoned off and sealed. Search operations were in progress, news agency ANI quoting a military statement as saying. Other media reports said that everyone inside the military station has been advised to stay indoors, as a search and rescue operation is still going on to nab the assailant. Meanwhile, the local police said there is no terror angle in the incident. About two days ago, one Insas Rifle with 28 cartridges was reported missing.—APP

Italy declares state of emergency

ROME: Italy declared a six-month state of emergency Tuesday to help it deal with a surge in the number of migrants arriving in the country via the Mediterranean Sea, local media reported. The government approved the measure following a proposal by Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci, said the state-run ANSA news agency. "Let me be clear. The problem will not be solved with this. The solution is possible only through a conscious and responsible intervention by the European Union," said Musumeci. "We are talking about a phenomenon never seen in the past. The islands alone cannot deal with this state of emergency," he added. With the state of emergency, faster procedures and actions can be implemented to offer migrants reception solutions in a short time with adequate standards, according to the agency. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said the decision aims to enable more effective and timely responses to the management of the migrant flow.—Agencies

GCC to discuss Syria return to Arab League

DOHA: Qatar says that the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has sent invitations to member states to attend a meeting next Friday in the Saudi capital, Jeddah, to discuss the possibility of Syria's return to the Arab League. Majid al-Ansari, the spokesperson of the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Doha has received the invitation and confirmed that Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani will take part in the event. He noted that "concerned countries" such as Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan will also participate in the "consultative meeting". "The main aim is to discuss the situation in Syria. There are many developments regarding the situation in Syria and points of view of Arab states about the return of Syria to the Arab League," al-Ansari said in a briefing to local media. For his part, a spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the issue of Baghdad's participation in the meeting is currently.—DNA

US, Philippines mull maritime activities in S.China Sea

MANILA: The US and Philippines have discussed plans to hold combined maritime activities with "likeminded" partners in the disputed South China Sea, said a joint statement on Wednesday. The two sides "discussed plans to conduct multilateral maritime activities with other like-minded partners in the South China Sea later this year," read a joint statement issued at the end of the 2+2 ministerial meeting between the top diplomats and defense chiefs of the US and Philippines. It added that the two sides committed to finalizing plans for "the resumption

of combined maritime activities, including the conduct of joint sails by the US and Philippine navies, in the South China Sea." The meeting was held on Tuesday in Washington and was attended by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Filipino Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his Filipino counterpart Carlito Galvez Jr. "Now the commitments that we made today will further integrate our strong bilateral ties into multilateral networks, including with Japan and Australia," Austin later told a joint news

conference. "We discussed plans to conduct combined maritime activities with likeminded partners in the South China Sea later this year as we work to enhance our collective deterrence," he added. Manila is the oldest ally of Washington in the region and is also the largest recipient of US military assistance, equipment, and training. The 2+2 ministerial meeting was held as the two allies launched their biggest annual military exercises involving over 17,000 troops. Besides, 111 Australian defense forces and observers

from other countries are attending the "Balikatan" or "shoulder-to-shoulder" exercises in Philippines, set to end on April 28. On Balikatan, China had said Monday that the "exchange and cooperation between relevant countries should not target any third party and should be conducive to regional peace and stability," adding: "The US-Philippines military cooperation must not interfere in South China Sea disputes, still less harm China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights, and interests and security interests."—Agencies

Chinese enterprise, Pakistan to partner in seed breeding

BEIJING: A Chinese seed company and the Pakistani embassy in China have agreed to explore opportunities to enhance collaboration in breeding seeds in a recent meeting between Chinese seed enterprise Hainan State Farms Nanfan Industrial Group and Fareena Arshad, Counsellor of Pakistan embassy in China. Speaking at the meeting, the counsellor said Pakistan possesses high-quality tropical fruit and agricultural germplasm resources and that in her role as counsellor, she will actively promote collaboration between agricultural enterprises in both countries and build a solid platform for agricultural research and development, cultivation, and processing industries. Chairman Li Zhiqian of the Chinese seed company noted that the company will communicate with Pakistani seed enterprises and research institutes and seek possible avenues for seed breeding, agricultural R&D and cultivation. As a first step, an online forum will be organised in the near future to rally bilateral seed companies and promote seed cooperation and exchanges, the company's overseas department director told China Economic Net (CEN).—DNA

China puts US on notice over Pentagon documents

China on Wednesday asked the US to provide "an explanation" to the international community over the documents leaked from Pentagon. "Leaked Pentagon documents suggest the US is not only deeply involved in the Ukraine crisis but also has been long eavesdropping on allies," Wang Wenbin, the spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry, told reporters in Beijing. "Washington must give an explanation over the matter to the international community," Wang said, according to Chinese daily Global Times. "Facts clearly tell the world that the 'democratic values' claimed by the US are just a pretext, a tool that serves its own selfish interests," the Chinese official added. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Tuesday that Washington is taking the unauthorized disclosure of a cache of apparent classified intelligence documents "very seriously," as he pledged to identify the leaker. "We will continue to investigate and turn over every rock until we find the source of this and the extent of it," Austin said during a joint news conference alongside Secretary of State Antony Blinken and their Filipino counterparts. "We will continue to investigate and try to determine the full scope of the activity," Austin said. The Biden administration has repeatedly declined to confirm or deny the authenticity of the documents even as they have sent shockwaves through some of the US' most important international relationships. The Justice Department and Pentagon have opened investigations into how the cache was released without authorization and who might have been responsible. Many are crudely taken photographs of documents with markings bearing varying levels of classification and appear to be folded, according to images circulating on social media. Some carry Joint Chiefs of Staff seals. They had been circulating on Discord, a messaging platform popular with videogame streamers, for at least a month before they were reported on by the New York Times newspaper on April 5, according to the investigative news website Bellingcat.—DNA

Pakistan, Bulgaria hold political consultations



DNA

SOFIA: The fifth Round of Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) between Pakistan and Bulgaria was held in Sofia on 11 April 2023. The Pakistani side was led by Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe) Muhammad Saleem while the Bulgarian delegation was headed by Mr. Petar Kray-

tchev, Director General (Bilateral Relations), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria. The two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations and discussed ways and means to further enhance them in diverse fields. They reiterated mutual resolve to cement relations in the fields of political, economic, trade, investment, higher education,

agriculture, ICT and people-to-people contacts. The two sides agreed on the importance of early convening of next session of the Pakistan-Bulgaria Intergovernmental Commission, and active linkages between the private sectors of the two countries. Possibilities to enhance Pakistani workforce to address the existing labor shortage in Bulgaria were also dis-

cussed. Pakistani delegation thanked Bulgaria for playing a supportive role in Pakistan's active engagement with the EU, especially in context of GSP+ status. Regional and global issues of mutual interest were also discussed including peace and security, counter-terrorism and climate change. The two sides also under-

Armenia's provocation was preplanned: FM Bayramov

The appeal drew attention that on April 11, the Armenian armed forces units once again committed a provocation that broke peace and security in the region by launching intensive fires from their positions located in the direction of the Digh settlement in Gorus District at the opposite positions of the Azerbaijan Army located in the direction of the Lachin District.

BAKU: The Armenian provocation of April 11 was preplanned, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov said. The official made the remarks during a joint press conference with his North Macedonian counterpart, OSCE Chairman-in-Office Buyar Osmani, who is currently on an official visit to Baku. Talking about the provocation, Bayramov called on Armenia to avoid such irresponsible and dangerous steps, as the consequences can be very serious as it was yesterday. Besides, the minister noted that Lachin residents are planning to return to the district in 2023. "The mine threat and similar measures are aimed at preventing their return. If Armenia's provocations continue, our response will be very heavy for them. It was put forward by Azerbaijan that the peace process has no alternative," Bayramov reminded. The minister also pointed out that Armenia's attempts to interfere in the normalization process are unacceptable, noting that Azerbaijan has repeatedly called on the Armenian side to return to the negotiating table. "Negotiations will continue. The Azerbaijani side proposed to hold a meeting in Baku. However, Armenia's interference in the process of reintegration of the Armenian population into Azerbaijani society is unacceptable," the official added. The official

emphasized that face-to-face meetings have not been held since December as a result of Armenia's destructive approach. In turn, the North Macedonian minister expressed his support for the initiatives, which promote dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia. According to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, his goal at the moment is to strengthen and deepen cooperation with Azerbaijan to promote peace and security. "The OSCE reaffirms its desire to

build trust between the member countries of the organization and should continue to work to build relations and establish an atmosphere of trust. I spoke with the minister about how exactly Baku can contribute to this process," Osmani said. Besides, he called for the continuation of direct contact between Armenia and Azerbaijan in order to normalize relations between the countries. "I received information about yesterday's incident as soon

as I arrived. I conveyed my condolences in connection with the victims. Unfortunately, such incidents can lead to further escalation," Osmani commented. Talking about the bilateral ties, the Azerbaijani FM underlined that from the first days of joining the OSCE, Azerbaijan has been an active participant in it and remains committed to the principles of the organization. Furthermore, the official noted that the priorities of the OSCE coincide with the goals and priorities of Azerbaijan, including such as combating climate change, gender equality, etc. Similarly, Osmani stated that Azerbaijan plays an important role in the OSCE. Besides, during the conference, it was announced that the foreign ministries of Azerbaijan and North Macedonia plan to hold political consultations. Prior to the press conference, the two ministers held a tete-

te meeting and a meeting in an extended format. "The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia held a meeting in an expanded format and exchanged views on the agenda of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the OSCE," the Azerbaijani foreign ministry tweeted. Azerbaijani Ombudsman Sabina Aliyeva appealed to the world community to take a decisive position to end Armenia's military provocations and restore peace.—Agencies



Briefs

Dagleish lauds economic stability measures

ISLAMABAD: Acting British High Commissioner to Pakistan Andrew Dagleish Wednesday commended the measures being undertaken by the incumbent government for economic stability and offered all possible help from the 'British Government' for the people of Pakistan in mitigating the socio-economic crisis. The Acting British High Commissioner called on Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar and discussed the current macro-economic situation of the world as well as Pakistan. The Finance Minister also briefed the envoy on the progress in talks with the International Monetary Fund and appraised the overall economic outlook of the country. The Finance Minister briefed the envoy on pragmatic policies and programs of the government being taken in terms of revenue generation and bringing economic stability and growth. The High Commissioner commended the practical measures being undertaken by the present government and offered all possible help from the British Government for the people of Pakistan in mitigating the socio-economic crisis. The Finance Minister appreciated the British Acting High Commissioner for his cooperation and support. - APP

Iranian delegation arrives in Saudi Arabia

WEB DESK

RIYADH: An Iranian delegation arrived in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to pave the way for reopening diplomatic missions as the Gulf rivals prepare to normalise relations, seven years after an acrimonious split. The announcement came just days after a Saudi delegation made a similar visit to Tehran hot on the heels of a historic meeting in China between the two governments' foreign ministers who vowed to bring stability to the turbulent region. "The Iranian delegation arrived in Riyadh on Wednesday to visit and reopen the Iranian embassy and consulate in accordance with the recent agreement between the two countries," Iran's official news agency reported. "One team is due to travel to Jeddah to prepare for the reopening of Iran's consulate there and its representation in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, while the other will remain in Riyadh to reopen the embassy," IRNA added. Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has been invited to Saudi Arabia, according to Tehran, in what would be the first visit of its kind since Mohammad Khatami went in 1999.

Biden under political fire in restive N.Ireland

BELFAST: US President Joe Biden entered the political cauldron of Northern Ireland on Wednesday, using a brief visit to promote the benefits of enduring peace and investment, but already facing heated criticism from pro-UK hardliners. Following a late-night greeting in blustery weather from UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Biden arrived with the British-ruled province again gripped by political and sectarian squalls, 25 years on from a US-brokered peace agreement. The Irish-American president was due to meet Sunak, and greet the leaders of Northern Ireland's feuding political parties, before delivering a speech at a newly opened campus of Ulster University in central Belfast. Biden said Tuesday the priority for his trip - which includes three days in his ancestral homeland, the Republic of Ireland - was "to keep the peace" in Northern Ireland and help unlock its political paralysis. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Engr. Khurram Dastgir, Minister Mussadaq Malik posing for a picture with the members of the diplomatic corps on the occasion of an Iftar dinner hosted by President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sakib Rafiq and his team. A large number of diplomats from various countries attended the iftar dinner. - DNA

RCCI hosts Iftar-Dinner in the honor of diplomat corps

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) hosted an Iftar Dinner in the honor of the Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Diplomats and Commercial Counselors in Islamabad. A large number of ambassadors and diplomats were present on the occasion, including the Dean of Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of Turkey, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Iran, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Morocco. Federal Minister Energy Khurram Dastgir and Federal Minister Petroleum Musadiq Malik were also present on the occasion. RCCI Group Leader Sohail Altaf and President Saqib Rafiq thanked the ambassadors, dignitaries and businessmen for the overwhelming gathering. President Saqib Rafiq said that Rawalpindi Chamber considers the diplomatic community an important pillar for promoting trade ties and RCCI always believes in better connectivity with all diplomats. RCCI iftar dinner for diplomats is being held every year to promote a positive and true image of the country, he added. Group leader Sohail Altaf in his remarks said that we are thankful to Federal Ministers Energy Khurram Dastgir and Federal Minister Petroleum Musadiq Malik for joining us today. This is a great opportunity for networking and we are very honored to host the large number of ambassadors and commercial counselors, he added. Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Saqib Shahzad, former presidents, President FCCI, Dr. Khurram Tariq, President Small Chamber Tariq Jadoon, President WCCI Rifaat Shaheen, members of the executive committee and representatives of district and local administrations, representatives of Anjumane-Tajiran and a large number of members and businessmen attended the Iftar dinner.

Ban on UN Afghan women 'an internal issue': Taliban

Since the ban was announced, the UN has ordered all its Afghan staff - men and women - not to report to work until further notice

DNA

KABUL: A ban on Afghan women working for the United Nations was an internal issue, the country's Taliban authorities said on Wednesday, adding that the decision "should be respected by all sides". Taliban authorities triggered international outrage earlier this month after extending a December ban on Afghan women working for non-governmental organisations to the UN. "The Islamic Emirate does not want to create obstacles for the United Nations," Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement on Wednesday. "Rather, it wants to make it clear that this is an internal issue of Afghanistan which does not create a problem for anyone and should be respected by all sides."

Under their austere interpretation of Islam, Taliban authorities have imposed a slew of restrictions on Afghan women since seizing power in 2021, including banning them from higher education and many government jobs. The UN said on Tuesday that the ban was forcing it to make an "appalling choice" on whether to continue operations in Afghanistan. The world body said it cannot comply with the ban as it was "unlawful under international law, including the



UN Charter". Mujahid, however, said there was no "discrimination" in the decision. "On the contrary, considering the religious and cultural interests, we are committed to all the rights of our people." The increasing curbs on women are reminiscent of the Taliban's first government between 1996 and 2001, when the UN said they were responsible for repeated human rights violations - particularly against girls and women. Taliban authorities have imposed a slew

of restrictions on Afghan women since seizing power in 2021, including banning them from higher education and many government jobs.

In December, they banned Afghan women from working for domestic and foreign non-governmental organisations, and on April 4 extended that to UN offices across the country. Since the ban was announced, the UN has ordered all its Afghan staff - men and women - not to report to work until further notice. Taliban authorities justified the December ban on the grounds they had received "serious complaints" that women were not observing the group's interpretation of Islamic dress codes. Several NGOs suspended operations in the country in protest, piling further misery on Afghanistan's citizens - half of whom face hunger, according to aid agencies. Mujahid said Afghans had the "capacity to stand on their own feet", but the country's problems were caused by sanctions and restrictions on the financial and banking system. Soon after the Taliban's takeover, the United States seized roughly \$7 billion in Afghan central bank assets. "It is necessary that the member countries of the United Nations resolve the problem of freezing Afghan assets, banking, travel bans and other restrictions so that Afghanistan can progress in the economic, political and security areas," Mujahid said.

AJK SC rejects Ex-PM Tanveer Ilyas' appeal

Khawaja Farooq Ahmed appointed interim prime minister

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Supreme Court rejected on Wednesday Sardar Tanveer Ilyas's appeal challenging his disqualification on technical grounds. A day earlier, in a largely unexpected move, a full court bench of the AJK High Court disqualified Ilyas from being elected or being a member of the Legislative Assembly or from holding any public office for two years after holding him guilty of contempt. At a function in Islamabad over the weekend, Ilyas, who belongs to the PTI, had indirectly blamed the judiciary for affecting the functioning of his government and interfering in the domain of the executive through the grant of stay orders. AJK's superiors court - both the SC and high court - had then issued notices to the ex-premier on Monday to explain his position with regard to his "derogatory remarks about the superior judiciary in his speeches at public meetings". Meanwhile, in a late-night development, the office of AJK's chief secretary on Tuesday issued a notification appointing Khawaja Farooq Ahmed as the interim prime minister of the region. "The president of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, in exercise of powers vested in him under sub-article (1) of Article 17 of the AJK Constitution, is pleased to call upon Khawaja Farooq Ahmed, the most senior minister, to perform functions of the Office of the PM until a new PM has been appointed and elected upon his office," it said. - DNA

US lawmaker writes to Blinken over Pakistan



WASHINGTON: US Congressman Brad Sherman has written to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, voicing concerns over "democracy, human rights, and rule of law" violations in Pakistan, it emerged on Wednesday. In a letter dated April 11, Sherman asked Blinken to "guide the US' Pakistan policy toward a greater commitment to human rights and to use all US diplomatic channels to urge Pakistani authorities to investigate the alleged abuses and to hold accountable anybody who may be responsible". "I urge the authorities to make sure that going forward political figures or citizens who simply want to demonstrate are not subjected to anti-democratic consequences," he added. He highlighted several alleged cases of human rights violations in Pakistan, including cases against PTI Chairman and media ban on his speeches, detention of protesters, the alleged torture of Shahbaz Gill and journalist Jameel Farooqui, and the recent arrest of PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur. - DNA

Pakistan, China reiterate resolve to boost cooperation

Sanjrani Lauds China role for bringing peace in the region

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China have reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields for the mutual benefit of the two countries. The need for collective efforts to promote peace, prosperity, and development in the region was emphasized by both sides during a meeting between Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani and a three-member

delegation of the Chinese Embassy, including Charge de' Affaires Ms. Pang Chunxue, Ms. Bao Zhong, Political Counselor, and Ms. Dong Wenli, Third Secretary. The meeting also underlined the importance of enhancing cooperation in all fields, including Information Technology. During the meeting, Chairman Senate Sanjrani congratulated President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government, and the people on his re-election as President for the third consecutive term. He also praised China's

efforts to establish peace in the region, noting that China played a key role in bringing together Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is commendable. Sanjrani highlighted that both countries have stood by each other in all kinds of situations and supported each other on every platform. He also acknowledged China's investment in Pakistan, which has provided new employment opportunities for the youth, and noted that with the completion of CPEC, the entire region will develop and open new avenues for further investment.

The Chairman reiterated that Pakistan is committed to the timely completion of the CPEC project, which has enormous potential to contribute to the socio-economic development of Pakistan. Ms. Pang expressed her country's desire to further strengthen bilateral cooperation with Pakistan, noting that Pakistan is China's closest friend. She added that her country would share its experiences with Pakistan, which would help in its social and economic prosperity.



Non-Muslims banned from Al-Aqsa for Ramadan

RAMALLAH: Israel has banned visits by non-Muslims to the flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem until the end of Ramadan. The move followed outrage after Israeli security forces permitted about 800 settlers to pray in the compound on Tuesday morning, the sixth day of the Passover holiday, in breach of a longstanding agreement that prohibits such activity during the last 10 days of the Muslim holy month. It remains unclear whether Israel's increasingly empowered radical settler movement will comply with the Al-Aqsa policy. One of their leaders, far-right police minister Itamar Ben-Gvir - a notorious religious bigot with a criminal record for supporting terrorism and incitement to racism - denounced the ban. "When terrorism strikes us we must strike back with great force, not surrender to its whims," he said. - DNA

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