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Olaf Scholz says he plans to speak with Putin over Ukraine

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Pak-Azerbaijan ties bound by brotherhood

Detailed News On Page-08



Jahangir Tareen set to form new political party

Detailed News On Page-08



Briefs

Imran not mentally stable

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Federal health minister and PPP leader Abdul Qadir Patel on Friday said PTI chief Imran Khan's medical report showed consumption of drugs and not fractures. Addressing a presser, he said Mr Khan was examined in PIMS after he was arrested, adding that he kept roaming for 5-6 months with a plaster. "No medical report shows fractures on Mr Khan's body," he added. He went on to say that courts gave relief to Mr Khan before the medical report was sought, adding that the report could not be brought to the public completely. "Mr Khan's urine sample was also taken for test," he added. Initial report elicited alcohol and cocaine abuse, Mr Patel alleged. The minister continued by saying that details on the ratio of alcohol and cocaine would be shared soon, adding that the report also placed question mark on Mr Khan's mental state.

PDM destroying economy

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leader Farrukh Habib on Friday accused the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) of destroying the economy. Speaking to media, Mr Habib recalled, "Former Prime Minister Imran Khan had said that the fall of his government would make it difficult to control the country's economic situation". He lamented that PTI was a national party and "cannot be compared with MQM". Reiterating the demand for elections, Mr Habib said, "We wanted to see progress in line with the holding of fresh elections in the country." More than 100,000 people have faced unemployment in one year, Mr Habib rued.

Will leave PML-N but on one condition

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) prominent leader Miftah Ismail announced on Friday that he would follow in the footsteps of Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former prime minister of Pakistan, if Mr Abbasi decided to leave the party. Speaking at a meeting with a delegation of the Council of Economic and Energy Journalists, Miftah Ismail stressed the significance of Mr Abbasi's political choices in determining his own future within the party. Mr Ismail expressed confidence in Mr Abbasi's judgement, asserting that he would not make any misguided decisions.

Holiday Notice

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

— Editor

TEXPO 2023 IN KARACHI

Rule of law at any cost, assures PM

PM asks exporters to come up with innovative ideas for boosting exports

NAZIR SIYAL / DNA

KARACHI: Prime Minister (PM) Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday stressed the country's exporters to come up with innovative and unique ideas to boost exports which would ultimately help the country earn valuable foreign exchanges. "Despite various challenges, we have very robust, very futuristic, and extremely hardworking entrepreneurs that have gradually built Pakistan's export culture," he said while addressing a ceremony at the Textile Expo here. He said with genuine government support combined with the entrepreneurs' extraordinary intellect and hard work, the provision of quality export goods to foreign customers would be ensured. Welcoming the foreign delegates, the PM said he was happy to learn that over 400 foreign delegates from 60 countries were visiting on the occasion showed Pakistan was a valuable destination for foreign guests, buyers, and traders. Shehbaz Sharif also appreciated the industrialists, exporters, and experts who had contributed immensely to promoting Pakistan's textile and leather exports. He said Pakistan's industry had now been transformed and converted to air jet looms, spinning, and weaving. Commerce Minister, Secretary Commerce, and Zubair Motiwala, he said had done a commendable job by arranging this expo which would help promote the country's exports. The PM said the textile sector constituted 60%

of total exports while 40% labour force was absorbed in this sector. "It is no doubt one of the largest sectors of Pakistan's economy," he added. He pointed out that despite financial challenges and other difficulties, the government was committed to providing genuine support to all the export sectors including textile, leather, and sports to help increase the country's export volume. He recalled that a few decades ago, Pakistan was ahead of its neighbors in textile exports, however unfortunately it lost the grounds. "But I have no doubt in mind that we can still recover from these setbacks and take hands off the clock back to 1990s and excel in our exports," he said adding that Naveed Qamar, its team, and the finance minister combined could turn the table. The PM said Naveed Qamar had put in place the national compliance cell which was the need of the hour and "we are obviously grateful to the European Union for GSP plus status and again I am aware of the fact that all reviews have been done, and we ... respect all international requirements in this behalf whether it is good governance, human rights or any other requirement". He maintained the government believed in the rule of law and merit, and come what may, the government would toe the line of constitution and policies. Commerce Minister Syed Naveed Qamar on the occasion said Pakistan offered numerous opportunities for investment to foreign investors.

Continued on Page 06

No plans to travel abroad, says Imran

Imran Khan thanks govt for placing him on no-fly list; says he'll spend his holidays in northern mountains

Abrarul Haq, Saifullah Nyazee quit PTI

BUREAU REPORT



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Expressing their regret over the May 9 mayhem, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders - singer-turned-politic

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan Friday thanked the government for placing his name on the no-fly list along 600 leaders and lawmakers of his party, because he had no plans to travel abroad. In a statement on Friday, PTI Chairman said that he had no plans to go abroad because he neither had any properties or businesses abroad nor even a bank account outside the country. He stated: "I want to thank the government for putting my name on the ECL as I have no plans to travel abroad, because I neither have any properties or businesses abroad nor even a bank account outside the country." Imran Khan stated: "If and when I do get an opportunity for a holiday, it will be in our northern mountains, my favourite place on earth." He further said that he immediately condemned on the corps commander house when he learnt about it in the court.

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Continued on Page 06

May 9 riots 'planned at Zaman Park': Maryam

DNA

VIHARI: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Friday said that May 9 riots were not spontaneous attacks but rather it was planned at Imran Khan's residence in Lahore's Zaman Park. "This did not happen suddenly. This was an act of terror planned at Zaman Park," she said while addressing a PML-N Youth Convention in Vihari.

"Even Pakistan's worst enemies could not manage to do what Imran Niazi did." She questioned why Imran's "miscreants" only targeted Corp Commander's House. "Many government buildings came in the way but no one attacked them but they went straight to Corp Commander House," she added. Maryam said that Imran was not alone in attacking the military installation, saying that his "facilitators" were also on board.

Continued on Page 06



VEHARI: PMLN Chief Organiser and Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz addressing a public rally in Vehar. — DNA



KARACHI: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visiting different stalls in Textile Expo (TEXPO) 2023. — DNA

Only 6 cases to be tried in Mily Courts: Sanaullah

Assures no innocent to be taken to task

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah on Friday said that "only six" out of nearly 500 cases filed after the May 9 vandalism are being processed to be tried under Army Act, rejecting the perception created by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) that all of those arrested will face military courts. "The remaining will be tried by ordinary courts," he said in a presser in a bid to clear the air regarding the government's crackdown against those allegedly involved in the May 9 mayhem. "Various analyses and conspiracies have been spreading ... so I thought it best to appear here and state the facts and figures," Rana Sanaullah said.

Continued on Page 06

Audio Leaks

Supreme Court bars proceedings of judicial commission

The country's top judge also lamented the government's "hasty" decision to enact legislation regulating chief justice's powers

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Friday stayed the proceedings of a high-powered judicial commission formed to probe the audio leaks related to the judiciary. It also suspended the federal government's notification on the commission's constitution. The order was issued by a five-member SC bench headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial and comprising Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan, Justice Munib Akhtar, Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Shahid Waheed. The bench issued the order while hearing separate petitions filed by Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Abid Shahid Zuberi, SCBA Secretary Muqtedir Akhtar Shabbir, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan and Advocate Riaz Hanif Rahi requesting to declare the commission's formation illegal. The order

noted that the SCBA president's lawyer pointed out the commission had already started functioning and issued an order on May 22 that its proceedings would be made public. The commission's next meeting was scheduled for May 27 (tomorrow). "In the circumstances, till the next date of hearing, the operation of the impugned notification No.SRO.596(I)/2023 dated 19.05.2023 issued by the Federal Government is suspended as is the order dated 22.05.2023 made by the Commission and in consequence thereof proceedings of the Commission are stayed," it stated. The federal government had last week constituted a judicial commission to probe the veracity of recent audio leaks and their impact on the independence of the judiciary. The government constituted a three-member judicial commission, headed by a

Continued on Page 06

Holidays in Gilgit-Baltistan

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SERENA HOTELS

Four medical stores sealed, six salesmen arrested

PESHAWAR: Following instructions issued by Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Shah Fahad, Assistant Commissioner Sayyeda Zainab Naqvi along with drug inspectors Muhammad Zeeshah and Madiha Anjum on Friday inspected medical stores at University Road here.

During the operation drug samples from medical stores were inspected however a medical store named Irfan Medicos was sealed for not having the right DSL. Some other medical stores including Sadiq Medical Center, City Medicos, Imran Medicos and Makka Medicos were also found guilty of selling unregistered medicines, using poor packing material and allowing unauthorized salesmen.

The inspection team arrested 6 owners of the unregistered medical stores and sealed three other stores. APP

RADM Javed Iqbal, others meet caretaker CM

LAHORE: Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal, Commander Central Punjab Pakistan Navy, and Commandant Pakistan Navy War College, met caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at his office on Friday.

The meeting revolved around various matters of mutual interest. The attacks on military installations and monuments of the martyrs were condemned during the meeting, while unwavering solidarity was expressed with the martyrs and their families.

The CM lauded professional capabilities of the Pakistan Navy, highlighting its consistent demonstration of bravery and valour. The officers and jawans of the Pakistan Navy, who dedicate themselves for defending naval frontiers, are a source of immense pride for the nation, he added. It is reassuring to know that the Pakistan Navy, alongside the Pakistan Air Force and the Army, has consistently given a befitting response to enemy aggression, the CM said. —APP

Former MPA resigns from PTI

PESHAWAR: Former Member Provincial Assembly, Malik Qasim Khan Khattak here Friday resigned from Pakistan Tahreek e Insaaf. Addressing a press conference here at the press club, Aslam Khattak said that May 9-10 vandalism and ransacking of public properties and attacks on defense installations were unacceptable and strict action should be taken against the culprits. The May 9 violent incidents created widespread anger and tarnished the country's image. He said PTI has disappointed the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the party has closed its own Ehtesab Commission that exposed Imran's tall anti-corruption claims. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Dr. Rumesh Kumar, Patron-in-Chief of Pakistan Hindu Council, Ambassadors of Indonesia, Thailand Nepal and Secretary National Heritage Faarina Mazhar cutting cake to celebrate Budha birthday.—DNA

PARC demonstrates commitment to enhancing capacity building efforts

Certificates were awarded to all participants, signifying the successful completion of the workshop and acknowledging their active involvement

ISLAMABAD (PR&P, PARC): The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) recently organized a three-day workshop at the National Institute of Genomics and Biotechnology (NIGAB), National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) in Islamabad. The workshop, led by the Animal Biotechnology Program (ABP) at NIGAB, focused on advanced molecular tools, including Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), Enzyme-Linked

Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA), and Bioinformatics. Participants from various institutions attended the workshop, gaining valuable insights and skills in these cutting-edge research techniques. The ABP at NIGAB, NARC actively works on developing innovative solutions to enhance animal productivity, health, and welfare, including the creation of animal vaccines, advancements in breeding techniques, improvements in animal nutrition, and the development of diagnostic tools for animal diseases.

Dr. Muhammad Ghulam Ali, Chairman of PARC, graced the inaugural session of the workshop as the Chief Guest. During his address at the opening ceremony, Dr. Ali provided a comprehensive overview of the research conducted at NIGAB, emphasizing the institute's commitment to expanding its capacity building initiatives through collaborations with international organizations. He highlighted the significance of prioritizing domestic manufacturing capabilities and achieving self-sufficiency, encouraging participants to actively contribute to the country's development.

In the concluding session, Dr. Muhammad Afzal, Country Director FAO, Pakistan raised concerns about the credibility of research conducted in Pakistan, which often faces skepticism. He emphasized the need to raise standards to establish a global presence and addressed the importance of addressing gaps in funding and research support to further enhance the country's scientific capabilities. Participants provided positive feedback on the workshop, de-

scribing it as exceptionally informative and insightful. They acquired valuable proficiencies relevant to their respective fields of expertise, appreciating the enlightening briefings by Dr. Muhammad Shaukat, Dr. Muhammad Naeem Riaz, and Dr. Tahira Kamal, which provided knowledge of laboratory methodologies and practical skills. Certificates were awarded to all participants, signifying the successful completion of the workshop and acknowledging their active involvement.

Leaders in Islamabad business summit on May 31 and June 1

ISLAMABAD: The 6th Edition of Pakistan's biggest corporate event, LEADERS IN ISLAMABAD BUSINESS SUMMIT 2023 (LIBS), will take place on May 31 & June 1, 2023, at a local hotel in Islamabad. Curated under the theme of "The Big Rethink," this Summit brings together a spectacular array of national and international experts to re-think the conventional paradigms for the business world of the future. LIBS 2023 is jointly hosted by Nutshell Conferences Group and Martin Dow Group, in strategic partnership with the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI), and Unity Foods Limited (UFL). The Ministerial Keynote will be delivered by Senator Dr. Musadik Malik, Minister of State, Ministry of Energy, whereas Khurram Dastgir Khan, Minister for Power, will grace the Summit as the Guest of Honor.

Ali Akhai, Chairman of Martin Dow Limited, will be gracing the event with opening remarks as the founding partner of LIBS and Chairman of Pakistan's leading multinational healthcare group. His innovative, progressive, and forward-looking approach has been instrumental to the growth of Martin Dow. He has represented Pakistan on international platforms including the World Economic Forum (WEF). He has worked closely with global leaders to portray a positive image of the country and initiate compelling conversations to enhance Pakistan's reputation. Farrukh Amin, Chief Executive Officer, Unity Foods Limited, will be sharing the opening address with reference to UFL's vision of excellence from 'Farm to Fork,' and strategies for food security in Pakistan through innovative and mechanized infrastructure that UFL is incorporating to establish best industry practices. The two-day Sum-

mit will be bringing together more than 50 eminent and renowned panelists belonging to diverse industries from across the globe. The primary agenda will entail discussions and solutions about the present and the future of digitalization, healthcare, HR, economic landscape, innovation, and investments through the 'Rethink' lens. The Summit will have corporate and public sector leadership from across the world, including: Aamir Ibrahim, President & CEO, Jazz & Chairman, Mobilink Microfinance Bank; Abdul Haseeb, Managing Director, TMC; Adil Farhat, Chief Executive Officer, Procter & Gamble Pakistan; Ahmed Khan Bozai, Managing Director & City Country Officer, Citibank; Ali Akhai, Chairman, Martin Dow Group; Asif Peer, Chief Executive Officer, Systems Limited; Asim Chohan, Senior Vice President, Morgan Stanley, USA; Ayla Majid, Global Vice President, ACCA & Founder & CEO, Plaintive.

NDRMF to fund over Rs 924 mln to strengthen health system in GB

ISLAMABAD: The NDRMF is providing funding assistance of over Rs 924 million to Health Department, Gilgit Baltistan's Government for executing the project "Emergency Assistance to Strengthen Health System to Fight Against COVID 19 and other health related emergencies in Gilgit Baltistan". Chief Executive Officer (CEO) NDRMF, Bilal Anwar and Secretary Health Services Government of Gilgit Baltistan, Sanaulah, and Chief Economist Planning and Development Department Government of Gilgit Baltistan signed the Grant Implementation Agreement, a news release said. The Project is designed to support 18 public sector hospitals and health facilities through provision of supplies and clinical management equipment to deal with health related emergencies in Gilgit Baltistan. —APP

25 new crime scene unit sets up in Karachi

KARACHI: 25 new crime scene units equipped with 8 modern technology vehicles and 12 to 14 trained police personnel in each unit have been set up round the clock high alert in different districts told Additional Inspector General of Police Javed Alam Odho in a statement. According to the spokesman, 25 new crime scene units have been inaugurated, the purpose of establishing offices in all districts of Karachi is to make the crime scene safe and secure in a timely manner and to innovate and improve the investigation. It was further informed in the meeting that the main objective of the Crime Scene Unit is to secure the evidence from the spot and to enable the investigating officers to access the accused and to convict the accused

in the Court on the basis of solid evidence. ADIG Crime, SSP Malir, SP Headquarters, DSP Crime Scene Unit and other officers participated on this occasion. Meanwhile, special measures have been taken regarding high security alert in Karachi parts during Friday prayers. Additional IG Karachi Javed Alam Odho issued orders to make all security arrangements and measures very concrete and extraordinary in Metropolitan city during offering prayers on Friday. On the occasion of Friday prayers, instructions are issued to ensure the deployment of police personnel in plain clothes and uniforms on the sides of mosques and Imam-bargahs and on the main roads. For the security of the worshippers, all possible steps should be taken under the coordination of all the police stations. Parking of vehicles and motorcycles should be ensured at a distance from mosques and Imam-bargahs.

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Youm-e-Takreem Shuhada-e-Pakistan' ceremony at RCCI

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) organized a ceremony, "Youm-e-Takreem Shuhada-e-Pakistan" to pay rich tribute to Shuhada. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq, Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shehzad, former presidents, executive committee members, women members and other members were also present. Former member of National Assembly and Prime Minister Islamabad Development Steering Committee Chairman Hanif Abbasi, Station Commander Rawalpindi Brigadier Salman Nazir, Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaqat Ali Chatta, Deputy Commissioner Hasan Waqar Cheema, DGRDA Saif Anwar Japha, Small Chamber President Tariq Jadoon and a large number of representatives of Anjuman Tajran attended the event. President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce Saqib Rafiq said on this

occasion that the events of May 9 are deplorable and added that, no matter what the situation is, we have to stay united. We must unite ourselves against the nefarious designs of the enemy. Group leader Chamber of Commerce Sohail Altaf said, we pay tribute to the sacrifices of armed forces, police and other forces. Addressing the ceremony, Hanif Abbasi said that the martyrs are our pride, I pay great tribute to the parents

of the martyrs. The sacrifices of our armed forces and law enforcement agencies are eternal, those who burnt the effigies of the martyrs and humiliated them, is a very reprehensible and condemnable act, Hanif Abbasi said that he proposed to the Prime Minister the name of the Seventh Avenue Interchange as Colonel Sher Khan Shaheed Interchange to pay tribute to him, we have to work together to take the

country on the path of development. Addressing the ceremony, the station commander said that the enemy is trying to create a wedge between the Pakistan Army and the people. There is a lot of grief and sadness among the people including the army on the events of May 9. The only way for the progress of the country is unity and consensus. He said that we can create a good position in the world,

but for this we need good intentions and consensus. For the security of Pakistan, the people along with the forces of Pakistan have made many sacrifices. We have traveled a long way since 1947. Commissioner Rawalpindi, Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi and representatives of DGRDA and Anjuman Tajran also addressed the ceremony and paid tribute to the martyrs.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MAY

May 03/Poland
National Day
May 06/Bulgaria
Armed Forces Day
May 06/UAE
Armed Forces Day
May 07/Kazakhstan
Armed Forces Day
May 08/Czech Republic
National Day
May 09/European Union
National Day
May 17/Norway
Constitution Day
May 21/Hungary
Armed Forces Day
May 22/Yemen Republic
Re-unification Day (National Day)
May 24/Eritrea
National Day
May 25/Argentina
National Day
May 25/Lebanon
Liberation and Resistance Day
May 28/Azerbaijan
Republic Day
May 28/Ethiopia
National Day



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Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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



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Railway Exchange.9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



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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



ISLAMABAD: Wives of diplomats posing for a picture on the occasion of the Independence Day of Azerbaijan.—DNA

Govt to provide maximum relief to small businesses

Malik further explained that a number of agreements with Russia had reached their final stage and Pakistan would receive its first shipment of discounted oil in the next few days

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik on Friday said that in the fiscal budget 2023-24, the coalition-led government has planned to use all available resources to reduce the financial burden from the middleman and provide maximum relief to small businesses.

"The current budget will be a poor friendly which will reflect Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

concern for downtrodden people of the country," he said in an exclusive interview with a private news channel.

The minister added that the new budget would strengthen the relationship between the government and the masses as it would promote pro-people economic policies. The incumbent government had to take difficult decisions to put the economy on track, and it could take more drastic measures if required to improve it, he added. Malik further explained that a

number of agreements with Russia had reached their final stage and Pakistan would receive its first shipment of discounted oil in the next few days.

He said the country would receive one-third of its crude oil imports from Russia at a concessional rate. The minister highlighted "it is the first time in history" that Russian delegates visited Pakistan and began talks on an oil and gas deal on discounted rates.

Under the Pak-Russia agreement, "oil and gas will start reaching

Pakistan soon", which would help provide relief to common people, he added. To a question about the TAPI pipeline project among multiple countries would bring peace and stability to the region, adding, Pakistan's gas shortages issue would be eased soon under this project.

"We are currently working on three pipelines including a liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline from Gwadar, TAPI and the North-South LNG pipeline," he

informed, adding, the TAPI gas pipeline project aims to bring natural gas at cheap rates.

Dr Musadik Malik requested Turkmenistan and Iran to take all steps for the early completion of the project. Musadik stressed that the budget would present a long-term way forward to set economic goals for the next five years, adding, the public would reject all those elements in elections, which used politics for personal gains instead of addressing their problems.

Pakistan Cultural Week concluded in Chengdu

ISLAMABAD: The 2023 Pakistan Week, started from May 18 came to a successful close in Dujiangyan, Chengdu, Sichuan region, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Friday. Themed "Working hand in hand for a closer China-Pakistan bond under the Belt and Road Initiative", the 7-day event showcased traditional Pakistani clothes, dazzling jewelry and hand-made rugs copied from ancient Chinese artists, which vividly interpreted the fusion and collision of Chinese and Pakistani culture.

"Children are our future. That is why I was particularly excited to have the opportunity to visit Wanhui Academy in Dujiangyan, to talk to representatives and discuss Pakistan-China relations," said Agha Hunain Abbas Khan, Acting Con-



sul General of the Consulate General of Pakistan in Chengdu, expressing his excitement to communicate with local children and representatives to know more about the long-lasting friendship between both countries. During the event, the Chinese city of Dujiangyan and the Pakistani city of

Murree signed a Letter of Intent for the establishment of a sister-city relationship to cement people-to-people exchanges and enhance practical cooperation. Also the military action-romance film "Parwaaz Hai Junoon" was screened for local residents to enjoy the charm of the friendly coun-

try on their doorsteps. According to Sichuan Provincial People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, this cultural week will promote the understanding of Sichuan people on Pakistan, and effectively boost the exchanges and cooperation between the two sides.—DNA

Gwadar Port desilting operation geared up

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Gwadar port desilting operation has picked robust momentum after ministry of planning urged to accelerate the work on the special directives of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif. Desilting mega process has been galvanized in order to restore original depth of navigational channel at Gwadar Port offering heavyweight ships to float well. It will ensure seamless movement of all types of vessels, facilitating them to dock at ease. Gwadar Port Authority Project Director Dawood Baloch told Gwadar pro that after the mobilization of required paraphernalia and test-run to ensure operational efficiency engaging China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC), dredging operation has moved into high gear. "We plan to reclaim 14.5 meters natural and original operational depth at Gwadar Port at a cost of Rs 4.7 billion," he added. He expressed satisfaction on the pace of operation. "Under title of "the maintenance dredging of a navigational channel of Gwadar Port", Project will complete in 12 months as per agreement signed between CHEC and Gwadar Port Authority (GPA)," he added. Another GPA official told Gwadar Pro that since earlier they planned to kickstart only one part of dredging process in two or three phases at Gwadar Port, so around Rs 1 billion was allocated in 2022-2023 budget for a partial dredging. Later, he said, it was finalized to do complete dredging at one fell swoop. Hence, now cost of the project stands at Rs 4.7 billion.

POL import bill contracts by 17.96% in 10 months

ISLAMABAD: The imports of the overall petroleum group contracted by 17.96 percent during the first ten months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The total imports of the petroleum group during July-April (2022-23) stood at \$13,974.610 million, as against the imports of \$17,033.574 million during the same period of last year, according to PBS data.

Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 28.07 percent, from \$8,549.224 million last year to \$6,149.117 million during the time period under review.

Likewise, the imports of liquefied natural gas declined by 16.06 percent and dropped from \$3,705.959 million last year to \$3,110.836 million this year whereas petroleum crude dipped by 1.98 percent from \$4,221.208 million to \$4,137.726 million.

On the other hand, the products that witnessed positive growth included liquefied petroleum gas, the imports of which grew by 3.53 percent, from \$556.962 million last year to \$ 576.618 million whereas imports of all other petroleum products increased by 41.28 percent, from \$ 0.222 million to \$0.313 million. Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the petroleum group imports witnessed a decrease of 59.91 percent during the month of April 2023 as compared to the same months of last year.—APP

Theaters all set for cinematic blockbusters

ISLAMABAD, May 26 (APP): Gearing up for a roller coaster of fun, joy & awesomeness throughout this summer season, theaters in Pakistan are all set for back-to-back cinematic blockbusters.

Starting from Lollywood to Hollywood, the whole month of June will be fun-packed for Pakistani cinema audiences since more than 10 films will be ready for screening around the country.

From some of the hyped names like eVIPi & eAllahyar and The 100 Flowers of God (3D) which are already the talk of the town due to their release on Eid ul Azha, a double joyous element of the month of June, many other films are getting in line to enchant the audience. First in line is a 3D film from the famous Spider-man series, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse released on June 2 as per announced by Sony Pictures UK. Following the lead another blockbuster from Transformers Franchise eTransformers: Rise of the Beasts will hit the cinemas on June 9 along with Pixaris enchanting film eElemental set to release on June 16.—APP

OGRA shares cylinders blast report

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has released its investigation report on the LPG Cylinder Blast incident that occurred at Crunch Bite Restaurant in District Narowal, resulting in the unfortunate loss of four lives and several injuries. The report indicates that the catastrophic incident could have been prevented if proper safety measures had been in place.

According to the investigation findings, the incident was primarily attributed to a lack of awareness and negligence on the part of the restaurant staff. The absence of hooters/smoke alarms or gas detectors, improper ventilation in the kitchen where the LPG cylinders were installed, and the non-availability of a special fire extinguisher (DCP) were key contributing factors. Additionally, the restaurant management failed to inform the diners about the fire eruption and instruct them to evacuate promptly. In light of this incident, OGRA has taken the initiative to issue advisory notes to all Chief Secretaries, urging their collaboration in raising awareness about the safe use of LPG cylinders in both residential and commercial settings. OGRA emphasizes the need to implement the following safety criteria at the local level, as LPG is highly inflammable and mishandling it can lead to fatal incidents: Placement of LPG cylinders in well-ventilated areas. Installation and availability of special fire extinguishers (DCP) in restaurants. Installation of hooters, smoke alarms, and gas detectors. Provision of emergency functional exits in restaurants. Restriction of LPG installations, fittings, and valve changes to trained staff only. By establishing these minimum safety criteria at the district level, OGRA aims to enhance the safety standards in the handling and usage of LPG cylinders.—DNA

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Briefs

The political turmoil destroying country's economy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt on Friday said the political upheaval and other factors have destroyed the country's economy.

The IMF's program is on hold, foreign exchange reserves are at around \$4 billion and Pakistan is due to pay \$3.7 billion next month, with the risk of default looming, he said. In these circumstances, it will be difficult to provide relief to the public and the business community in the forthcoming budget. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that Pakistan will somehow manage payments of three billion and seventy million dollars, but next year, Pakistan will need thirty-four billion dollars to repay foreign loans and interest. It will be difficult for Pakistan to manage 34 billion dollars without the IMF programme, he added.

The business leader noted that the stock market has decreased by one thousand and forty-six points in two weeks, while exports have decreased by 11.7% in ten months. Textile exports have decreased by two billion dollars and a decrease of six billion dollars is expected in the year's exports. Mr. Butt said that a decrease of four hundred billion rupees has been recorded in tax revenue and there has been a thirteen percent decrease in remittances during the last ten months.

JKLF hailed Yasin Malik' services

ISLAMABAD: The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has hailed the services of illegally detained party Chairman Muhammad Yasin Malik for the Kashmir cause on the completion of his one year of unjust life sentence by India's pliant

judiciary. According to Kashmir Media Service, JKLF spokesman Muhammad Rafiq Dar in a statement described Muhammad Yasin Malik as a symbol of perseverance, and pride for his bravery and the sacrifices he rendered for the Kashmiri people, so far. He said, the ongoing Indian-sponsored state oppression in IOJK has reached its peak and that the pride of India will certainly reduce to dust no sooner the dark night of oppression ends. Condemning the life imprisonment sentenced by an Indian special court on the dictates of the Indian government against the popular leader of the people of Jammu Kashmir, Muhammad Yasin Malik, the spokesman said that India with aggressive policies is not going to achieve anything with the use of her military might against the Kashmiri people.—APP

Poliovirus detected from Hangu's environmental sample

ISLAMABAD: Wild poliovirus has once again been found in a sewage sample from the Hangu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. According to the Pakistan Polio Laboratory at the National Institute of Health, wild poliovirus type 1 was detected in an environmental sample collected from the Civil Hospital, Jani Chowk site on May 9. Earlier, a sample collected from this site had also tested positive for poliovirus in April. The detected virus belongs to a virus cluster which is in circulation in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. "The presence of poliovirus in the environment means children's health is at risk and parents must ensure that their children are protected through vaccination," said Federal Minister for National Health Services Abdul Qadir Patel. He said, "We must remember that polio has no cure and only the vaccine offers lifelong protection. A vaccination drive is underway in many districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—APP



A ISLAMABAD: A large number of deserving people stand in long queue outside PIMS Hospital as waiting for Free Food distribution Truck, in Federal Capital.—Online

WB approves \$213m for flood-affected people

The assistance is in line with programme agreed with Pakistan to respond to the devastating floods that hit the country last summer and build a climate-resilient Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank (WB) has approved financial assistance amounting to US \$213 million to mitigate the sufferings of the flood-affected communities of Balochistan province under the Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project (IFRAP). The assistance is in line with programme agreed with Pakistan to respond to the devastating floods that hit the country last summer and build a climate-resilient Pakistan aims at improving livelihoods, essential services

and enhancing risk protection in communities affected by the 2022 floods.

"We will be working closely with the Government of Balochistan to support the affected communities by providing livelihood support and rehabilitating irrigation and flood protection infrastructures," WB Country Director for Pakistan Nay Benhassine said in a news release here on Friday. He said the assistance would not only help restore livelihoods but also protect the population by improving their resilience to potential future climate-related disasters and natural hazards.

"This project is part of the comprehensive package of post-floods rehabilitation and resilient-reconstruction program agreed with the authorities."

The Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project (IFRAP) will provide housing reconstruction grants to approximately 35,100 homeowners to rebuild their homes following resilience standards and livelihood grants to smallholder farmers to support livestock, promote climate-smart agriculture and other productive activities. The assistance would also help restore essential services by

rehabilitating damaged community infrastructure and facilities such as water supply, irrigation, roads, and community facilities.

"Balochistan is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters due to its geographical location, socio-economic background, and climate change," WB's Senior Water Specialist Yoro Sidibe said. The project would help provide economic opportunities to the affected communities while ensuring social inclusion and participation. It will also strengthen institutional capacity in terms of preparedness and response to future disasters.

The project would benefit approximately 2.7 million people in selected communities in calamity-declared districts across Balochistan.

"It will mitigate flood risks through a combination of resilient protection infrastructure, enhancing early warning systems, while ensuring that women have access to this system and disaster risk management information," the WB officials said adding the IFRAP would help restore degraded watersheds and strengthen institutional capacity at both the provincial and local level.

Chairman PRCS pay tribute to martyrs

Chairman PRCS Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari says the sacrifices made by our courageous soldiers, law enforcement personnel, and civilians in the face of adversity and threat are a testament to their unwavering commitment to safeguarding our nation's values and freedom.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Multiple ceremonies and gatherings to commemorate the "Youmm-e-Takreem Shuhada-e-Pakistan" were held across Pakistan to pay rich tributes to martyrs on Thursday. Chairman Pakistan Red Crescent Society Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari has extended heartfelt homage and respect to the brave martyrs who selflessly sacrificed their lives for the defense, sovereignty, and honor of Pakistan.

In his message on the occasion, Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari said that the sacrifices made by our courageous soldiers, law enforcement personnel, and civilians in the face of adversity and threat were a testament to their unwavering commitment to safeguarding our nation's values and freedom. He said that PRCS stands in solidarity with the families of our fallen heroes and it is our duty as a society to ensure that the



families of our martyrs are provided with the care, respect, and opportunities they deserve. "As we commemorate this solemn day, let us unite as a nation, irrespective of our differences, and work towards the development and progress of our country, upholding the ideals for which our martyrs laid down their lives", he added.

ANF foils four bids to smuggle 844 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations managed to recover 844 kg drugs and arrested four drug smugglers, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that in an operation near Attock Chhachh Interchange, ANF recovered 2460 grams opium and rounded up three accused residents of Attock and Swabi. In another operation near Peshawar-Charsada Road, ANF seized 24 kg opium and 18 kg charras. In the third operation, ANF acting on a tip-off conducted a raid and foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from Quetta to Sindh. During the operation, ANF team tried to stop a Vigo pick-up vehicle bearing a fake government number plate and driver wearing fake uniform. After chasing the vehicle, ANF managed to intercept the vehicle near Quetta-Sibi Road and recovered 700 kg charras besides netting an accused resident of Quetta. After preliminary investigation and pinpointing of the accused,—APP

Ongoing operation is a security requirement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Murtaza Mughal, President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW) on Friday said the current operation in the country is necessary and a national security requirement. COAS Asim Munir has not only saved the country from civil war but also frustrated unholy designs on India, Israel and the US, he said. The dream of the enemies of Pakistan to ruin our country has been shattered by the timely action, said Dr. Murtaza Mughal, President of PEW. In a statement issued here today, he said that not a single friendly country has raised any objection against the ongoing operation in Pakistan, but America is criticising it. The plan of the international establishment to make Pakistan a satellite state of India and use it against China has been ruined, he observed. Dr. Murtaza said that the current operation is not against any political party but a successful attempt to save the country. The process of damaging CPEC and Gwadar, the plot to divide the army, rolling back the nuclear program and recognizing Israel have been dealt with effectively. China is saving Pakistan from default but it will not invest heavily in our country until it is sure that Pakistan will not damage CPEC again, Chinese projects will not be rolled back, and the government which likes to dance to the tunes of the US and Goldsmith family will not return to power. He noted that PML-N and PPP are in favour of CPEC and they have been punished for it and the international establishment was sure that in the presence of these two parties, Pakistan cannot be persuaded to act against China. Now General Asim Munir has removed China's reservations and China is willing to work on development projects again, for which the Western powers have given the task of a failed politician to attack the military leadership.

PMDC successfully conducts foreign students' NEB exam

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) has successfully conducted the National Equivalence Examination (NEB) for foreign students at Rawalpindi Medical University (RMU) as per the decision of the newly elected council.

According to PMDC, all necessary arrangements were made prior to the exam in which students showed complete satisfaction. The total number of candidates scheduled for the exam was 512, out of which 370 candidates appeared in the exam. After a comprehensive review and checking of all papers, the result was compiled and prepared by RMU. PMDC declared the result of NEB and uploaded it on its website and students can visit the website to check their results at www.pmdc.pk

President PMDC Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj said that the council had given special amnesty to Pakistani national female students studying in Afghanistan whose study was banned by the Afghan government and Ukrainian students whose studies were affected due to war.

The exam date was announced well before time, so students wishing to appear can prepare accordingly. The NEB examination is conducted twice a year to assess and oversee the assessment of the knowledge, clinical skills, and professional attributes of students who partially complete a medical and dental program in a foreign institution and seek transfer and admission to a medical or dental college in Pakistan.

President condoles with family members of martyred soldiers

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi on Friday talked to the family members of the Pakistan Army soldiers who embraced martyrdom in Tank, South Waziristan and Gulab Post, Balochistan on May 20, 2023. He also paid tribute to the martyrs and expressed sympathies with their families.

He called the family members of martyred Naek Muhammad Attique and Rajib Ali via telephone and prayed to Allah Almighty to grant courage to them to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude. The president also talked to the family members of Sepoy Mudassir, Abdul Qadir and Zaheer Ahmed who embraced martyrdom in Gulab Post and Zarghoon areas of Balochistan. The president saluted the martyrs for their utmost love for their country and devotion to their duties. Paying tributes to the services and sacrifices of the martyrs for their country, President Alvi thanked the families of the martyrs on behalf of the nation. He also prayed to Almighty Allah for the elevation of ranks of the departed souls in paradise.—APP

Pakistan's Rising Debt and Dwindling Economy

ABDUS SATTAR

Pakistan's fiscal deficit was around Rs.5bn in 1970. In 1980, it was Rs.14bn and Rs.52bn in 1990. In 2000, it soared to Rs.156bn, and Rs.929bn in 2010. After that, it propelled to Rs.3.4tr in 2020 and Rs.5.260tr in FY22 while stood at Rs.2.392tr during (July-Feb) FY23. The average fiscal deficit hovered around 6pc of GDP during 1970-2022. The persistent rising trend in fiscal deficit diverted the economy's direction towards internal and external borrowings. Moreover, external debt servicing and currency devaluation played a decisive role in public debt accumulation.

The total public debt was Rs.30bn in 1971 and Rs.146bn in 1980. It ballooned to Rs.711bn in 1990. In 2000, it was Rs.3.2tr, and Rs.9tr in 2010. It stood at Rs.19.7tr in 2016 and Rs.21.4tr in 2017. In 2018, it was Rs.25tr, and Rs.32.7tr in 2019. It escalated to

Rs.36.4tr in 2020 and reached Rs.40tr in 2021. The total public debt stood at 49.196tr in FY22 and Rs.52.721tr in December 2022. The GDP was Rs.66.950tr in FY22. The total public debt was 73.5pc of GDP in FY22. The debt burden per person mounted from Rs.129K to more than Rs.240K just in ten years.

The domestic debt was Rs.14bn in 1971 and engaged to Rs.60bn in 1980 while Rs.381bn in 1990. In 2000, it was Rs.1.6tr, and Rs.4.7tr in 2010. It burgeoned to Rs.23.3tr in 2020 and reached Rs.26.3tr in 2021. The domestic public debt stood at 31.037tr which was 46pc of GDP in FY22 and Rs.33.116tr in December 2022. The domestic debt was 63pc of total public debt in FY22. The external debt was Rs.16bn in 1971 and escalated to Rs.86bn in 1980 and Rs.330bn in 1990. In 2000 it was Rs.1.5tr and Rs.4.4tr in 2010. It jumped to Rs.13tr in 2020. In 2021, it was 13.6tr. The external public debt stood at 18.158tr which was 27pc of GDP in FY22 and Rs.19.605tr in December 2022. The external

debt was 37pc of the total public debt in FY22. The share of multilateral, bilateral, and commercial loans was 48pc, 30pc, and 22pc respectively, in external debt.

It is worth noting that under the Fiscal Responsibility Law, Pakistan's National Official Debt Ceiling was fixed 60pc of the GDP, which has been violated as public debt increased to 73.5pc of GDP in FY22. Currently, Pakistan is stuck in debt sludge and takes more new loans to pay the interest on the old loans and 60 to 70pc of the public revenue goes only for debt servicing. The total revenue was Rs.4500bn, with external debt servicing of Rs.3900bn in FY21. The recent rupee depreciation against the US dollar has added an additional burden of Rs.5200bn or US\$18bn in external debt.

The external debt was US\$3.41bn in 1970 which reached US\$130bn in FY2022 while external repayments always remained the toughest subject for the economy. The reliance on new loans augmented to pay the interest on the

old loans. The external debt servicing was US\$3.4bn in the 70s. It was US\$14bn in the 80s and US\$28bn in the 90s while US\$30bn during 2000-09. It increased to US\$56bn during 2010-19. Nevertheless, it was US\$10bn, US\$12bn, and US\$15bn in 2020, 2021, and 2022 respectively. The total external debt service payments were US\$150bn, which means on average more than US\$3bn was paid yearly from 1970 to 2021. Pakistan has to pay external repayments of US\$7.3bn this month and US\$3.7bn in June 2023. In the first 9 months of the current fiscal year, the external repayments were US\$3.6bn while tax revenues stood at around US\$3bn. Moreover, external repayments of US\$75bn are required for the next three years. The severity of dependence on the IMF is obvious from the recent uncertainty regarding the tranche of US\$1.1bn, which has shambled the economy. The SBP foreign exchange reserves depleted to US\$4.5bn. Interest and GST rates increased to 21pc

and 18pc, respectively. Inflation (CPI) proliferated to 27.3pc while dollar and petrol prices touched Rs.288 and Rs.282 per liter, respectively. With new taxes of Rs.170bn; consequently, about 20mn people are expected to slip below the poverty line. The recent rupee depreciation added Rs.5.2tr or US\$18bn in external debt. It also encouraged the hoarding of US\$8bn to US\$10bn domestically while illegal channels adversely affected remittances. Only US\$5mn is smuggled to Afghanistan on a daily basis. The industrial subsidy abolition and difficulty in opening new import LCs for raw materials harmfully affected domestic productivity as well as exports. The trade deficit stood at US\$21.3bn in FY23. Nutshell, GDP growth would decline to less than 1pc in FY23 from 6pc in FY22.

No doubt high fiscal deficit, external debt servicing, and currency devaluation played a decisive role in rising public debt. But permanent dependence on donors, as well as on interna-

tional financial institutions, is the symbol of debt addiction. Although debt restructuring or re-profiling provides temporary relief to the economy for a specific time. But it is not a viable solution to such a chronic problem. Therefore, the debt to GDP ratio should be topped from 73.5pc to 60pc. It requires more than 8pc of GDP growth by keeping the real interest rate and fiscal deficit less than 10pc and 1pc respectively for a decade. The perks and privileges as well as luxury imports should be reduced. The tax base should be increased by taking into account the informal economy. There is a dire need to enhance domestic productivity growth, high value-added exports, and foreign direct investment. The remittances should be boosted through legal channels by providing lucrative incentives and investment opportunities to Pakistani expats.

—The author is a researcher at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE).

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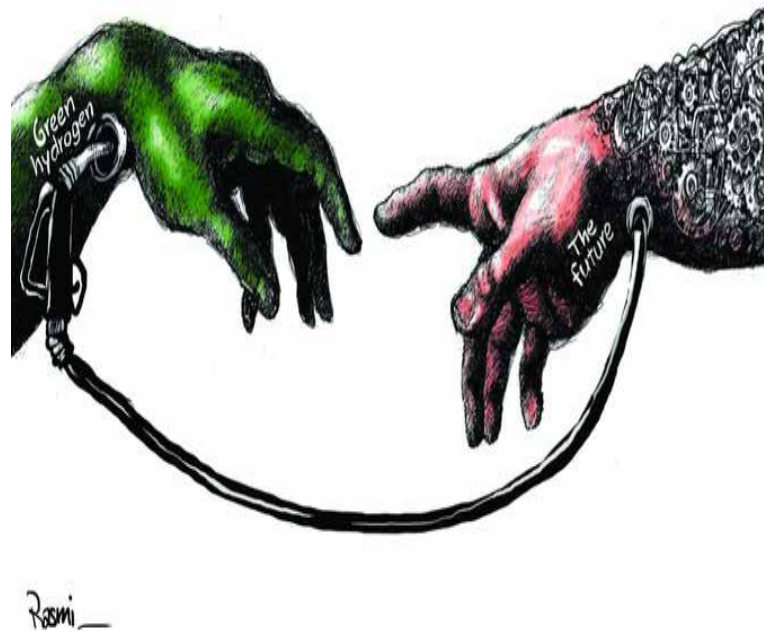
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Political consensus amidst economic turmoil

In times of economic turmoil, it is crucial for a nation's political leaders to set aside their differences and foster a climate of political consensus. Democracy and political stability are invaluable assets that need to be nurtured and protected, especially when economies are facing significant challenges. Political consensus serves as the binding force that enables governments to make tough decisions and implement effective policies, ensuring the long-term well-being of their nations. In this editorial, we will explore the importance of political consensus in upholding democracy and stability amidst economic turmoil. During economic crises, the instinctive response of political leaders may be to resort to partisan tactics, blame games, and the exploitation of divisions for short-term political gains. However, such approaches only exacerbate existing problems, undermine public trust, and hinder progress. Political consensus, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for unity, collaboration, and compromise. It brings together diverse perspectives and encourages policymakers to rise above their differences, focusing on the greater good rather than individual or party interests. When economic turmoil strikes, citizens and investors seek stability and certainty. A fragmented political landscape with constant bickering and gridlock undermines confidence in the government's ability to address the challenges at hand. By forging political consensus, leaders demonstrate a commitment to stability and provide reassurance to their constituents and markets. This stability, in turn, fosters an environment conducive to economic recovery, investment, and growth. Economic crises demand bold and swift action. However, implementing necessary reforms and policies in a highly polarized political environment can be exceedingly difficult. Political consensus allows governments to navigate these treacherous waters by finding common ground and generating support for vital economic measures. It streamlines decision-making processes, reduces bureaucratic red tape, and enables the timely implementation of policies that address the root causes of economic turmoil. Without political consensus, crucial reforms may languish, prolonging the suffering of citizens and hindering recovery efforts. Democracy thrives on the principles of inclusivity, representation, and open debate. However, when economic hardship looms, democratic institutions can become vulnerable to populist movements, extremism, and erosion. Political consensus plays a critical role in safeguarding democracy during economic crises. By fostering an environment of dialogue, compromise, and respect for differing opinions, political leaders demonstrate the strength of democratic values. Consensus-building ensures that diverse voices are heard, dissent is valued, and decisions are made through fair and transparent processes, protecting the democratic fabric of the nation.



Urgent climate action required

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture in its efforts to combat climate change and build a sustainable future. As a nation vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events and water scarcity, Pakistan must prioritize and accelerate its climate action agenda. Pakistan is among the countries most affected by climate change, with devastating consequences for its environment, economy, and human well-being. Rising temperatures, melting glaciers, erratic monsoons, and increased frequency of floods pose significant challenges to food security, water resources, and public health. Recognizing the stakes, Pakistan has a moral and strategic imperative to take swift action to mitigate and adapt to climate change. It is not just a matter of preserving the environment, but also ensuring a secure and prosperous future for its citizens. Pakistan's efforts in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions are crucial for global climate goals and for the country's own sustainable development. Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources should be a top priority. Pakistan has immense potential for solar, wind, and hydropower generation. By investing in clean energy infrastructure, the country can reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, decrease emissions, and create green jobs. The promotion of energy-efficient practices, such as building insulation and public transportation systems, can further contribute to a low-carbon economy. Adaptation to climate change is equally important as mitigation, especially for a country like Pakistan. The government must invest in strengthening infrastructure, improving water management, and enhancing disaster preparedness. Climate-resilient agriculture practices, water conservation, and afforestation programs can safeguard rural livelihoods and enhance climate resilience. By integrating climate considerations into urban planning, Pakistan can build sustainable cities that are equipped to withstand future climate challenges. Additionally, the education and awareness of climate risks and adaptation strategies among communities should be prioritized. Pakistan has the opportunity to assume a leadership role in global climate action. The country's geographic location, ecological diversity, and unique climate challenges provide a valuable perspective in international climate negotiations. By actively participating in forums like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Pakistan can contribute to shaping global climate policies and advocate for the needs of developing nations. Engaging with international partners and accessing climate finance mechanisms can support Pakistan's climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. Climate action cannot be successful without the active participation and support of the public. It is essential to raise awareness about the urgency and importance of climate change among citizens. Educational institutions, media, and civil society organizations have a crucial role in disseminating information and promoting sustainable practices. Encouraging public participation through platforms for dialogue and collaboration will help foster a sense of ownership and inspire collective action towards a sustainable future.

Media the fourth pillar

Qamar Bashir



Norway is placed top for the seventh year in a row, Ireland and Denmark are second and third, and Vietnam (178th), China (down four places to 179th), and North Korea (180th) are in the bottom three. Russia fell nine positions as a result of the Ukraine War, and Tajikistan, India, and Turkey fell from a "problematic situation" to the lowest category. India dropped to 161st place after losing 11 points, mostly after Hindu nationalist Modi took over as Prime Minister. Senegal dropped 31 places, Tunisia dropped 27 places, the Middle East was named the world's most dangerous location

Pakistan was amongst the few countries which has shown commendable improvement of 7 notches and achieved 150th position in 2023 compared to 157th of 2022 on the Freedom of Press Index and if the trend continues it may further improve to its average ranking of 142 to 145 maintained by it from 2018 to 2021. Comparatively, our closest neighbor and so called champion of democracy, India fell from 133 in 2016 to 142 in 2021, and further dropped to 150 in 2022 and 161 in 2023. The reasons for such a steep decline was attributed to politically partisan media, concentration of media ownership and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right. Like India, the freedom of press has been under threat in many countries of the world as never before. Norway is placed top for the seventh year in a row, Ireland and Denmark are second and third, and Vietnam (178th), China (down four places to 179th), and North Korea (180th) are in the bottom three. Russia fell nine positions as a result of the Ukraine War, and Tajikistan, India, and Turkey fell from a "problematic situation" to the lowest category. India dropped to 161st place after losing 11 points, mostly after Hindu nationalist Modi took over as Prime Minister. Senegal dropped 31 places, Tunisia dropped 27 places, the Middle East was named the world's most dangerous location for journalists, and the United States dropped three places to 45th. While we seldom take into account what is happening in other parts of the world, we have always expressed worry about media freedom in Pakistan. Shocking statistics from the World Press Freedom Index 2023 showed that 31 countries were in a "very serious situation," which was unprecedented. RSF Secretary General Christophe Deloire stated that "The international community needs to wake up to reality and act together, decisively and fast, to reverse this dangerous trend" in response to the current state of events. He continued by noting that "there is more red on the RSF map this year than ever before, and that the current state of the journalism environment is regarded as "bad" in seven out of ten nations and "satisfactory" in only three out of ten. A UN report claiming that 85% of people reside in nations where media freedom has decreased during the past five years was equally disturbing. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 30 journalists and two media workers have been killed, while 492 journalists and 18 media workers have been imprisoned around the world as of July 1, 2022 including 86 occurrences of violence against the media and its practitioners occurred in Pakistan between May 2021 and April 2022. According to Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), 2161 journalists and

media workers were assassinated globally between 1992 and 2022. According to these reports, a climate of fear impedes media coverage in many nations for a variety of reasons involving governments, political parties, and militant organizations, compelling journalists to practice self-censorship in order to save their jobs and lives. According to these reports, not only journalists but also media outlets were under pressure to stop criticizing the government, defense or judiciary by blocking and punishing noncompliant cable providers and television networks. The use of force by law enforcement authorities (LEA) to prevent an angry crowd charged with causing damage to lives and property is occasionally necessary, however in such cases, media personnel become collateral damage. Such events occurred frequently during my tenure as press minister in France from 2016 to 2020. In France, the LEA was forced to use force to protect itself from hostile attacks or to protect persons or property, particularly during the yellow vest protests, when an irate mob used to threaten the city of Paris every Saturday and Sunday during 2019-20. During these protests, I witnessed the mob tossing petrol bombs into parked cars and setting them on fire, as well as throwing stones and other projectiles against police and public property. The LEA used to respond in a variety of manners, and the media personnel assigned to cover the event were most likely collateral victims. Regardless of whether the LEA's use of force was warranted or not, France's rating on the Freedom of the Press Index declined to 35th in 2020, hovered around the same place in 2021 at 33, 2022 at 34, and ultimately improved to 26th in 2023. Nonetheless, France remained well behind its European peers. While commenting on reasons or factors for France's low position in the world ranking, Reporter Without Borders (Reporter sans Frontiers) identified concentration of media ownership, which had resulted in self-censorship and a lack of diversity of opinion. Journalists are threatened with legal action for their reporting to discourage investigative journalism and physically attacked for their reporting, which were termed as dangerous and irrational. The use of force by the LEA is common in many countries where media persons end up victims, but in our country there is another worrying trend, the use of force on unfriendly media by the political party workers. There were many instances when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf supporters attacked news coverage teams considered unfriendly. Similarly, Pakistan Muslim League (N) supporters exhibited similar behavior in a few events. While commenting upon the freedom of media situation in Pakistan, RSF said that ever since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has oscillated between civil society's quest for greater press freedom and the government's constant reassertion of extensive control over the media. It said that a recurring theme is apparent: political parties in opposition support press freedom but are first to restrict it when in power. While referring to legal

framework, the report said that under the guise of protecting journalism, Pakistani law is used to censor any criticism of the government and important institutions, PEMRA is concerned less with regulating the media sector than with regulating the content it published. PECA, adopted in 2016, is used more to restrict online freedom of expression than to crack down on online crime and the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, passed in 2021, has made the journalists' protection conditional on reporters adopting a certain "conduct". While referring to economic context it said that the media is dependent on state sector ads which are used to leverage media in favor of the government. While referring to the context of safety, Pakistan was termed as one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists, with three to four murders each year that are often linked to cases of corruption or illegal trafficking but mostly go unpunished. The Freedom of the Press is also directly and indirectly challenged by the neck-breaking advancements in social media technologies that are made on a regular basis. Because of its capacity to blur the distinction between genuine and false, real and artificial, truths and artifices, this new component has presented extra problems to national states and civilizations all over the world. The unprecedented ability to tamper with content is being used to undermine those who embody quality journalism and weaken journalism itself. Artificial intelligence (AI) has added fuel to the fire by "digesting content and regurgitating it in the form of syntheses and not only written content but also pictures and videos of real people generated in studios and spreading them on social media for achieved set objectives." Press and media organizations around the world are confronting serious security and safety concerns, which are growing by the day with the arrival of social media technologies and Artificial Intelligence, which has and will continue to surprise us in the future. Media is learning and will continue to learn to protect itself from the challenges of safety and security, to improve their professional competency and skills, and to learn new ways and means to pursue and tell the truth in the face of fake news, heresy, propaganda, and professional challenges imposed by new and emerging technology, but media cannot fight this uphill battle alone. The press and media is, in fact, as vital as the other three pillars of the state. The media is an indispensable pillar for a healthy, lively, and innovative nation. For a healthy and prosperous nation, all pillars of the state should be independent of one another, but united to serve the country and the nation with sincerity of purpose and keeping the national interest supreme while remaining within their assigned jurisdiction and respecting the jurisdictions of the other pillars and institutions. The government should create enabling conditions for media to grow and prosper, civil society should support and nurture healthy and vibrant media, and media should play an independent but complementary role in creating an informed, educated, literate, healthy, and prosperous society.

Pak-China are exploring the remarkable friendship

Dureshehwar Gull



People-to-people contacts play a crucial role in nurturing the bilateral relationship. Numerous events and exchanges, including seminars, visits, and cultural events, have been organized to promote interactions between the peoples of both nations

Pakistan and China share a significant partnership in Asia, especially within the South Asian region. Their enduring friendship and strong bilateral relations have been established despite their differences in religion, language, and culture, and are built upon shared interests and mutual cooperation. The foundation of Pakistan and China's bilateral relations can be traced back to 1950 when Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) and sever ties with the Republic of China (ROC). Since then, the leaders of both nations have consistently emphasized the special nature of their relationship, often using phrases like "higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, and sweeter than honey" to describe it. China's diplomatic approach is characterized by careful nuance and deliberate choice of words. While China describes its relations with various friendly countries as strategic and comprehensive, it reserves the term "all-weather" for Pakistan, underscoring the exceptional nature of their bilateral relationship. Chinese leaders also refer to Pakistan as their "Iron Brother," signifying their unwavering confidence in the enduring nature of their ties. China has consistently supported Pakistan in safeguarding its independence and sovereign-

ty and has demonstrated a willingness to invest in developing a strategic partnership with the country. The strategic alliance between Pakistan and China has proven advantageous in the South Asian region, particularly considering the evolving dynamics of the early 21st century. China views Pakistan as a close and reliable partner in shaping the political landscape of the region, considering the geopolitical shifts taking place in South Asia. These changes have provided an opportunity for China and Pakistan to forge closer ties and collaborate in various sectors, with a particular focus on the economy and strategic cooperation. For Pakistan, China is not just an ally but a friend, often referred to as the "Pak-China friendship." The two nations have engaged in extensive military and economic collaborations, perceiving each other as counterweights to an Indian-Western alliance. Additionally, China has relied on Pakistan as a conduit for extending its influence in the Muslim world and has consistently supported Pakistan in regional matters. Economically, China holds the position of Pakistan's largest trading partner and a significant investor. In 2018, the bilateral trade between the two countries reached a substantial \$18 billion. The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as

part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's "One Road and One Belt" initiative has further elevated the bilateral relationship, aiming to enhance connectivity and improve infrastructure between Pakistan and China. People-to-people contacts play a crucial role in nurturing the bilateral relationship. Numerous events and exchanges, including seminars, visits, and cultural events, have been organized to promote interactions between the peoples of both nations. Educational exchanges have also been a focus, with China increasing the number of scholarship awards for Pakistani students. Cultural exchanges and youth programs have been initiated to strengthen mutual understanding and foster socio-economic development. Both Pakistan and China aspire to play constructive roles in promoting peace and stability, and they do not perceive their friendship as a mere tool in power games. Pakistan regards China as a voice of reason and restraint in international affairs. The cooperative partnership between the two nations is firmly rooted in their fundamental interests, and their enduring friendship has weathered all challenges, contributing to regional peace and stability.

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Briefs

Russia has started moving nuclear weapons to Belarus

MOSCOW: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that Russia has started moving tactical nuclear weapons to his country. "We had to prepare storage areas and stuff. We have done this, so the movement of nuclear weapons has already begun," Lukashenko told Russia's Pervy TV. Lukashenko, who was on a trip to Moscow, said some of the weapons might already be transferred. He refused to specify the number of weapons and locations of their storage in Belarus and said: "Don't worry about nuclear weapons, we are responsible for this." On Thursday, the Russian and Belarusian defense ministers signed an agreement on the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, which stipulates terms for keeping them in a special storage facility. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said that in response to NATO's "aggressive" activities, they are deploying military contingents, building military infrastructure, enhancing training, and increasing reconnaissance activities on the borders of Russia and Belarus.—Agencies

King Charles makes 1st visit to N. Ireland

LONDON: Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla visited Northern Ireland, their first visit out of England since the coronation on May 6. The couple's two-day official visit that began on Wednesday continued with meetings with communities in Enniskillen and Armagh. "In Armagh, the King is visiting St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, where His Majesty will meet representatives from the Church of Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Irish Council of Churches," according to a statement by Royal Communications. They also met representatives from across the community, voluntary and heritage sectors in Fermanagh at Enniskillen Castle. Charles' last visit to Northern Ireland took place September last year, less than a week after the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II. Charles ascended the throne on Sept. 8, 2022, following the death of his long-serving mother Queen Elizabeth II.—APP

Landslides kill 5 in Uganda

KAMPALA: Landslides on Thursday night killed five people, injured several and seven are missing in the eastern Uganda district of Bulambuli. The landslides reportedly buried over ten houses, in addition to killing animals and destroying houses. "One body was retrieved Thursday night while four more bodies have been retrieved Friday morning. So we have five confirmed dead," said Irene Nakasita, spokeswoman of the Uganda Red Cross. She told Anadolu that their emergency response section released an urgent call on Thursday evening for a response in the villages of Bulungunya and Bumasabo, located in Bulambuli district about 300 kilometers (186 miles) east of the capital of Kampala. Heavy rains caused the landslides, she said, adding that they dispatched a team to save lives. They got the body of a 15-year-old boy and several injured people whom they took to hospital. On Friday, they removed four more bodies from the mud. Since January, heavy rains in Uganda have caused havoc, including destroying roads, causing landslides and floods, which affected the lives of thousands of Ugandans. On May 4, eight people got killed by landslides in the western Uganda district of Kisoro.—Agencies

'War on women'

Taliban curbs on females a 'crime against humanity'

Taliban crackdown on Afghan women's rights could constitute gender persecution under the International Criminal Court (ICC), Amnesty International and the International Commission for Jurists say

LONDON: Rights groups have denounced severe restrictions imposed on women and girls by the Taliban in Afghanistan as gender-based persecution, which is a crime against humanity under international law. In a new report, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) underscored how the Taliban crackdown on Afghan women's rights, coupled with "imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment," could constitute gender persecution under the International Criminal Court (ICC). What is happening in Afghanistan is "a war against women" that amounts to "international crimes" that are "organized, widespread, systematic," said Agnes Callamard, Amnes-

ty's secretary general.

Without elaborating, she called for the international community to dismantle "this system of gender oppression and persecution". The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021 as United States and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from the country after two decades of war.

Despite initial promises of a more moderate rule, the Taliban started to enforce restrictions on women and girls soon after their takeover, barring them from public spaces and most jobs, and banning education for girls beyond the sixth grade. The measures harked back to the previous Taliban rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, when they also imposed their strict interpretation of Islamic law.



Harsh Taliban edicts prompted an international outcry against the already ostracised group, whose administration has not been officially recognised by the United Nations and the international community. The report by Amnesty and ICJ - titled 'The Taliban's war on women: The crime against humanity of gender persecution in Afghanistan' - cited the ICC statute that lists gender-based perse-

cution as a crime against humanity. In the report, Santiago A Canton, the ICJ secretary general, said the Taliban's actions are of such "magnitude, gravity and of such a systematic nature," that they qualify "as a crime against humanity of gender persecution".

Both organisations called on the International Criminal Court to include this crime in their continuing investigation into what is happening in Afghanistan, and take legal action. They also called on countries "to exercise universal jurisdiction" and hold the Taliban accountable under international law. The report also accused the Taliban of targeting women and girls who have taken part in peaceful protests by detaining, forcibly disappearing them and subjecting them to torture in custody. The Taliban has also forced them to sign "confessions" or "agreements" not to protest again, it said. Amnesty also documented cases of women and girls being forcibly married to members of the Taliban. The report said those who refused such marriages were "subjected to abduction, intimidation, threats and torture". The report cited the

case of a 15-year-old girl who was forced to marry a Taliban figure despite her family's objections in the northeastern province of Takhar in August 2021. And that of a 33-year-old female journalist and social activist who was forcibly married to a Taliban commander the following month. "We simply cannot afford to fail the women and girls of Afghanistan," said Canton.

The Taliban has also targeted journalists, the LG-BTQ community, rights activists and ethnic minorities, the report said. Amnesty and ICJ also shared a summary of the report's findings with the Taliban-appointed Foreign Ministry in Kabul, requesting a response. None was immediately provided, the groups said.—Agencies

Top US, Chinese trade officials meet in Washington

WASHINGTON: The top Chinese and U.S. business and trade officials met Thursday in Washington, an infrequent direct conversation between leaders of the world's two biggest economies.

The U.S. Commerce Department said in a statement Thursday that Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimond had "candid and substantive discussions on issues relating to the U.S.-China commercial relationship." Thursday's meeting, the department said, "was part of ongoing efforts to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage" the U.S.-China relationship. While U.S. President Joe Biden met with Chinese

leader Xi Jinping in Bali last November, Thursday's trade talks in Washington were the first cabinet-level meeting in the U.S. capital between American and Chinese officials during the Biden administration.

Wang is in the United States for the 2023 APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting, in Detroit - a city in the U.S. state of Michigan - on Thursday and Friday. In the Washington talks, China expressed its views on China-U.S. relations and issues of common concern, Shu Jueting, the Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesperson, told a regular briefing in Beijing. On Monday, Wang met with representatives of U.S. firms in Shanghai, including Johnson & Johnson, 3M, Dow, Merck, and Honeywell, according to the ministry, telling them that "China will continue to welcome U.S.-funded enterprises to develop in China and achieve win-win results."

But China on Sunday declared U.S. chip manufacturer Micron a national security risk and banned the firm from selling its memory chips to key domestic industries. The ban followed a series of raids on American consultancies operating in China.

Wang's trip to the U.S. follows a recent summit in Hiroshima, Japan, of the leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialized countries, at which Biden and other G7 leaders took aim at China over "economic coercion" and said they would

"de-risk" without "decoupling" from the world's second-largest economy on an array of products.

"China hopes the G-7 will not abuse trade and investment restrictions while saying that they will not seek to decouple from the country," Shu said. Wang met earlier in May with U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns in Beijing amid speculation about a visit from top U.S. officials. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed a trip in February after the U.S. shot down a Chinese spy balloon that flew over sensitive military sites. Raimondo and Blinken, as well as U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, have all expressed interest in visiting China.—DNA

Scholz says he plans to speak with Putin

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Friday that he is planning to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the situation in Ukraine.

"My last telephone call was some time ago. But I plan to speak with Putin again in due course," Scholz said in an interview with the German daily Kolner Stadt-Anzeiger. He underlined that Germany and its Western partners would continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. "Russia needs to understand that it cannot be about concluding some kind of cold peace - for example by turning the current front line into the new border between Russia and Ukraine," Scholz said. "Rather, it is about a fair peace, and the prerequisite for this is the withdrawal of Russian troops," he added. The German chancellor did not give a clear answer when asked whether this would also apply to the Crimean peninsula, which has been occupied by Russia since 2014. "It is not up to us to formulate what agreements Ukraine wants to reach," he said and underlined that a peace agreement will ultimately be concluded between the authorities in Moscow and Kyiv.

Scholz also declined to comment on whether a regime change in Russia is needed to reach peace through negotiations. German authorities are investigating a massive security breach during Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to Frankfurt, authorities said on Friday.

South Korea approves Ukraine arms transfer

SEOUL: South Korea has agreed to send hundreds of thousands of artillery shells to Ukraine under a "confidential arrangement" with the United States, the Wall Street Journal reported. The move would mark an about-face for Seoul, which has been reluctant to authorize lethal aid to Kiev.

Under the reported agreement, South Korea will first ship the munitions to the US, which will then forward them on to Ukraine, sources told the WSJ on Wednesday. Seoul and the Pentagon have so far declined to confirm the transfer, though both acknowledged ongoing talks on the issue. However, South Korean Defense Ministry spokesman Jeon Ha-kyu said there were "inaccurate parts" in the WSJ report during a press briefing later on Wednesday, though did not specify further. "There have been various discussions and requests, and our government will take appropriate measures while comprehensively reviewing the war and humanitarian situation in Ukraine," Jeon said. While South Korea initially announced it would send munitions last November under another behind-the-scenes deal with the US, it later "got cold feet" after the agreement was reported in the media, American officials told the outlet. At the time, Seoul reportedly feared the decision would violate its policy against providing anything beyond non-lethal aid to Ukraine, though officials were also hesitant to deny a request from Washington, a close ally. Since then, the Pentagon has scrambled to meet Ukraine's massive demand for shells, even tapping into US-owned weapons stocks in Israel, Germany, Kuwait and South Korea to make up for the shortage. The White House has authorized the transfer of more than 2 million 155-millimeter shells to Kiev since the conflict with Russia escalated last year, exhausting US stockpiles.—Agencies



H.E. Mr. Donald Blome, Ambassador of the United States of America to Pakistan called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Islamabad.—DNA

Martyrs are the pride of the nation: Bakhtawari

Participants expressed their determination that no conspiracy can separate Pakistan army and people. Every individual of the nation stands behind their institutions. We will not allow any compromise on the dignity of institutions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) organized a ceremony on the occasion of Martyrs Day at Pakistan Monument. Tributes were paid to the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives for Pakistan in the ceremony, Chairman CCI Captain Noor Ul Amin Mengal, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, members of Islamabad Chamber, senior officials of the administration, and a large number of citizens participated in the ceremony. On this occasion, Chairman CCI Capt. Nurul Amin Mengal said that the purpose of Martyrs' Day is to remember the sacrifices of the brave soldier who sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country. We need to tell and teach this bright side of our history to the young-

er generation. Martyrs and Ghazis of Pakistan are the real capital of the nation. We can be proud that the sacrifices made by our army, police and people in wars against the enemy and in the fight against terrorism are

rare. Thanks to the sacrifices of these brave people, we have defeated the monster of terrorism. Speaking on the occasion, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the lives of

the martyrs and their sacrifices are a debt to this nation. The way the Pakistani nation celebrated Martyrs' Day and paid tribute to the brave martyrs proves that we have never forgotten and will never forget the martyrs, ghaz-

is and brave martyrs who protected the soil. He said that the Islamabad Chamber has always stood by the side of its forces, in every difficult time we have remembered the Pakistan Army and Police.

The entire business community of Pakistan believes that Pakistan and our institutions are inseparable. A few misguided people can neither diminish his worth nor erase his bright character from history. In the ceremony, The participants expressed their determination that no conspiracy can separate Pakistan army and people. Every individual of the nation stands behind their institutions. We will not allow any compromise on the dignity of institutions.

The participants supported strict punishment and trial under the Army Act for the accused of May 9 tragedy.



Kosovo Serbs clash with police

PRISTINA: Small groups of ethnic Serbs in northern Kosovo on Friday clashed with police while trying to block the entrance of municipal buildings to prevent recently-elected officials from entering them, according to local media.

Police fired tear gas and several cars were set ablaze. In response to the clashes, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said in a written statement carried on state-run RTS television that he put the army on a "higher state of alert." Vucic also said that he ordered an "urgent" movement of Serbian troops to the border with Kosovo.

Vucic will attend a rally in support of him in Belgrade after two mass shootings earlier this month that killed 18 people and left 20 others wounded.

The media reports also said that because of "violence" against Kosovo Serbs, Vucic demanded that NATO-led troops stationed in Kosovo protect them from the Kosovo police.

Kosovo police acknowledged their increased presence in the north "to assist mayors of the northern communes of Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok to exert their right of work at the official objects." New mayors in three communes in northern Kosovo, which is mostly populated by an ethnic Serb minority, were prevented from entering the buildings with small groups of Serbs keeping their hands up at the entrance of the municipalities, apparently in a sign that they were not there to take part in violence, Albanian indexonline.net website wrote, also showing photos. In Zvecan, the Kosovo-online.com site showed clashes with police in front of the public building while in Leposavic they also had blocked the main square with cars and trucks.—APP

Passenger opens exit door during airplane flight

SEOUL: A passenger opened an emergency exit door during a plane flight in South Korea on Friday, causing air to blast inside the cabin and slightly injure 12 people, officials said. The plane landed safely.

Some people aboard the Asiana Airlines Airbus A321 aircraft tried to stop the person, who was able to partially open the door, the Transport Ministry said. The person was detained by airport police on suspicion of violating the aviation security law, a ministry statement said. The person's identity and motive weren't immediately released.

The law bars passengers from handling exit doors and other equipment on board and provides for penalties of up to 10 years in prison, the ministry said.

The plane with 194 people aboard was heading to the southeastern city of Daegu from the southern island of Jeju. The flight is normally about an hour, and the incident occurred when the plane was reaching the Daegu airport at an altitude of 700 feet (213 meters).—APP

Russia's Medvedev warns of 'preemptive strike'

MOSCOW: The deputy head of Russia's Security Council warned Friday that if the West delivers nuclear arms to Ukraine, Russia would have to carry out a preventive strike.

Dmitry Medvedev told reporters in Moscow that the West has been supplying Ukraine with gradually heavier weapons since the beginning of the war last year, when it started sending Kyiv small arms, while now they plan to deliver F-16 fighter jets.

"There are irreversible laws of war. If it comes to (supplying Ukraine with) nuclear weapons, it will be necessary to launch a preemptive strike," he stressed. Medvedev, who served as Russian president in 2008-2012, claimed that the US "earns money" on the conflict in Ukraine, while simultaneously damaging its "centuries-old enemy," Russia. As for Europe, Medvedev said it "went crazy," behaving in ways that escalate the conflict in Ukraine. "This conflict (in Ukraine) is very long-lasting ... for decades, probably. — Agencies

Briefs

Belgium, Iran conduct prisoner swap

DNA

TEHRAN: Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander de Croo said the 42-year-old had arrived in Oman and added: "If all goes to plan, he'll be with us this evening. Free at last!" Separately, Oman's foreign ministry announced it had helped broker an "exchange deal" and that an Iranian previously held in Belgium was on his way to Tehran. Iran announced that the freed Iranian is diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who was jailed in Belgium over a 2018 plot to bomb an Iranian opposition rally outside Paris. Iran's Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, tweeted that Assadi, "the innocent diplomat of our country... is now on his way back to his homeland and will soon enter our beloved Iran."

Japan adopts new sanctions on Russia

TOKYO: Japan on Friday approved additional sanctions against Russia over its war on Ukraine, including freezing the assets of dozens of individuals and groups and banning exports to Russian military-related organizations. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters the Cabinet approval shows Japan is in step with the rest of the Group of Seven countries that agreed during their summit in Hiroshima last week to maintain and strengthen sanctions against Russia. He said Japan is committed to working with other G7 countries and the broader international community "to improve the situation" for Ukraine. Matsuno also sharply criticized the signing of a deal between Russia and Belarus on Thursday formalizing the deployment of Moscow's tactical nuclear weapons in its ally's territory as a move that "further escalate tensions." - APP

Palestinian shot dead by Israeli settler

DNA

AL-KHALIL: An illegal Israeli settler has fatally shot a Palestinian youth on suspicion of attempting to carry out an alleged stabbing attack in the south of the occupied West Bank city of al-Khalil (Hebron), the latest amid rising violence in the occupied territories. The young Palestinian man died of his critical wounds early on Friday after he was shot by an Israeli settler in the Tana Omrim settlement, south of Hebron, according to Palestinian media reports. Palestine's Ma'an news agency cited the settler as claiming that the Palestinian youth was trying to carry out a stabbing attack inside the illegal settlement, without identifying the Palestinian victim. Israeli media said sirens sounded in the Tana Omrim settlement on the lands of the al-Dhahiriya town on suspicion of an infiltration into the settlement. Israeli forces were reported to have arrived at the settlement and launched a search for other individuals who might have accompanied the young man.

Iran defends missile launch

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran has slammed the reaction of some Western countries to its successful launch of a new precision-guided ballistic missile, saying they are opposed to the enhancement of the Islamic Republic's defensive power. In a tweet on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani referred to the history of the Western countries' arming of Saddam Hussein's regime during the eight-year imposed war on Iran in the 1980s. "The same Western governments, especially the US and France, that played a big role in provoking and arming Saddam's Baathist regime to attack Iran and showering Iranian cities and people with missiles, those are the main suppliers of weapons to the region, are now worried about Iran's defensive power," the spokesman wrote.

Independence Day of Azerbaijan celebrated

Azerbaijan, Pakistan relations bound by strong friendship, brotherhood

Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov says this year we celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of our National Leader Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and other brotherly countries

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov has said after the restoration of Azerbaijan's Independence in 1991, Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan. 'Azerbaijan and Pakistan are bound by the relations of strong friendship, brotherhood, and strategic partnership based on historical and cultural roots. The two countries have always supported each other both bilaterally and within international organizations'. Ambassador Khazar Farhadov made these remarks on the occasion of May 28 - Independence Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

He further said, brotherly relations between the two countries are deepening, developing, and strengthening every year. Azerbaijan gives great importance to Pakistan. In 2022, under the instruction of Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, our country was among the first countries who rushed for help during the large-scale flood in Pakistan. While talking about bilateral ties the Ambassador said, the ties between the two brotherly countries continue to grow in an upward trajectory in all fields. Direct flights between Azerbaijan and Pakistan which are being operated since 2022 tremendously contribute to these relations.

He said, roughly 50,000 Pakistani tourists visited Azerbaijan in 2022. 'I must mention that Pakistan is one of the countries that is included in the online ASAN visa system of Azerbaijan. The citizens of Pakistan can easily obtain a visa online within 3 hours and visit Azerbaijan'. This direct connectivity brings people from all circles of the two countries closer. In 2022, the Government of Azerbaijan, taking into account the fraternal relations, exempted rice from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan with the same origin from import customs duty. It is not a coincidence that trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Pakistan has almost tripled last year and this year we are expecting more, he added.

He said, May 28 is celebrated as the Independence Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan every year. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic which was the first democratic secular republic in the Muslim East was established on May 28, 1918. The newly established Azerbaijan Democratic Republic honorably fulfilled the difficult historical task it undertook. 'The first Parliament and Government of Azerbaijan, the state apparatus was formed, the borders of the country were determined, the flag, anthem, and coat of arms were created, the Azerbaijani language was declared the state language, serious measures were taken in the field of state building'. Ambassador Khazar said, the country's territorial integrity and national security were ensured, highly combat-capable military units were created in a short period of time, state bodies were established in accordance with national requirements and democratic principles, and special attention was paid to the development of education and culture. The first university of Azerbaijan was founded, education was nationalized, and exceptionally important works were done in terms of the histo-



ry of public opinion, which prepared the ground for the cultural advancement of the nation in the following years. Recognition of equal rights of all citizens regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, and giving women the right to vote even

before many European countries was one of the great successes of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic existed for only 23 months till the Bolshevik's occupation on April 28, 1920. After the collapse of

the Soviet Union in 1991, the people of Azerbaijan established an independent Republic of Azerbaijan based on the traditions of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, he added.

'In May-June 1993, when the government crisis became extremely acute and there was a threat of civil war and loss of independence in the country, the National Leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev was brought to power for the second time at the demand of the people and Azerbaijan entered a new stage of independence. Under the leadership of Great Leader Heydar Aliyev, tremendous efforts were done and steps taken to strengthen the independence of Azerbaijan and the era of prosperity and economic development started for the country'. He said this year we celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of our National Leader Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and other brotherly countries. Azerbaijan continues this successful tradition under the leadership of Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan which was inherited by our National Leader Heydar Aliyev.

Talking about the war with Armenia the Ambassador said, these successes are reflected in all aspects of the Azerbaijani people's lives. As a result of the Patriotic War in 2020, Azerbaijani Army liberated our territories from Armenian occupation within 44 days. Right after the liberation, the Government of Azerbaijan started large-scale restoration and reconstruction works there and the Great Return of former Azerbaijani IDPs and refugees to their land has begun.

Fighting rages in Darfur as mediators report progress

KHARTOUM: Fierce fighting between rival Sudanese forces on Friday rocked the western region of Darfur, witnesses said, as US and Saudi observers noted "improved respect" for a fragile ceasefire now in its fourth day. Within minutes of the ceasefire taking effect late Monday - after weeks of war that has claimed 1,800 lives and displaced more than one million people - witnesses in the capital Khartoum reported air strikes and gunshots. The one-week truce is the latest in a series of agreements that have all been systematically violated, with the army and the paramilitary RSF accusing each other of more breaches this week. The US and Saudi Arabia, which had brokered the latest deal, reported "serious violations" since it took effect, particularly on Wednesday.

Washington has threatened sanctions for breaches detected by its "monitoring mechanism", but has not yet targeted either side. The conflict, which erupted on April 15, pits Sudan's de facto leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan against his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.


Burhan and Daglo had in 2021 staged a coup that unseated a civilian transitional government but later fell out in a bitter power struggle. In a joint statement Friday, the mediators "noted improved respect for the agreement" and said they had "cautioned the parties against further violations and implored them to improve respect for the ceasefire on (Thursday), which they did". There was nevertheless "isolated gunfire in Khartoum", the US-Saudi statement said. Increasingly desperate civilians have been waiting for brief lulls in fighting to flee or for assistance to flow through as battles have left the capital - a city of five million - with intermittent supply of food, water and electricity. The International Committee of the Red Cross announced Thursday it had finally been able to begin distributing aid to "seven hospitals in Khartoum". The supplies include "anaesthesia and antibiotics among other medications, dressings, sutures and infusions that can treat hundreds of people severely wounded by weapons", the ICRC said. - Agencies

Jahangir Tareen decides to establish new political party


DNA

LAHORE: After remaining out of the scene, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) estranged leader Jahangir Khan Tareen has decided to form a new national-level political party, sources privy to the development told Geo News on Friday. According to the sources, PTI leaders upset with the party are also expected to join the new setup. Apart from those, many political families from Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh, Lodhran and Multan are expected to join hands with Tareen. The sources claimed that many "important leaders" from Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have also contacted the former PTI leader. Sources shared that Tareen will be patron-in-chief of the party. Tareen was the secretary general of the PTI before he was ousted from politics in 2017 after the Supreme Court disqualified him for being "dishonest" on a petition filed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Hanif Abbasi. Abbasi had approached the

Supreme Court seeking the disqualification of PTI Chairman Imran Khan, and Tareen. However, despite the disqualification, Tareen remained part of PTI and was crucial in wooing independent lawmakers to join the Imran Khan-led party after the 2018 elections. His efforts proved critical as they helped Khan secure the prime ministership in 2018. But after coming to power Tareen and PTI leader Aleem Khan's relationship with the PTI turned sour. In May 2022, the former prime minister revealed the reason behind his differences with both leaders and said that both were seeking "illegal benefits from him." Speaking during a podcast, Khan claimed that differences with both estranged leaders developed when he refused to entertain their requests. "Aleem Khan expected me to legalise his 300-acre land near Ravi", Khan said, adding "from then onwards, I developed differences with him." While talking about Tareen, Khan said: "Tareen stood with those who are the biggest dacoits in the country. When I ordered a probe into the matter [sugar scandal], differences developed with Tareen."



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