



# Islamabad POST

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**Moscow 'open to resolving conflict in Ukraine peacefully'**

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**Faisal Javed's arrest warrant suspended**

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**Babar Azam creates history in T20 format**

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## Appex Court rules

# SJC proceedings to continue even after resignation

Five-member SC bench partially accepts federal govt's appeal; Justice ® Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi to be affected by the verdict

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) proceedings once initiated cannot be halted even after the resignation of a judge. A five-member larger bench Justice Amin-ud-din Khan announced the short verdict and partially accepted the federal government's intra-court appeal (ICA) against its judgment delivered in 2023 in Afia Sheharbano Zia's case. The other members of the bench included Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Musarrat Hilali, and Justice Irfan Saadat Khan. The top court in Afia Sheharbano Zia's case held that the judges who retire or resign do not fall within the ambit of Article 209 of the Constitution that determines misconduct of the superior court judges.

In the short verdict today, the apex court ruled that it's the discretion of the SJC whether or not to proceed against a judge in a pending complaint. Four of the five judges of the bench declared the ICA maintainable, while Justice Rizvi dissented with the majority verdict to the extent of the appeal being time-barred. The SC said the detailed reasons for the verdict will be issued later. The federation - through secretary law and justice - had filed the ICA with the apex court under Section 5 of the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023 read with Article 184(3) of the Constitution against the judgment dated June 27, 2023 delivered in Afia Sheharbano's case. The federal government had prayed the apex court to set aside the impugned judgment after

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## SC disposes of elections annulment plea

"State should ensure that court-martialed person does not use rank of brigadier," CJP Isa

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) Wednesday disposed of the petition seeking re-election and annulment of the February 8 polls and imposed a fine of Rs500,000 on the petitioner over his failure to appear before the court. The development comes as a three-member SC bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, comprising Justice Musarrat Hilali and Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, conducted the hearing on Brig (ret'd) Ali Khan's petition urging the apex court to annul the polls and order re-elections over

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## Briefs

**Siraj calls for respecting public mandate**

CEC failed to act upon his oath

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) chief Sirajul Haq says the decision has been taken first and the drama in the name of the election happens later in the country. "All international organisations have demanded an investigation into the election activity. All organizations have called this election a drama," he held. Referring to the 1970 elections, Sirajul Haq said that the public mandate was not given importance in 1977 and rigged elections were held again. He said that the nation suffered the consequences for eleven years. He further said that the Chief Election Commissioner had taken an oath to conduct a transparent election but he failed to do so.

**MQM demands governorship**

MQM also emphasises amendments to LG system

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The MQM-Pakistan has reportedly asked the PML-N for its share in the federal government as much as possible. As per reports, the MQM has demanded the Sindh governorship and five ministries in the Centre. The MQM leadership also emphasized amendments to the local government system and constitutional amendments. These terms were reportedly discussed during negotiations between the two parties on the issue of government formation in the Centre. The meeting was held at the ministers' enclave in Islamabad. Both parties considered various options for working together in the federation. The MQM-P also asked the PML-N for its share in the central government as much as possible.

## X down for 5 days

# Internet, social media disruption irks SHC CJ

Internet services suspended over national security threats, says federal government

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Sindh High Court (SHC) Chief Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi lambasted the authorities over intermittent internet, social media disruption in the country. "When will you restore the internet?" the chief justice asked the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority's (PTA) lawyer during the hearing of a petition filed by rights activist Advocate Jibran Nasir on the suspension of internet and social media services. The top judge's remarks come as netizens have been facing sporadic disruptions in internet services along with hindrances in accessing social media platforms for the past couple of weeks, including a complete internet suspension on February 8 election day despite SHC's stay order directing the authorities to ensure uninterrupted internet access. Renowned social media platform X, formerly Twitter, had been down for days with no

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## IHC rejects DC Islamabad's 'unconditional pardon'

The court also issued show-cause notice to DC Islamabad for skipping hearing and sought a reply by Monday

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) rejected Islamabad Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon's plea seeking unconditional pardon on Wednesday after he

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# PPP, PML-N forge 'marriage of convenience'

ANALYSIS

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development, the PML-N and the PPP formalized an alliance Tuesday night, marking a crucial step towards government formation and bringing an end to the prevailing uncertainty and chaos albeit for a while. However, the nature of this partnership remains uncertain, raising questions about whether it is grounded in substantial principles or merely a strategic alliance of convenience. Earlier this week, on Monday, February 19, 2024, this newspaper reported on the success of government formation talks, outlining the path for collaboration between the two parties in the upcoming administration. According to the agreed-upon formula, the PPP is set to secure the Presidency, Governorships of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Senate chairmanship, Balochistan chief ministership, and the deputy speaker position in the National Assembly. Despite this agreement, a notable point of contention has emerged regarding the selection of the next Chairman of the Senate. While the influential forces advocate for the appointment of caretaker Prime Minister



emerge as strong candidates for this prestigious position. In this negotiated settlement, the PML-N will assume key roles and responsibilities, securing the Prime Minister's office, the Chief Ministership of Punjab, and the Speaker position in the National Assembly. Additionally, the party will have the privilege of nominating governors for both Baluchistan and Sindh provinces plus all the tension and headache as it has to take full responsibility when it comes to governance and sorting out fiscal as well as political issues because the PPP shall not be part

"The PML-N government is undoubtedly poised to encounter a multitude of challenges. Operating as a fragile minority government, its continual reliance on the PPP for survival adds an additional layer of complexity"

allowing for a change of guards without unnecessary complications or disruptions. The persistent challenges confronting the PTI founding chairman are anticipated to endure, yet the party has demonstrated a remarkable resurgence and vitality following its impressive performance in the 2024 general elections. With the possibility of coalition governments formed by the PML and PPP, it becomes crucial to establish a robust opposition, functioning as a vigilant watchdog to prevent the coalition from navigating too smoothly in both national and provincial assemblies. This development holds promise for PTI

and optimism within the party, setting the stage for a potentially transformative period in its political trajectory. It is widely acknowledged that, in addition to internal dynamics, external factors also wield significant influence in shaping and dismantling governments in Pakistan—an enduring reality. The impending change of administration in the United States later this year could exert a notable impact on the political landscape of Pakistan. The potential victory of Donald Trump in the U.S. elections has been viewed by Senator Mushahid Hussain as a potential boon, particularly for the

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Without mincing words, Senator Hussain has forecasted that a Trump triumph may swiftly alter the political trajectory in Pakistan in favour of beleaguered PTI. As the political landscape continues to evolve, it remains to be seen how this newly formed alliance will navigate the complexities of governance and whether it will stand the test of time beyond its immediate purpose. It remains a fact that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has emerged as the most popular political party, demonstrating resilience in the face of numerous challenges. Despite encountering various obstacles, the party has successfully secured more seats than its counterparts, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). This electoral success solidified PTI's position as a legitimate contender for forming the government. The PML-N government is undoubtedly poised to encounter a multitude of challenges. Operating as a fragile minority government, its continual reliance on the PPP for survival adds an additional layer of complexity. Furthermore, the administration finds itself in a precarious position as it lacks the moral authority bestowed by the masses, who did not grant it a clear mandate to govern the country. In essence, the success of the PML-N government hinges on its ability to transform adversity into opportunity. Anything less than an extraordinary performance may jeopardize the future of the party.

## RUSSIAN DEFENDERS DAY



ISLAMABAD: Chief guest Air Vice Marshal Abid Latif, of Pakistan Air Force, Ambassador of the Russian Federation Albert P Khorev, Defence Attaché Colonel Vadim N. Fenchenko and others cutting cake to celebrate the Defender of the Fatherland Day, of the Russian Federation. - DNA

**Palestinian MEA condemns Israeli Knesset's decision**

Calls for a two-state solution

NEWS DESK

RAMALLAH: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemns the Israeli Knesset's adoption by a large majority of a resolution to reject what it called unilateral recognition of the Palestinian state, and considers it an official Israeli attempt to challenge the international community by rejecting the Palestinian state and being hostile to peace, and an Israeli insistence on kidnapping the rights of our people by the occupying force and keeping the Palestinian state hostage in the hands of

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**'You're too late', PML-N tells JUI-F**

"PML-N going to form a coalition government with PPP in Balochistan"

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has shown reluctance in forging an alliance with its former ally, Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), to form a coalition government in Balochistan. As per the inside story of PML-N leader Isahq Dar and JUI-F's Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri

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## Meets Australian envoy

# Maryam Nawaz reveals 5-year governance plan

"A new era will usher in Punjab. I congratulate PML-N for securing victory," says party's senior vice-president

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Maryam Nawaz, Punjab's chief minister nominee of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), has revealed her game plan for the province as she gears up to take charge for five years. In her address to the media after PML-N's parliamentary party meeting Wednesday, Maryam said: "A new era will usher in Punjab. I congratulate the PML-N for securing victory [and

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**86 PTI people have joined Sunni Ittehad PTI to hold intra-party elections in 15 days**

MEHTAB PIRAZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) submitted on Wednesday the joining certificates of independent members aligning with the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) to the Election

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## 10% of Europeans believe Ukraine can defeat Russia

The findings come on eve of the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Support for Ukraine remains high across the European Union, but authors of the study say politicians should focus on defining an acceptable peace. Only one in ten Europeans believe that Ukraine can defeat Russia, according to an EU-wide poll. Conducted across 12 EU countries - including France, Germany,

Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden - the survey found that pessimism about the war's outcome was being fuelled by Ukraine's failed counteroffensive, a potential US policy shift and the possibility of Donald Trump getting into the White House. The report - titled 'Wars and Elections: How European leaders can maintain public support for Ukraine' -

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# Call for parties to unite in resolving national crisis

They emphasized the necessity for all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Armed forces, judiciary, and all political and religious factions, to come together and formulate a covenant for the betterment of the nation

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Religious scholars and leaders on Wednesday urged political parties to forge a national accord requiring collective efforts to steer clear from any crisis. This call was made during the "Convention for Pakistan Accord" held here under the auspicious of Pakistan Ulama Council (PUC) under the visionary leadership of Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, seeing the participation of religious scholars and leaders from various schools of thought. They emphasized the necessity for all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Armed forces, judiciary, and all political and religious factions, to come together and formulate a covenant for the betterment of the nation. This covenant, named the Pakistan Accord, should outline the trajectory for the country's next 25 years, they added. In their joint declaration, they highlighted that political parties must accept each other's mandate and resort to the Constitution and law to resolve elec-

toral disputes. They urged Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and judiciary to play impartial roles into the matter. Ulama and Mashaykh emphasized that economic stability was intricately linked with political stability, and without the latter, the former could not be achieved. They pointed out that Pakistan faces several challenges, and addressing them requires cooperation from all democratic societies. They stressed that all parties should accept the results of general elections and work together to resolve the country's pressing issues. However, they raised the concerns regarding the dissatisfaction expressed by certain political parties over the results of the elections held on February 8. Regarding electoral results, they reiterated that parties with doubts and suspicions should adhere to the Constitution and law, and the ECP should promptly address their concerns. It was deemed unacceptable to push the country towards unrest under any circumstances, they said adding that the ECP and judiciary should play impartial roles in resolv-

ing electoral disputes to ensure the satisfaction of all parties.

The religious scholars and leaders emphasized the importance of fostering an environment of tolerance and mutual respect among all political parties, aiming to eliminate past animosities and give each other due space to end intolerance in the country. They stated that the Pakistan Armed forces, judiciary, and all political and religious groups should sit together and unite under a comprehensive Pakistan Accord. They said it should outline a unified plan for steering beloved country for the next 25 years, addressing both internal and external challenges and finding effective solutions for economic crisis and combating extremism, terrorism, and youth radicalization. Furthermore, they proposed that Pakistan's foreign policy, along with improving relations with friendly countries, should also focus on alleviating poverty and unemployment through a plan for youth rehabilitation, aiming to eliminate extremism and terrorism. They concluded by asserting that all stakeholders must come together to formulate a consensus policy, which should be declared a national policy, and any government, irrespective of its origin, should accept it in a coherent manner. "The path we stand on today is the right path, and any experimentation with the situation will only lead to serious consequences," they opined. They, applauding services of the Pakistan Army and security agencies in maintaining peace and security during the general elections, attributed their efforts to be commendable and praiseworthy.



## Madad Sindhi directs NAVTTC to increase quota for disables

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhi has directed the chairperson NAVTTC to increase the quota for disables and transgender in all the programs. He was chairing the steering committee meeting of National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by chairperson NAVTTC Ms. Gulmina Bilal Ahmed and senior officials from Ministry of Education. Madad Ali Sindhi said that this was the second meeting of NAVTTC steering committee under his tenure as minister. He pointed out that this is also the second meeting in five years. He highlighted the importance of this committee and urged the upcoming government to give it due importance as well. He said that in the last meeting, he had increased the quota for women which has been implemented and today, he also directed the chairperson to increase the disability and transgender quota in all NAVTTC programs. Madad Ali said that domain of NAVTTC should be expanded to provinces to achieve the progress. He was of the opinion that it is vital to include universities for enhancing scope of NAVTTC.—APP

## S.Punjab Secretariat aims to pace development

BAHAWALPUR : Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab Captain (ret'd) Saqib Zafar on Wednesday said that the South Punjab Secretariat is addressing the gaps of development by enhancing infrastructure in health, education, and other sectors. Addressed officers undergoing the 39th Mid-Career Management Course at the National Institute of Management in Islamabad during their visit to the South Punjab Secretariat, he said that major projects in education and health have been completed in all major cities of South Punjab. He

said that proposals for 58 major projects in the new budget have been submitted to the government, with an estimated cost of Rs 132 billion. Zafar emphasized that eliminating poverty and backwardness from the region is the top priority of the South Punjab Secretariat along with focusing on providing necessities, increasing literacy rates, and promoting agriculture. He highlighted the importance of agriculture in the country's prosperity, mentioning the revival of cotton cultivation in South Punjab which is known as the Cotton Belt. He said that a project proposal of

investing Rs 5 billion for the revival and increased production of cotton is part of the plan. He mentioned the plans to connect all major cities of South Punjab through CPEC and motorways, including the construction of the Khanewal-Jhang Interchange on the Karachi-Lahore Motorway with an estimated cost of Rs13 billion. The Additional Chief Secretary revealed that action plans have been prepared for the construction of flyovers and underpasses in major cities of South Punjab to improve the traffic system. A plan to construct protective dykes to prevent damage from floods.—Agencies

## MCI Administrator vows to resolve business concerns

ISLAMABAD : Rana Waqas Anwar, Administrator, Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI)/Acting Deputy Commissioner Islamabad along with his team visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and interacted with the business community to learn about their issues. Kamran Bakht, Dy. DG MCI, Yasir Arfat DMA, Rana Waqas Mustaqeem Director Revenue, Dr. Mustafa Alam Director 1122, Dr. Irshad Ali Jochio Director Health Services, Ch. Iftikhar Haidri Director Disas-

ter Management, and others were in the delegation. Speaking on the occasion, Rana Waqas Anwar said that MCI wants to move forward with the consensus of the business community to address their issues and facilitate them in business promotion. He said that he would visit markets to see the situation of encroachments and take measures to remove them in coordination with ICCI and concerned market associations. He said that MCI is making a uniform policy to remove all billboards in Islamabad as

they are affecting the beauty of the city. He said that vending zones are being considered for shifting pushcarts from markets. He said that law-abiding citizens would get some rebate in property tax. He said that board tax and trade license fees should be paid to only one entity from MCI or UC. He said that open spaces would be allotted only to the shopkeepers. He said that no brand would be damaged and only violations would be removed from markets. He said that if anyone gives notice to traders using the

name of the Punjab Government, he should be handed to the police for appropriate action. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry briefed the MCI delegation about the key issues of the business community. He said that encroachments should be removed in consultation with ICCI and concerned market associations. He said that notification of mutually agreed board tax and trade license should be issued.—APP



LAHORE: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov visited Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry and interacted with the business community. DNA

## No load-shedding during Sehara & Iftar: CEO SEPCO

SUKKUR : The Sukkur Electric Power Supply Company (SEPCO) has completed all operational arrangements and finalized a comprehensive strategy for the region to ensure uninterrupted power supply to consumers during Ramadan. These views were expressed by Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engr Saeed Ahmed Dawach, while talking to APP here on Wednesday. In this connection, he said that in the Sukkur and Larkana divisions, a special desk/control room has been established to monitor the uninterrupted electricity supply during the month of Ramadan, which will remain operational 24 hours a day. He further said that the monitoring cells established at SEPCO headquarters and all circles would be personally monitored by himself and the superintendent of Engineers. CEO Dawach said that in the special control room, the duties of various officers have been assigned to monitor the smooth transmission of electricity at the time of Sehara, Iftar and Taraweeh. Officers of the Executive Engineer level will monitor the operational activities as monitors of these circles for immediate redressal of any emergency and consumer complaints. He further said that no effort would be spared to ensure an uninterrupted supply of electricity to consumers during Sehara, Iftar and Taraweeh prayers in Ramadan. He added that individual consumers' complaints would also be resolved immediately. He said that the SEPCO staff has been instructed to deal with the consumers in a very friendly manner and take steps to solve their problems immediately in the spirit of service.—APP

## Health and education key to strong economy: RCCI

DNA

RAWALPINDI : For the development of any country, health and education are important sectors, by developing which the country can be economically stable; Rawalpindi Chamber is taking all steps and efforts for the development of these two sectors. Pakistan has a weak economy where the common man does not have access to the expensive treatment of dental cancer and related diseases. Speaking at the National Health Summit at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Rawalpindi, RCCI President Saqib Rafiq said that the purpose of the conference was to bring awareness about oral hygiene, especially dental hygiene and safety, so as to avoid

expensive treatment. Saqib Rafiq said that it is an honor for the Rawalpindi Chamber that the President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi was the Chief Guest of the inaugural session of the event. The theme of the conference was "Dental Hygiene". The President of Pakistan was the first Head of State to visit the Rawalpindi Chamber and encouraged the business community for their involvement in the various initiatives taken for health facilities. He said almost 90 per cent of people could not afford the expensive treatment of dentistry, adding the dental related diseases could be avoided with just due care and prevention. He said the chamber was making all possible measures to extend better health facilities in every nook and

cranny of the Rawalpindi division, under which it had arranged mobile dental units for diagnosing chronic disease caused by bad oral hygiene. Besides, it was carrying out water testing and data collection in 74 union councils of the Rawalpindi division, he added. Moreover, panelists from leading laboratories and hospitals participated in panel discussions and informed the audience about the challenges facing the healthcare system and dental hygiene. Medical students from different universities also participated in the event. Along with the panel discussion, there was also a dental mobile unit and free oral cancer screening facility for the members and visitors on the occasion of the summit.

## JazzCash assigned task of BISP fund disbursements

ISLAMABAD : JazzCash, country's leading fintech organisation, has been assigned the task for disbursements of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) aimed at empowering underserved communities, with a particular emphasis on women inclusion. JazzCash, as part of this partnership, will leverage its extensive nationwide network of agents and retailers to disburse funds to over 1.3 million beneficiaries, said a news release issued on Wednesday. Aamir Ibrahim, CEO of Jazz, said, "In collaboration with BISP, we are working to uplift the economic well-being of Pakistani women. Leveraging JazzCash's network, we aim to provide accessible digital financial services, hence, contributing to the gradual

financial empowerment of BISP's beneficiaries. This effort is a reflection of our purpose of improving the lives and livelihoods of women through digital and financial inclusion." Speaking at the signing ceremony, Murtaza Ali, Head of JazzCash, said, "JazzCash and BISP, together, envision a future where financial inclusion acts as a catalyst for social upliftment, breaking barriers and providing equal opportunities for all. This partnership reflects our shared commitment to positively impacting the lives of those who need it the most." BISP, the prominent social protection organisation, provides financial assistance to over 9 million women who will be given cash assistance amounting to Rs. 10,500

per quarter for a period of 3 years. Under the 3-year partnership, JazzCash will facilitate cash withdrawals through biometrically enabled services. Chairperson BISP, Muhammad Amjad Saqib, in his address, emphasized the importance of collective responsibility towards uplifting the marginalized. "Irrespective of designation, as human beings and citizens of Pakistan, we must perform our duties. Through our love and respect for our women, we can bring about positive change in their lives," he added. This ceremony, he stated, further strengthened the commitment of all parties for the mission of serving the most vulnerable members of society with dignity and transparency.—APP

## ISSI hosts public talk on "stabilizing Pakistan's economy"

DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood highlighted the significant economic challenges that Pakistan is currently facing, fostered by both internal and external factors

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD : The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), organized a Public Talk on "Stabilizing Pakistan's Economy." The Guest Speaker at the event was Mr. Mueen Afzal, Former Secretary General, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Pakistan. In her introductory remarks, Dr. Neelum Nigar, Director CSP, emphasized the significance of today's talk, which delves into a crucial topic. The economy has faced severe macroeconomic imbalances, with the recurring balance of payments crises, shortages of foreign exchange, and above all a lot of fiscal indiscipline. The economy has not been able to take off even with the series of financial stimuli provided by international financial institutions. This underscores the necessity to comprehend the fundamental

aspects of the economy, allowing us to present practical policy recommendations. In his welcome remarks, DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood highlighted the significant economic challenges that Pakistan is currently facing, fostered by both internal and external factors, including the impact of global economic slow-down, Covid-19 pandemic, and food and fuel crises in the wake of Russia-Ukraine conflict and situation in the Middle East. He noted that Pakistan is grappling with a dual deficit challenge, involving both fiscal and current accounts, ultimately leading to a debt trap. Furthermore, the economy is confronted with rising inflation, food insecurity, energy crisis, and unemployment, adding to the already formidable set of challenges. These hurdles have hindered the nation's path to achieving sustainable growth. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood further emphasized that the implementation of necessary

corrective measures, including re-direction of resources toward social sectors, has been hindered by fiscal constraints, also resulting in a sluggish GDP growth rate. To stabilize the economy, a comprehensive but targeted approach is imperative, entailing sustained long-term growth through structural adjustments within the economic framework. During his address, Mr. Mueen Afzal shed light on the recent challenges confronting the Pakistani economy. He attributed the country's economic woes to the misallocation of human resources. Mr. Afzal emphasized that while economic crises are surmountable, they necessitate a rigorous reform process. He highlighted the potential benefits of investments like CPEC, stressing that they must be utilized prudently. Mr. Afzal argued that stabilizing the economy relies on attaining sustainable growth, necessitating a minimum GDP growth rate of around 5 per cent. Specifically, he

stressed combating poverty and inequality; fiscal discipline; increasing savings and revenues; responsible management of debt; trade diversification; conducive environment for FDI; structural reforms; and, above all, 'sensible decisions.' He underscored that the foremost concern presently is the escalating inflation, which impacts both exchange rates and interest rates. Moreover, Mr. Mueen Afzal addressed the recurring challenge of the balance of payments, advocating for a strategic focus on trade policies and diversification of exports as imperative solutions. A manageable current account balance, he noted, is vital for maintaining a stable rupee, a prerequisite for sustainable growth. In conclusion, he pointed out that Pakistan's public spending is limited, remaining below 20 per cent. This limitation hinders investment in crucial public infrastructure, further worsening inequality within the nation.

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### FEBRUARY

Feb 04/Sri Lanka
National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand
National Day
Feb 06/Uganda
Army Day
Feb 11//Iran
Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea
National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania
National Day
Feb 18/Gambia
National Day
Feb 19/Nepal
Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan
National Day
Feb 23/Brunei
National Day
Feb 23/Guyana
National Day
Feb 23/Russia
National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan
Armed Forces Day
Feb 25/Kuwait
National Day

## Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133  
Marriott.....051- 2826121  
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

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



## Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
CAA.....9281092



## Hospitals

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



## Departments

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

## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Pakdesires JVs, partnerships with foreign firms: President

In the meeting, the president was briefed about the company's performance in salt mining, processing and marketing



## DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said that Pakistan desired to build mutually beneficial partnerships with foreign firms by building joint ventures and attracting foreign investment in multiple sectors. He in a meeting with a delegation of Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc, a USA-based salt mining and

processing company here, said Pakistan was fully focused on boosting its exports to improve its economic condition. In the meeting, the president was briefed about the company's performance in salt mining, processing and marketing. President Alvi said that Pakistan could make value addition to its salt products through better processing, packaging and marketing. Reaffirming the government's commitment to facilitate the investors, he appreciated

Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc for its investment in Pakistan as well as its joint venture agreement with Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation. The delegation members apprised the president of the potential of Pakistan's salt mines to earn foreign exchange, adding that Pakistan was the only country rich with quality and mineral salt that was also high in quality and low in price. The delegation viewed that Pakistan could take advantage of the huge

salt market across the world by ensuring value addition through responsible mining, processing and marketing. It was told that the company would invest in the salt mining sector of Pakistan and would utilise modern technology for mining and processing to ensure minimum wastage during the processes. President Alvi also emphasised the promotion of environment-friendly and responsible mining in the country.

## Pak Chromium ore export to China increases

"Pakistan has taken proactive measures to ensure the quality and consistency of its chromium ore exports. Stringent quality control standards

### STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chromium ore and concentrates have seen an increase in exports to China from Pakistan in recent years. In 2023, exports increased by 32%, reaching \$117.68 million, compared to \$89.28 million the previous year, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Wednesday quoting sources from the Commerce Ministry. Ikram Ul Haq Sulehri, an economic expert, told CEN that the Pakistani government is keen to boost chromium ore exports to China. He also mentioned that Pakistan's exports of chromium ore to China have been increased recently due to good quality and competitive prices. There has been a huge demand in China in recent years. "Pakistan has taken proactive measures to ensure the quality and consistency of its chromium ore exports. Stringent quality control standards, adherence to international regulations, and certification processes have enhanced the market reputation of Pakistani Chromium Ore, making it a preferred choice for Chinese manufacturers," he stated. Sources also mentioned that China's total chromium ore import in 2023 was \$5.033 billion, while Pakistan's share in the total import was over \$117.68 million. This is due to increased investment by Chinese companies in collaboration with local Pakistani companies and the rising demand for chromium ore products in China post-COVID-19. This trend is expected to persist as both countries stand to gain from enhanced economic cooperation. "Pakistan has been actively seeking foreign investments, particularly from huge Chinese companies, to add value and produce more valuable products for the global market. Having Chinese companies invest in Pakistan would not only provide a boost to the country's economy but also open doors for advanced technologies and expertise. This would enable Pakistan to enhance its manufacturing capabilities and produce high-quality, value-added products that can meet international standards", Ikram added. Pakistan has the potential to further capitalize on its rich mineral resources and leverage its strategic geographic location to emerge as a key player in the global minerals market. By continuing to invest in infrastructure, technology, and human capital, Pakistan can sustain its export momentum and unlock new avenues for economic prosperity in the years to come.

## NUST, WWF-Pakistan join hands

ISLAMABAD: National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and WWF-Pakistan have joined hands to collaborate on research and innovation to promote sustainable development, the use of technology, and academic linkages in Pakistan through signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Wednesday. According to the NUST, the MoU signing ceremony was held with presence of officials from NUST as well as WWF-Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, Pro-Rector Research, Innovation and Commercialization (RIC), Dr. Rizwan Riaz highlighted NUST's endeavors in sustainable technology, industry-academia linkages, and the university's global reach. Director General, WWF-Pakistan, Hammad Naqi Khan spoke about WWF's key areas of work and discussed many potential areas of collaboration. DG WWF-Pakistan, Hammad Naqi's visit to NSTP advanced the institutional commitment to collaborate, emphasizing their combined strength in fostering sustainable solutions through research, advocacy, and entrepreneurial ventures. Both the officials expressed the hope that this MoU marks a significant step towards a greener future through the collaboration of these institutions. The WWF-Pakistan (Worldwide Fund for Nature Pakistan) is a leading environmental conservation organization in Pakistan, established in 1970. - APP

## The Royal College starts ophthalmology exams

ISLAMABAD: The Royal College of Ophthalmologists, London, as per its last year's decision, has started its oral examinations for ophthalmology and refraction certificates in Pakistan. Last year, the college announced its partnership with Al-Shifa Eye Trust Rawalpindi, and now a team of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists has come to Pakistan to conduct tests. Examiners include Dr. Daniel Nolan, Dr. Bernard Chang, Dr. Mohamed Elalfy, Dr. Simon Keightley, and Dr. Gwyn Williams, who will conduct the exams. Examinees include one applicant from Singapore and seventeen from Pakistan. The president of Al-Shifa Eye Trust, Maj. Gen. (Retd) Rehmat Khan, stated in a statement that it is an important milestone that has given

Pakistani ophthalmologists the chance to earn internationally recognised credentials, advance their expertise, and improve eye care services throughout the nation. He claimed that a well-known institute from the UK was holding internationally recognised eye expert tests for the first time in Pakistan, which is an honour for us. He stated, "It is a great honour for the nation, and credit goes to the dedication of all those serving in the Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital for providing high-quality eye treatment to many patients with the help of state-of-the-art equipment." A team from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists visited Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital last year and found facilities appropriate for performing the exams, and they were satisfied with arrangements during the ongoing visit," he added. He said that the team of foreign specialists is pleased with the variety of patients, treatment arrangements, the latest equipment, security and safety measures, and other measures that meet international standards. - DNA

## Excise deptt provides civic facilities

ISLAMABAD: The Excise department is providing civic facilities to residents of federal capital to get their vehicle registration as well as access of various essential services at Rose & Jasmine Garden here on Wednesday under ICT doorstep initiative. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, the excise staff would be stationed at the park's parking lot from 3.00 to 5.00 pm, and the citizens hailing from nearby areas of Rose & Jasmine Garden can get civic facilities through a dedicated van, ICT Spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said. He said that whether you need a fuel permit for domestic or commercial use, or looking to register your motor vehicle seamlessly, the on-ground service will ensure a swift and straightforward process. This initiative aims to streamline processes and provide ease to the public regarding vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax procedures, he added. - APP

## Police arrest five kite makers

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi are making efforts to control kite flying and managed to arrest five kite makers and sellers on recovery of a large number of kites, string rolls and kites making material, said a police spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed, Waris Khan Police conducted a raid and arrested five accused namely Semab alias Mani King, Shahzaib, Ibrahim, Numan and Zubair and recovered a large number of kites and kites making material from their possession. Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Faisal Saleem said the operation against the rules violators would continue without any discrimination. The spokesman said that the Divisional Superintendents of Police had directed the police teams to accelerate operations against kite sellers and flyers. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi said that strict action in accordance with the law would be taken against the violators and they would be sent behind the bars. - APP

## COMSTECH, PEC ink MoU

ISLAMABAD: OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) and Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday at COMSTECH Secretariat. The MoU was signed by the Coordinator General COMSTECH Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary and Secretary/Registrar of the Council, Engr. Dr. Nasir M. Khan. Chairman PEC, Engr. Muhammad Najeeb Haroon, and the senior officials of the both organizations were also present in the signing ceremony. COMSTECH and PEC agreed to collaborate in organizing workshops and training programs to enhance the knowledge and skills of professionals in science and technology with a focus on engineering, healthcare sectors and innovations. They have agreed to transform information to knowledge and apply scientific and statistical principles in medical and engineering practices. They agreed to promote and develop policies with special emphasis on applied technology through OIC allied platforms to develop and transfer technology for industrial, medical and agricultural products and services, create linkages of OIC bodies to local competitiveness, promote the mutual trade of indigenously developed products, software and services, and encourage mobility & exchange of talent. Training of OIC engineers at various PEC institutions and starting COMSTECH-PEC Africa program for promotion of engineering for socio-economic development is part of this MoU. Both parties agreed to promote training, adoption, development and deployment of digital products, software, and services across OIC states with focus on applied artificial intelligence. Obtaining regional and global recognition, of outcome based engineering education across OIC states, such as prestigious Washington Accord signatory status and facilitating engineering accrediting and registering/ licensing bodies/ engineering councils of the member countries are the objective of this MoU. Conducting joint capacity building events, sharing expertise and resources, collaborating on R&D initiatives, supporting industrial R&D growth and mobility of qualified engineering resources, development of database of human resources, and facilitating in getting the membership of Federation of Engineering Institutions of Islamic Countries are the areas of collaboration. - DNA



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## Briefs

## Int'l Mother Language Day being observed today

ISLAMABAD: International Mother Language Day is being observed on Wednesday to promote cultural and linguistic diversity. The theme this year is "Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning". International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999. The idea to celebrate International Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh. The UN General Assembly welcomed the proclamation of the day in its resolution of 2002.—APP

## Urdu poet Mushfiq Khwaja remembered

ISLAMABAD: The 19th death anniversary of Urdu poet, literary columnist, critic and distinguished researcher Mushfiq Khwaja was observed on Wednesday. Mushfiq Khwaja's original name was Khwaja Abdul Hai and he was born in Lahore. After securing M.A degree in Urdu from Karachi University, he got associated with 'Anjuman Taraqi Urdu'. Affiliation with 'Anjuman Taraqi Urdu' ignited Mushfiq Khwaja's personality and he carried out many important research achievements from this platform. In the 1980s, Mushfiq Khwaja started writing a literary column under the pen name of 'Khama Bagosh', which created a sensation in the entire subcontinent. All his life, Mushfiq Khwaja remained engaged in purely academic and research writing and compilation. Among his famous works and compilations are 'Tazkira-Khush Marka-Zaiba', 'Ghalib and Safer Bilgrami', 'Jaiza-e-Makhtootaat-e-Urdu', 'Khama Bagosh e-Qalam Se', 'Sukhan Dar Sukhan', 'Sukhan Haay Na Guftani', 'Sukhan Haay Gustarana', 'Aabiyat (poetry collection)' and 'Kulliyat-E-Yagana'. Mushfiq Khwaja also wrote about fifty features on various topics for Radio Pakistan. He was conferred with the Presidential Medal in 1988 in recognition of his academic and literary services.—APP

## Imports of palm, soybean oil decreased by 49.95% &amp; 34.14%

ISLAMABAD: Edible oil including soybean and palm imports into the country during the first 07 months of the current financial year decreased by 49.85 per cent and 34.14 per cent respectively as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of last year. During the period from July-January, 2023-24 about 91,950 metric tons of soybean oil valued at \$99.990 million were imported as compared to the imports of 136,870 metric tons costing \$199.386 million of the same period of last year, according to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. During the period under review, over 1.735 million tons of palm oil worth \$1.611 billion were imported as compared to the imports of 1.927 metric tons valued at \$2.446 billion of the same period of the last year, it added. Meanwhile, the sugar imports into the country also decreased by 42.75 per cent as about 2,260 metric tons of sugar valued at \$2.10 million were imported as compared to the imports of 4,332 metric tons worth \$3.67 million in the same period of last year. During the period under review, food group exports from the country grew by 57.66 per cent as different food commodities valued at \$4.267 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$2.706 million in the same period of last year. On the other hand food group imports into the country during the first 07 months of the current financial year decreased by 21.09 per cent as food imports came down from \$5.983 billion in the first 08 months of the last financial year to \$4.721 billion during the same period.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Miracle Salt Collective Inc called on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.—DNA

## Can PTA remove 'immoral content' from websites?

Pakistan one of top seven countries where maximum numbers of videos were deleted on YouTube during last one year

## MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Is it possible for the government of Pakistan to remove explicit and objectionable content from social networking websites as the Sindh High Court (SHC) has ordered immediate action against immoral content on social media and directed to submit a comprehensive report in this regard? Digital experts and transparency reports of these social networking websites suggest it is not possible for the government to take down the content itself. The government has to file a request to obtain or access to data or content takedown which violates the local laws or community guidelines. The counsel, representing Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), also informed the SHC bench that the regulatory body doesn't have the authority to remove the content on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. It has to write to the authorities concerned in these social networking website companies. For any immoral content or any user/ account which violates the local laws of the host country, the so-

cial networking websites have their own set of rules or community guidelines. In case if these guidelines or local laws are violated, the social networking websites take down the content or block/ remove the user/ account from its platform. The YouTube Community Guidelines Enforcement report reveals that Pakistan is one of the top seven countries in the world where maximum numbers of videos were deleted during the last one year. From July 2022 to September 2023, YouTube removed more than 1.1 million videos on the request of the Pakistani government or in violation of community guidelines and local laws. Similarly, Meta (Facebook) also has its own guidelines. According to the Transparency Report of Meta, from January to June 2023, Pakistan filed 1,407 data requests to Facebook. Of these requests, Facebook produced data against 77.83 of the total requests. Through these requests, the government asked for the data of 1,639 users/ accounts, the report shows. Interestingly, the Meta data shows crackdown on social media users/ accounts increased

immensely during the PTI regime. From July 2018 to July 2020, the government filed the maximum number of data requests to obtain the data from Facebook. Bytes for All Senior Program Manager Haroon Baloch, while talking to The News, said it is not possible for the Pakistani government to remove targeted content from these social networking websites. The government has to approach these companies for the content takedown and has to inform them that they are in violation of the local laws. If it is established that any content is violating the local laws then it is removed, he said. "TikTok is the only social networking platform that has removed a large amount of content on the request of the Pakistani government. The other companies like Twitter/ X or Meta also entertain the requests but they have their own community guidelines as well. Sometimes these companies do not comply with the government requests if they find they are not violating the platform's own community rules/guidelines," commented Haroon Baloch. There is no permanent solution to remove the con-

tent from social networking websites. If targeted users or profiles are intended to be blocked, the government doesn't have the capacity. This is the reason the government's regulatory bodies sometimes block the entire website or throttle the traffic of these networking websites, he said. Media Matters for Democracy Executive Director Asad Baig said that any harmful content which contains hate speech or immoral content can be removed from social networking websites by invoking community standards. However, it takes time to remove such content once you invoke the community standards. Despite this, not all the harmful content can be removed from these platforms, he said. On the issue of whether the government is capable of removing any content from the social networking websites, Asad said the PTA or any other government department doesn't have any direct access to the data of social networking websites to get it removed. It has to request the platform for removing the content or blocking the users, he added.

## Businessmen call on DG Transit Trade

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Businessmen dealing in Pak-Afghan trade have suggested amendments to the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTITA) 2010 through consultation with the stakeholders. The suggestions were made during the visit of a delegation of businessmen to the office of Director General Transit Trade, Wajid Ali here at Custom House. The delegation was led by Co-ordinator Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi and comprised of Directors PAJCCI, Imtiaz Ahmad Ali, Khalid Shezad, former SVP Sarhad Chamber, Engr Manzoor Elahi, Central Vice Chairman All Pakistan Custom Agents Association, Farooq Ahmad and Vice President Khyber Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muhammad Haroon. DG Transit Trade was accompanied by Director Transit Trade, Arbab Qaisar Hameed, Additional Di-

rector Transit, Dr. Wajid Ali and Deputy Director Transit, Ms. Maliaka Ahmad. Speaking on the occasion, Zia Sarhadi said APTITA 2010 has several lacuna as a result of which 70 percent of transit trade has been shifted from Karachi port to Bandar Abbas in Iran. He also demanded the revival of Goods in Transit to Afghanistan (GITA) service through lost cargo via train between Peshawar to Karachi and from Karachi to Chaman. For this purpose, he continued, the SRO 121 be repealed for allowing GITA services through containers and loss cargo as well. The documentation (DG) of all this cargo under GITA should be held under WeBOC at Azhakhel dry port so that custom clearing and forwarding agents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should also benefit from this trade. Zia Sarhadi said in October 2023, the Ministry of Commerce through issuing SRO 1380 imposed a ban on 14 items of Afghan Transit Trade which in a larger context constitute

around 212 items, besides enforcement of a 100 per cent bank guarantee. The cargo goods were already covered under insurance guarantee and all the goods were going safely to Afghanistan for the last 13 years. He demanded the revoking of a 100 per cent bank guarantee and the revival of the old insurance guarantee system. He said instead of the imposition of a ban on transit trade items, concentration should be given to improving monitoring and vigilance on the border to curb smuggling. Coordinator PAJCCI said hundreds of trucks are illegally bringing different items including petroleum production, and food items from Iran daily which needed to be stopped. The measures taken for imposition of restriction on Pak-Afghan transit trade are hurting commerce in the region, he opined. Zia Sarhadi also shared data on Pak-Afghan trade and mentioned a decline in volume during the last several years, a reduction to 1400 million dollars.—DNA

## Politicians welcome consensus between PMLN, PPP

ISLAMABAD: The politicians, civil society and people of all walks of life here Wednesday welcomed the consensus reached between Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan People's Party over formation of the new Government and termed it a positive development for Pakistan. Member Provincial Assembly elect from Shangla, Rushad Khan told APP on Wednesday that consensus between the two main political parties was a good omen for democracy in Pakistan. Professor Dr AZ Hilali, former Chairman of, Political Science Department, University of Peshawar has also welcomed the development and said that political tolerance was a basic principle to successfully run the coalition government. He said the country needs political reconciliation and stability after the election 2024 to address the problems of shabby economy.—APP

## ANF recovers 253 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 253 kg drugs and arrested seven accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He said, 68 kg opium and 72 kg hashish were recovered from two suspects near Ring Road Peshawar. 80 kg Ice was recovered from Nokundi Road Chagai and 9 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near Hayatabad Toll Plaza Peshawar. He said that a raid was conducted in Labour Colony Peshawar and 9 kg hashish was recovered from two accused while 8 kg hashish was seized from G.T Raod Peshawar and an accused was netted during the operation.—APP

## DE, NH&amp;MP organize road safety awareness lecture

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) in cooperation with the National Highway and Motorway Police (NHMP) has organized a comprehensive road safety awareness lecture here at the Islamabad Model College for Girls PG Margalla College in F7/4. The event was headed by Senior Patrol Officer Younus, Senior Patrol Officer Nabeela, and Patrol Officer Asifa. The collaborative effort aimed to enlighten students on crucial road safety measures by utilizing informative videos and slides. The Principal IMCG PG Margalla College, Ayesha Kiayani talking to APP on Wednesday said that this

awareness session, conducted by the esteemed officers, proved to be highly informative and engaging. The team provided students with valuable insights into road safety, equipped with visual aids and relevant presentations, enlightening the audience about the dos and don'ts of road safety, she added. The interactive nature of the lecture allowed the students to grasp essential information efficiently. The officers highlighted the significance of adhering to traffic laws, using pedestrian crossings, and the hazards of reckless driving, ultimately emphasizing the importance of

responsible behavior on the road. The initiative also included a lively question and answer session, providing students with an opportunity to seek clarifications on road safety issues. This dynamic approach fostered an environment for active participation and allowed students to engage directly with the knowledgeable officers. Upon the culmination of the session, the students were conferred with tokens of appreciation as the police officers distributed gifts, serving as a tangible reinforcement of the lessons imparted during the lecture. The event transpired within a

productive and impactful atmosphere, as the authorities successfully captivated the attention of the attendees and effectively disseminated critical road safety information. This endeavor by the NH&MP in collaboration with the Federal Directorate of Education underscores the commitment to instill a culture of road safety awareness and responsible driving practices among the youth. The lecture stood as a testament to the unified effort to ensure the safety and well-being of motorists and pedestrians alike, contributing to the broader goal of minimizing road accidents and promoting safer commutes within the community.—APP

## Health experts urge to increase tobacco taxes

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Health activists have highlighted the critical need for raising tobacco taxes, specifically focusing on cigarettes. In a press release by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of Child (SPARC), the activists underscored that such measures are indispensable for generating significant revenue streams crucial for funding essential public services, including healthcare, and bolstering the economy. The Country Head of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK), Malik Imran Ahmed emphasized the pivotal role of heightened cigarette taxes in deterring smoking, particularly among the youth and individuals with lower incomes. By instituting annual increments in cigarette taxes, policymakers can effectively curtail tobacco consumption by rendering cigarettes less affordable over time, he added. This strategic approach holds the promise of substantially ameliorating public health outcomes by mitigating smoking-related diseases and reducing healthcare expenditures, he maintained. Malik Imran also shed light on the staggering economic toll of smoking in Pakistan, which amounts to Rs 615.07 billion (US\$3.85 billion), equivalent to 1.6% of the country's GDP. Notably, the economic costs of smoking far surpass the revenues generated by the tobacco industry, exacerbating this gap annually. He further referenced data from an international survey revealing that the aggregate annual economic costs attributable to smoking-related diseases and deaths, along with those associated with the three primary non-communicable diseases, collectively amount to 1.6% and 1.15% of Pakistan's GDP, respectively. This alarming trend underscores the urgent imperative for escalating cigarette taxes annually to alleviate the strain on Pakistan's GDP, necessitating prompt governmental action, he maintained. Dr. Khalil Ahmad, Program Manager at SPARC, elaborated on the multifaceted implications of escalating cigarette taxes.

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## US veto of UN resolution unjustifiable

At an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council, the United States once again vetoed a resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. Put forward on behalf of the Arab States by Algeria, the resolution demanded "an immediate humanitarian cease-fire that must be respected by all parties". The resolution, which gained the support of 13 out of the 15 members of the UNSC, with the United Kingdom abstaining, represents the voice of the majority of countries and the will of the international community, which wants an end to the indiscriminate killing by Israel in Gaza. As Amar Bendjama, Algeria's ambassador to the UN, said, the UNSC "cannot afford passivity" in the face of what is unfolding in Gaza, and silence is "not a viable option". More than 29,000 people have been killed in the "self-defense" operation Israel has launched, and more than 80 percent of the population of Gaza has been displaced over the past four months, according to Palestinian authorities. Washington traditionally shields Israel from UN action, and it has previously vetoed two other UNSC resolutions since the conflict began on Oct 7, when it was triggered by Hamas' attack on Israel. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador to the UN, said her country was vetoing the resolution over concerns it would jeopardize talks between the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar that seek to broker a "pause" in the war and the release of hostages held by Hamas. But this excuse does not hold water. The talks she referred to are one thing, and the UN draft resolution is another. Since the four-party talks are supposed to be seeking to realize a cease-fire, why can't the US support the UN resolution? How does passing the resolution jeopardize the talks? If the UN resolution exerted any influence, it would only help to promote the success of the talks. The US ambassador to the UN rejected claims that the veto was the US' latest effort to cover for an imminent Israeli ground invasion into the southernmost Gaza city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. But other countries cannot help but think otherwise, as there is no other justifiable explanation for the US' vote against the resolution. The US said on Monday that it had proposed a rival draft resolution calling for a temporary cease-fire and opposing a major ground offensive by Israel in Rafah. It is to be hoped that the US resolution can be put forward before Israel begins its ground offensive. If the offensive is launched, it is inevitable that many more innocent Palestinian civilians will be killed and there will be a new humanitarian disaster in the city.



## Politicians must call for ceasefire in Israel-Gaza war

As western leaders wake up to the need for a ceasefire in Gaza, nearly 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military campaign. More than two-thirds of the dead in the coastal enclave are thought to be women and children. Thousands more are believed to be buried under the rubble. The reputation of the west as a champion of universal values and upholding a rules-based order is unlikely to recover anytime soon from the bloody events in Gaza. International politics is not a morality play. Probably several Arab countries were not averse to the idea that Israel could deliver a coup de grace to Hamas. But the state of the fighting in Gaza suggested that this was a remote possibility. In January, it was estimated that Israel has killed or captured only around one-third of Hamas's fighting force. To finish the job would only be achievable at an indefensibly high cost to Palestinian - and hostage - lives. What is needed is an end to the war in Gaza, the release of the remaining hostages and a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace based on two states. But none of this seems possible with the current Israeli government. Its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, last week withdrew his delegation from talks in Cairo about a potential deal for a truce and prisoner release, infuriating the families of hostages at home and troubling Israel's allies abroad. Mr Netanyahu had caved to threats by extremists in his cabinet to topple him if he reached a "reckless" deal with Hamas. This is the consequence of the ultranationalist tail wagging the righting dog. Once seen as marginal politicians, ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir - religious fanatics who both live in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank - speak their minds with impunity. Whether it is their plans to resettle Gaza, their rebuke of the US for sanctioning violent settlers, or their claim that Donald Trump would be better for Israel than Joe Biden, the pair fear no repercussions, knowing that they remain popular with their voting base while Mr Netanyahu does not. US presidential diplomacy was once to "speak softly and carry a big stick." By contrast, in Gaza, Mr Biden speaks loudly and carries a little stick. The US wants a temporary ceasefire linked to the release of all hostages and increasing the flow of aid. If the use of the word "temporary" is an attempt to assuage Mr Smotrich and Mr Ben-Gvir, then it is likely to fail. Israel's government this weekend rejected "international dictates". At the UN, the US vetoed an Israel-Hamas immediate ceasefire resolution, which had been backed by Arab nations, offering a "side by side" alternative to disarm opposition. This tactic is also being used by Sir Keir Starmer ahead of Wednesday's parliamentary vote, with a ceasefire in which Israel stops fighting if Hamas discontinues its violence. Domestic politics is as important as the foreign arena to both leaders. Mr Biden faces a presidential primary in Michigan, which is home to a large Arab-American community, next week. Later this month, Sir Keir faces a byelection in Rochdale where a third of voters are Muslim.

## The dilemmas of US foreign policy

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s further deepened the American dilemma of war. The conflict was characterized by ambiguous objectives, controversial tactics, and a growing anti-war movement at home. The Vietnam War left scars on the national psyche, fostering skepticism towards military interventions and government claims

WAR has always been a complex and challenging issue for the United States, prompting a deep and enduring dilemma that echoes through the nation's history. From the Revolutionary War that birthed the nation to the modern conflicts of the 21st century, the American approach to war reflects a multifaceted struggle between ideals and realities, patriotism and pacifism, interventionism and isolationism. The roots of the American dilemma of war can be traced back to the very founding principles of the nation. The Founding Fathers, while proclaiming the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, also recognized the need for self-defense. The Revolutionary War, fought for independence, marked the inception of the American military tradition. However, the founders were wary of creating a standing army that could be misused by a tyrannical government, leading to the inclusion of the Second Amendment in the Constitution. As the nation expanded westward and faced external threats, such as the War of 1812 and conflicts with Native American tribes, the question of when and how to engage in war became increasingly complex. The dichotomy between the desire for territorial expansion and the commitment to avoiding unnecessary entanglements abroad began to emerge. The mid-19th century saw the nation torn apart by the Civil War, a brutal conflict that pitted Americans against each other in a struggle over slavery and the future of the Union. While the war ultimately ended slavery and preserved the Union, it left a lasting scar on the American psyche. The immense human cost of the Civil War led to a desire for peace and an aversion to further internal conflicts. The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the United States becoming a global power. The Spanish-American War of 1898 marked the country's first foray into overseas imperialism, raising questions about the morality and necessity of interventionist foreign policies. As the nation grappled with its new role on the world stage, President Woodrow Wilson's idealistic vision for a world "safe for democracy" collided with the harsh realities of World War I. The aftermath of World War I brought about the first significant debate over the United States' role in global affairs. The Senate's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations highlighted a tension between

the desire to remain detached from European conflicts and the recognition of the United States' responsibility in shaping world order. The interwar period saw a retreat into isolationism, fueled by a war-weary public and the economic challenges of the Great Depression. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 thrust the United States into World War II, erasing any lingering isolationist sentiment. The conflict galvanized the nation, with a united commitment to defeating fascism and defending democratic ideals. The war's end ushered in the era of the Cold War, as the United States found itself in a new global struggle against communism. The Korean War in the early 1950s marked the first armed conflict of the Cold War, testing the limits of American interventionism. The war ended in an uneasy stalemate, leaving the Korean Peninsula divided along the 38th parallel. This inconclusive outcome underscored the challenges and complexities of military intervention, prompting reflection on the goals and costs of war. The Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s further deepened the American dilemma of war. The conflict was characterized by ambiguous objectives, controversial tactics, and a growing anti-war movement at home. The Vietnam War left scars on the national psyche, fostering skepticism towards military interventions and government claims. The end of the Cold War brought a brief period of optimism and the hope for a "peace dividend." However, the Gulf War in 1990-1991 demonstrated the ongoing challenges of navigating the American dilemma of war. The conflict in the Middle East revealed the tension between the desire to protect national interests and the reluctance to become embroiled in prolonged military engagements. The 21st century witnessed a new chapter in the American dilemma of war with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks prompted a swift and forceful response, leading to long-term military engagements in the Middle East. The wars sparked debates over the justifiability of preemptive strikes, nation-building efforts, and the balance between security and civil liberties. The American dilemma of war persists today, as the nation grapples with evolving global threats, emerging technologies, and the moral and ethical implications of military interventions. The rise of non-traditional challenges, such as cyber warfare and terrorism, adds

complexity to the decision-making process. Some people argue that the United States shouldn't have joined the war in Ukraine. They say it's either not in the country's best interest or it costs too much. Others worry that getting involved in the Middle East might lead to a dangerous situation, not the U.S.'s business, and be expensive in terms of lives and money. These are serious concerns, but they overlook some important aspects of war. Firstly, war isn't always a choice. Secondly, avoiding war can sometimes be more expensive than getting into a conflict. The United States, being a powerful country, has faced these considerations in various conflicts since World War I. Some argue against involvement, saying there's no interest, the cost is too high, or the war is unwinnable. But the U.S. is a major global power, and other nations know that having the U.S. on their side increases their chances of success. The real question isn't whether the world seems dangerous to the U.S., but what to do about it. There are always choices: some can save a country, some can trap it, some suggest caution, and others demand action. The U.S. is always at the crossroads, debating what decision to make. Reflecting on the choices made during World War II is helpful. There was a debate on whether to enter the conflict at all. Some argued it wasn't America's war, especially during the Great Depression. However, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. was forced into the war. Staying out turned out to be the wrong decision, as it led to a lack of military preparedness. The Vietnam War was another example. The decision to enter was made casually, assuming U.S. presence alone would intimidate North Vietnam. This arrogant approach led to a massive defeat and casualties for the United States. After Vietnam, the U.S. adopted a stance of peace but readiness to fight, including possible nuclear war during the Cold War. This tension prevented an actual war during that period. In facing the Ukraine conflict, the U.S. is divided, but it chose to arm native forces rather than deploy U.S. troops, learning from the lessons of Vietnam and the Cold War. This is not to suggest a specific approach to war but to consider the potential consequences of decisions. However, being as prepared as possible without committing to the fight provides options. The details and reasons for going to war or not should be carefully considered at all times, as not making a decision is also a decision, and an enemy might be approaching.

## How to end the scourge of missing persons?

Qamar Bashir



Ironically, the interim prime minister's inability to enforce authority on the powerful spy agency likely stems from a combination of factors, including institutional resistance, complex power dynamics, and political constraints. The spy agency operates with a degree of autonomy and influence that may make it challenging for the prime minister to compel them to release the missing persons. Additionally, the sensitive nature of intelligence operations and national security concerns may further limit the prime minister's ability to intervene directly. The issue of missing persons has drawn condemnation from various..

THE Islamabad High Court's response to the disappearance of 12 Baloch students from Islamabad reveals a profound frustration with the violation of their fundamental human rights, as guaranteed by the constitution and the law. The court expressed dismay over the failure to recover the missing individuals even after two years, attributing responsibility to state institutions. In a stern warning, the judge highlighted the paradox of citizens needing protection from their own security agencies, which are mandated to ensure their safety. The court's summons of high-ranking officials, including the caretaker prime minister, reflects a commitment to accountability, with the judge cautioning that future disappearances could lead to legal action against top government officials. The judge's assertion that if those in power are unable to control the institutions under their purview, they should resign underscores the gravity of the situation and the need for effective governance and oversight. The statements made by the High Court judge during the hearing reveal a deep-seated frustration with the issue of enforced disappearances. The judge's remarks underscore the failure of state institutions, including security agencies, to safeguard citizens as mandated by the constitution and the law. The formation of the committee comprising heads of top spy agencies and summoning the caretaker prime minister, the court aims to ensure a thorough investigation and provide answers regarding the missing persons, regardless of political considerations. The judge's warning to state officials about potential consequences if such issues persist reflects the urgency and seriousness with which the court views the matter, emphasizing accountability and the judiciary's role in upholding human rights and the rule of law. Ironically, the interim prime minister's inability to enforce authority on the powerful spy agency likely stems from a combination of factors, including institutional resistance, complex power dynamics, and political constraints. The spy agency operates with a degree of autonomy and influence that may make it challenging for the prime minister to compel them to release the missing persons. Additionally, the sensitive nature of intelligence operations and national security concerns may further limit the prime minister's ability to intervene directly. The issue of missing persons has drawn condemnation from various quarters, both domestically and internationally which are tarnishing the soft image of the country. International bodies such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International have extensively documented and criticized the human rights abuses Balochistan, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Additionally, the European Parliament has passed resolutions urging the Pakistani government to address these issues. Within Pakistan, organizations like the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and Baloch political leaders have been vocal in condemning the actions of security forces in Balochistan and advocating for justice for the victims. Despite these condemnations, the situation in Balochistan remains dire, with ongoing human rights

abuses continuing to affect the lives of the Baloch people. Pakistani civil society organizations have also joined the chorus of voices calling for an end to these violations and for accountability for those responsible. International leaders and activists have echoed these sentiments, urging the Pakistani government to respect human rights and address the grievances of the Baloch people and restore their fundamental human rights such as the right to liberty, fair trial, and protection from enforced disappearance, as guaranteed by the UN Charter and the Constitution of Pakistan. Enforced disappearances, a global phenomenon, extend far beyond the borders of Pakistan. Numerous countries grapple with this issue, where individuals vanish without explanation, often with impunity. Mexico contends with tens of thousands of missing persons, primarily linked to organized crime and drug cartels, while Syria's civil war has led to widespread disappearances attributed to government forces and armed factions. Colombia's history of enforced disappearances, though improving, remains a concern, particularly regarding paramilitary groups and drug trafficking. Similarly, Sri Lanka's civil war aftermath includes ongoing cases, often involving state security forces. Unlike the examples quoted above, established democracies distinguish themselves by their robust systems, where occurrences of missing persons are exceptionally rare. This is attributed to optimized institutions with high levels of accountability, including law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Transparency is a cornerstone, ensuring adherence to constitutional and legal frameworks, thus resolving political intricacies. Non-state actors are brought within legal bounds, eradicating covert operations. Parliament, judiciary, and government operate independently, devoid of coercion or intimidation, and are subject to rigorous accountability measures for any lapses in fulfilling their mandates. This unwavering commitment ensures the effective functioning of democratic processes, fostering public trust and stability. The unrest and insurgencies, like in Balochistan primarily stem from a combination of historical grievances, political marginalization, economic disparities, and cultural identity issues. Historically, Balochistan has faced marginalization and exploitation of its natural resources by the central government, leading to feelings of neglect and resentment among the Baloch population. Additionally, the lack of political representation and autonomy, coupled with human rights abuses and military operations in the region, have fueled grievances and resistance. Resultantly, during ensuing struggles individuals vanish into a void of uncertainty and fear. The lack of accountability for those responsible perpetuates a cycle of anguish and injustice, echoing the urgent need for international cooperation and concerted efforts to address this pressing human rights concern. However, everything's not lost, there are examples of countries, which were facing the abhorrent phenomenon but they resolved this curse. One such country is Argentina.

Following the return to democracy in 1983, the government of Argentina established the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) to investigate human rights abuses. The resulting Nunca Más report documented the atrocities committed by the military regime, laying the foundation for accountability. In parallel, the Argentine parliament repealed amnesty laws that shielded military officials from prosecution for human rights abuses. This legislative action enabled the judiciary to prosecute and convict numerous perpetrators through landmark trials like the Trial of the Juntas in 1985. These legal proceedings underscored the importance of judicial independence and accountability in addressing state-sponsored violence. Civil society organizations, notably the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, played a pivotal role in advocating for justice for the victims of disappearances. Their tireless activism, alongside broader societal pressure and international scrutiny, contributed to the dismantling of impunity and the pursuit of truth, justice, and accountability. Together, these short-term, medium-term, and long-term measures exemplify a multifaceted approach that can serve as a model for addressing the issue of missing persons and promoting human rights worldwide. In light of Argentina's example, there are several actions that parliament, judiciary, government, and civil society in Balochistan could take to resolve the issue of missing persons once and for all. Firstly, parliament could enact legislation to establish a commission or task force dedicated to investigating cases of enforced disappearances in Balochistan. This body should be granted sufficient powers and resources to conduct thorough and impartial investigations into each case. Secondly, the judiciary should prioritize cases of missing persons and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. This may involve repealing any laws or policies that hinder prosecution or provide immunity to state actors involved in enforced disappearances. Additionally, the government should actively cooperate with investigative bodies and provide support to families of missing persons. This includes facilitating access to information, legal assistance, and psychological support for affected families. Lastly, civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for justice and raising awareness about the issue of missing persons. They should continue their efforts to pressure the government and hold authorities accountable for their actions. Moreover, international scrutiny and support can also be instrumental in addressing human rights abuses and promoting accountability in Balochistan. By implementing these measures and adopting a collaborative approach, parliament, judiciary, government, and civil society can work together to bring an end to the scourge of missing persons in Balochistan.

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## Briefs

## US urges DR Congo, Rwanda to avert war

WASHINGTON : The United States warned Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo at the UN that they “must walk back from the brink of war,” as tensions rise between the neighbors. Kinshasa, the United Nations and Western countries say Rwanda is supporting a rebel group active in eastern DRC in a bid to control vast mineral resources in the region, an allegation Kigali denies. After several months of relative calm, intense fighting resumed last month around the city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. “Parties to the conflict and regional actors should immediately resume (peace) processes – diplomatic efforts, not military conflict, are the only path for a negotiated solution and a sustainable peace,” said Robert Wood, an American envoy to the UN, at an emergency meeting concerning the DRC. Kigali “must also withdraw Rwandan forces from Congolese territory and immediately remove any and all of its surface to air missile systems, which credible reporting indicates they’ve been responsible for intentionally firing on the aerial assets of MONUSCO,” the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC, Wood added. —APP

## S.Korea doctors’ strike disrupts medical operations

SEOUL: Pregnant women had C-sections canceled and cancer treatments were postponed Wednesday as the number of South Korean trainee doctors to walk off the job over proposed reforms swelled, officials and local reports said. More than 8,800 junior doctors – 71 percent of the trainee workforce – have now quit, said Seoul’s Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo, part of a spiraling protest against government plans to sharply increase medical school admissions. Seoul says the reforms are essential, citing the country’s low doctor numbers and rapidly aging population, but doctors claim the changes will hurt service provision and education quality. Critics say doctors are mainly concerned the reform could erode their salaries and social prestige, and the plan enjoys broad public support among South Koreans, many of whom are fed up with long wait times for many medical services. Park said Wednesday that 7,813 trainee doctors had not shown up for work – an almost five-fold increase from the first day of the action Monday – despite the government ordering many of them to return to their hospitals. “The basic calling of medical professionals is to protect the health and lives of the people, and any group action that threatens this cannot be justified,” Park said. —Agencies

## Amazon to join DJIA, replace Walgreens

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Amazon.com Inc. will replace Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. in the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), S&P Dow Jones Indices announced. “Reflecting the evolving nature of the American economy, this change will increase consumer retail exposure as well as other business areas in the DJIA,” it said in a statement. In addition, Uber Technologies Inc. will replace JetBlue Airways Corp. in the Dow Jones Transportation Average. “This change will help the index gain exposure to the ride sharing industry,” said the statement. “The index change was prompted by JetBlue’s low weight in the index of less than one-half of one percentage point caused by its low share price.” The Dow Jones Transportation Average is a price weighted index, as a very low-priced stock has an immaterial impact on the index, according to the statement.



ISLAMABAD: Leader of the house in the Senate, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar in a meeting with the MQM delegation led by Kamran Tessori, Governor Sindh at parliament house. – DNA

## US plans new sanctions on Russia for Navalny’s death

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s main political opponent died in his penal colony on Friday

## NEWS DESK

MOSCOW : The United States will announce fresh sanctions on Russia on Friday over the death in prison of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, as a string of European governments summon Russian diplomats. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s main political opponent died in his penal colony on Friday, Russian authorities said. His team says the 47-year-old was murdered. The US is set to announce a “major sanctions package to hold Russia accountable” and respond to the “vi-

oluntary and brutal war that has now raged on for two years”, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Tuesday. The US and its allies imposed a slew of sanctions on Russia since it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The latest move comes as Belgium announced Tuesday that it had summoned its Russian ambassador, following Poland, France and Germany. Meanwhile, Italy’s deputy prime minister and former Putin adviser Matteo Salvini was criticised for saying it was “up to Russian doctors and judges” to deter-

mine the cause of Navalny’s death. Navalny’s mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, urged Putin to “immediately” release the body of her son – a demand echoed by his widow Yulia Navalnaya. Lyudmila Navalnaya travelled to the remote IK-3 penal colony on Saturday, the morning after his death was announced, and has since been barred from seeing his body. “Let me finally see my son. I demand that Alexei’s body be released immediately so that I can bury him in a humane way,” she said, dressed all in black, in a video published by his team.

Investigators said his body could be kept for “at least two weeks”, Navalny’s allies reported. Navalny’s team also published a written letter to Putin by Lyudmila Navalnaya – who is not a public figure – making the demand. The Kremlin has refused to say when the body will be handed over and Putin has been silent on the death of his main political opponent. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday brushed off Yulia Navalnaya’s statement that Putin killed her husband as “unfounded and vulgar.” “I do not give a damn how the press secretary

of a murderer comments on my words,” Navalnaya shot back on social media. Russia detained hundreds of mourners in the days after Navalny’s death. Yulia Navalnaya’s freshly created account on the social media site X, formerly Twitter, was suspended for 50 minutes on Tuesday, shortly after her remarks against the Kremlin. The company then reactivated it without an explanation. On Monday, she had posted an emotional video appeal on the platform accusing Putin of killing Navalny. She announced she would continue her husband’s fight

against the Kremlin and met European Union foreign ministers. Her team said on Tuesday she had urged the 27-nation bloc not to recognise Russia’s forthcoming presidential election – which is likely to see Putin extend his rule until at least 2030. “Do not recognise this election,” Navalnaya said, according to comments published by her team on social media. “A president who killed his main political opponent cannot be legitimate by definition,” she added. She also urged the EU to “always make the distinction between Putin and Russia.”

## Greek premier begins state visit to India

## WEB DESK

NEW DELHI : Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis arrived in India on a two-day state visit, officials said on Wednesday. Mitsotakis is visiting India at the invitation of Indian counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi and will be chief guest at the Raisina Dialogue, a multilateral conference held annually in India. Indian Foreign Minister Subramanyam Jaishankar met Mitsotakis on Wednesday morning. “Valued his commitment to enhancing India-Greece ties. Look forward to the strengthening of our strategic partnership,” Jaishankar said on X. Mitsotakis is the first Greek head of government to visit India after 15 years. “The last Prime Ministerial visit from Greece to India took place in 2008,” the Foreign Ministry said. The Greek prime minister will hold meetings with the Indian premier on Wednesday, the Foreign Ministry said. The relations between India and Greece have been elevated to ‘Strategic Partnership’ during Modi’s visit to Greece last August. The relations “are based on shared cultural values, commitment to foster economic growth, collaboration in the fields of security and defence, shipping,

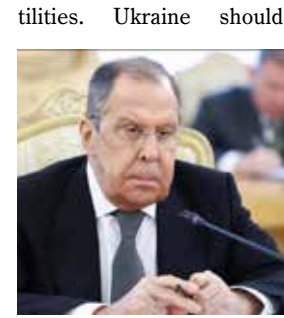
maritime and marked by convergence on regional and global issues,” the ministry said. Earlier today, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called on the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos. Jaishankar stated that he valued Mitsotakis’ commitment to enhancing ties between India and Greece. Mitsotakis arrived in the national capital. Union Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakashi Lekhi welcomed the Greek PM at the airport. Notably, Mitsotakis is the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker at the three day Raisina Dialogue 2024, which begins today. Mitsotakis is accompanied by senior officials and a high-powered business delegation. In a post on X, Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson stated, “Warm welcome to PM @kmitotakis of the Hellenic Republic as he arrives in New Delhi on his first State Visit to India. Received by MoS @M\_Lekhi at the airport. PM Mitsotakis is the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker at #RaisinaDialogue2024.” Greek Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis who is in New Delhi to attend the Raisina Dialogue and met with External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and the two leaders discussed the strengthening.

## President Sall is too slow scheduling vote

DAKAR : Opposition candidates in Senegal’s presidential election have accused the authorities of dragging their feet on setting a new date for the vote after a court ruled that a 10-month postponement was unlawful. President Macky Sall last week promised he would abide by the Constitutional Council’s request for the vote to be scheduled as soon as possible. The court blocked Sall’s parliament-backed decree to postpone the election, originally scheduled for Feb. 25. Sall faced significant domestic and international pressure to accept the council’s ruling after the crisis triggered violent street protests and warnings of authoritarian overreach in one of coup-hit West Africa’s more stable democracies. But a new date has yet to be set, stoking concern among opposition candidates, some of whom are pushing for the election to take place before Sall’s mandate ends on April 2. In a joint statement late on Tuesday, 16 of the 19 presidential contenders complained about an “unacceptable slowness” enacting the council’s ruling. —APP

## Moscow ‘open to resolving conflict in Ukraine peacefully’

MOSCOW : Moscow is open to resolving the conflict in Ukraine peacefully, and Kyiv’s self-imposed ban prevents the start of negotiations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday. Speaking in an interview with the Brazilian daily O Globo, Lavrov doubted that Ukraine would engage in talks with Russia, saying: “Kiev and the West are focused on promoting (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelenskyy’s formula, which contains an unacceptable ultimatum for Russia, and flat out rejects other initiatives, including Brazil’s.” “The goals and objectives of the special military operation were outlined by President (Vladimir) Putin and include the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and eliminating threats to Russia’s security that come from its territory,” he said. The minister insisted on eliminating “the root causes of the Ukraine crisis” to achieve a sustainable and fair settlement. “The West must stop supplying weapons to Ukraine, and Kiev must stop hos-



ilities. Ukraine should Consider Brussels’ determination to inflict a “strategic defeat” on us, talking about prospects for restoring relations is beside the point. “If the European countries drop their Russophobic policies and come up with realistic ideas regarding new principles of relations, we will consider them. Our decisions will be based on our national interests,” he said. Lavrov expects that the US will maintain its “anti-Russian course” in the foreseeable future, arguing that “the ruling elite of the United States views Russia as an adversary and a threat regardless of party affiliation.” “The former president (Donald Trump) did nothing to improve Russia-US relations during his four-year stint in the White House. ... We are prepared to work with any leader who wins the American people’s trust. What matters to us is not specific political figures, but their policies towards Russia. President Putin made that clear recently in his televised interview,” he said. —Agencies

reinstating its neutral, non-aligned, and non-nuclear status and ensure the rights and freedoms of its citizens. It is critical that the basis be the new territorial realities and the situation on the ground,” he stressed. Lavrov regretted that “neither Kiev nor the West demonstrates any sign of political will to settle the conflict,” and therefore Russia has “no choice but to continue the special military operation until its goals are achieved.” Asked about prospects of normalizing relations with Europe, the official said “the EU countries have imposed this enmity for Russia on themselves.” “It is up to them to decide how to go about this choice.

## BD resists to accept more Rohingya from Myanmar

DHAKA: Bangladesh is refusing to accept more Rohingya fleeing Myanmar, with authorities saying on Wednesday that the country is already overburdened in supporting more than 1.2 million refugees. The Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh over decades after escaping death and persecution in Myanmar, especially during a military crackdown in 2017. The developing country spends an estimated \$1.2 billion annually to support the refugees, as international aid for the oppressed stateless minority has fallen since 2020. Most of the Rohingya refugees live in squalid camps in Cox’s Bazar district, a coastal region in eastern Bangladesh.

“We are already overburdened with more than 1 million Rohingya,” Mizanur Rahman, Bangladesh’s refugee relief and repatriation commissioner in Cox’s Bazar, told Arab News. “The people of Bangladesh certainly will not welcome any more Rohingya here. Hospitality in the host community has turned into hostility. In this context, there is nothing much we can do for the newly displaced (Rohingya from Myanmar).” Rahman’s statement follows comments from other Bangladeshi officials, including Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, who told reporters earlier this month that Bangladesh “will not allow any more Rohingya to enter the country.” —DNA

## 11 Ukraine children returned from Russia

MOSCOW: Eleven Ukrainian children crossed the border from Belarus to Ukraine, in the latest return of children taken to Russia and occupied territories during the nearly two-year Ukraine war. Emerging from the darkness at a humanitarian crossing on the Belarus border, the children hugged family members who had been waiting for more than six hours. Oleksandr, 16, is the oldest among those returned by Moscow through a Qatar-mediated scheme. “My new life is starting,” he said, smiling shyly and describing the “joy and slight nerves.” The children were received by the Qatari embassy in Moscow on Monday before traveling to Belarus and walking across the one-kilometer border zone – while some relatives were able to meet the children directly in Moscow. Two critically ill children were brought over in an ambulance and rushed to hospital. Ukraine estimates 20,000 children have been forced to Russia since the war erupted in February 2022. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called the action “a genocide.” Russia denies the accusations. The group of children is the fourth and largest to have been returned with Qatar’s help and included some as young as two, Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets told AFP at the border. —Agencies

## SA will tap contingency account to curb rising debt

CAPE TOWN : South Africa’s government will draw down 150 billion rand (\$7.93 billion) over the next three years from a central bank-administered contingency account to limit borrowing, the National Treasury said on Wednesday. Africa’s most industrialised economy has barely grown in more than a decade, with GDP growth averaging 0.8% since 2012. Weak revenue collection has seen debt levels rise, with debt-servicing costs consuming a greater share of the national budget. Advertisement • Scroll to continue The bleak economic backdrop is looming large over a general election due on May 29 that could see the governing African National Congress (ANC) party lose its parliamentary majority for the first time in 30 years. The Treasury said in the 2024 budget that it was able to tap the Gold and Foreign Exchange Contingency Reserve Account (GFECRA) – which had a balance. —APP

## US opposes UN court’s order for Israeli withdrawal

The US is working to find a resolution of peace for Israeli’s and Palestinians and to pave the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state

## FOREIGN DESK

THE HAGUE: The United States said a call for withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories in Palestine requires to take into account Israel’s real security needs speaking at the International Criminal Court of Justice (ICC) on Wednesday. The US is working to find a resolution of peace for Israeli’s and Palestinians and to pave the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state, added the representative. Egypt, UAE and Cuba were among the speakers that appeared at the third day of hearings at the ICJ, also known as the World Court, in the Hague. Egypt’s legal counselor Jasmine Moussa said Israel’s ongoing ‘onslaught’ on Gaza killed over 29,000 Palestinians and displaced 2.3 million people in violation of international law. “It is shocking that some states do not want the court to render its legal opinion. What message does this send on their respect for international justice and the

rule of law?” asked Moussa. Egypt’s Jasmine Moussa said the Middle East “yearns for peace and stability” and a “comprehensive and lasting resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict”. Legal Advisor of the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jasmine Moussa attends ICJ public hearing to allow parties to give their views on the legal consequences of Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. (Reuters) UAE representative Lana Nusseibeh said the viability of peace and an independent Palestinian state are imperiled by Israel’s violations which have risen sharply recently. The UAE is confident that the court will determine the legal consequences of Israel’s violations of international law against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. “According to the United Nations, 2023 has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank,” said Nusseibeh. Nusseibeh said Israel must cease all policies and practices that impede the exercise of Palestinian right to self-determination.

Israel must ensure freedom of access to holy places and respect the legal and historic status quo of these areas, added Nusseibeh. The UAE concluded their statement by calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and criticized the UN’s Security Council’s failure to adopt a peace resolution. Russia will also present arguments on Wednesday in proceedings at the UN’s highest court examining the legality of Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. The ICJ, also known as the World Court, was asked in 2022 by the UN General Assembly to issue a non-binding opinion on the legal consequences of the occupation. Israel, which is not taking part, said in written comments that the court’s involvement could be harmful to achieving a negotiated settlement. Washington in 2022 opposed the court issuing an opinion and is expected to argue on Wednesday that it cannot rule on the occupation’s lawfulness. More than 50 states will present arguments until Feb. 26. Egypt

and France were also scheduled to speak on Wednesday. On Monday, Palestinian representatives asked the judges to declare Israel’s occupation of their territory illegal and said its opinion could help reach a two-state solution. On Tuesday, 10 states including South Africa were overwhelmingly critically of Israel’s conduct in the occupied territories, with many urging the court to declare the occupation illegal. The latest surge of violence in Gaza that followed Hamas’ Oct. 7 attacks in Israel has complicated already deeply-rooted grievances in the Middle East and damaged efforts toward finding a path to peace. The ICJ’s 15-judge panel has been asked to review Israel’s “occupation, settlement and annexation ... including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures.” The judges are expected to take roughly

six months to issue their opinion on the request, which also asks them to consider the legal status of the occupation and its consequences for states. Israel ignored a World Court opinion in 2004 when it found that Israel’s separation wall in the West Bank violated international law and should be dismantled. Instead, it has been extended. The current hearings could increase political pressure over Israel’s war in Gaza, which has killed about 29,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7. Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem – areas of historic Palestine – from the Palestinians want for a state – in the 1967 conflict. It withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but, along with neighboring Egypt, still controls its borders. Israeli leaders have long disputed that the territories are formally occupied on the basis that they were captured from Jordan and Egypt during the 1967 war rather than from a sovereign Palestine.

Briefs

Lula meets Blinken after Gaza comments

WASHINGTON: US top diplomat Antony Blinken was meeting President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Wednesday, amid a diplomatic spat after the Brazilian leader likened Israel's war in Gaza to the Nazi genocide during World War Two.

US officials have said they expect Lula and Secretary of State Blinken to have a robust conversation on issues of global security, including the conflict in Gaza sparked by attacks in southern Israel by Hamas militants on Oct. 7. Israel said on Monday that Lula is not welcome in Israel until he takes back the comments.

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday that Washington disagreed with Lula's comments, but declined to preview what Blinken would say in the meeting on the issue. Lula's comments came after he visited the Middle East last week and just ahead of a meeting of foreign ministers in Rio de Janeiro as part of Brazil's presidency of the G20 group of advanced economies.

Washington, which provides Israel with military and diplomatic support, has urged Israel to protect civilians but defended Israel's right to target Hamas militants in the Gaza strip.

Ahead of Blinken's travel to South America, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols told reporters that sharing ideas on the conflict in Gaza would be "crucial to the conversation" between Lula and Blinken.

The two would also discuss efforts to promote democracy in Venezuela, a US-Brazil partnership on workers' rights and cooperation on transitioning to clean energy, Nichols said.

PPP finalises 3 names for Punjab governor

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: PPP finalised three nominees for the esteemed position of Governor of Punjab. Sources within the party revealed that the frontrunners for the coveted role include seasoned political figures Makhdoom Ahmed Mehmood, Qamar Zaman Kaira, and Nadeem Afzal Chan. However, it is Makhdoom Ahmed Mehmood who emerges as the top priority for the party's leadership.

Sources added that Mehmood's candidacy is not only endorsed by the PPP but also enjoys acceptance from other political parties including PML-N.

The announcement comes in the wake of a power sharing formula for government formation and power-sharing unveiled jointly by PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, and former President Asif Ali Zardari.

The trio convened a press conference at the historic Zardari House in Islamabad to disclose the collaborative approach towards national leadership.

PNS Yamama launching ceremony held in Romania

The Admiral expressed his confidence that induction of these multipurpose and highly adaptive platforms; equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors will further strengthen combat capability of PN Fleet in safeguarding maritime frontiers while ensuring Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region, especially in the Arabian Sea

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Launching Ceremony of state-of-the-art 4th Offshore Patrol Vessel, PNS YAMAMA (Desig) being built for Pakistan Navy was held at M/s DAMEN Shipyard Galati, Romania. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami graced the occasion as Chief Guest. Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chief of the Naval Staff underscored the importance of maritime security under the prevailing conventional and non-conventional maritime threats to energy and trade highways passing through Indian Ocean Region. In this context, he highlighted that Pakistan Navy has tremendous contribution in maintenance of safe and secure sea environment for maritime trade.

The Admiral expressed his confidence that induction of these multipurpose and highly adaptive platforms; equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors will further strengthen combat capability of PN Fleet in safeguarding maritime frontiers while ensuring Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region, especially in the Arabian Sea.

Earlier during his welcome address, Chief Operations Officer of M/s DAMEN Group Netherlands highlighted that DAMEN Shipyard and Pakistan Navy are enjoying historic relations since 1986. He highlighted that M/s DAMEN would continue to deliver cost effective, technologically advanced and potent ships to PN to meet their operational requirements. The launching ceremony was attended by high ranking officials from Romanian Government and Navy, Pakistan Navy, M/s DAMEN and notables from Pakistani community in Romania.



UK nuclear missile crashes into ocean

LONDON: A UK Trident nuclear missile has misfired and crashed into the ocean off the US coast of Florida during a failed test launch by a British nuclear submarine in an embarrassing blow for the United Kingdom's outdated naval warfare force. British news outlets cited the UK's Ministry of Defense (MoD) statement, confirming that an "anomaly occurred" during a missile launch on January 30 off the coast of Florida. The MoD said the "anomaly" during the exercise was "event specific". The officials said they could not say any more because the incident related to national security. They said there remained "absolute confidence" in Britain's constant at-sea nuclear defense system.

One British official said the test-launch from the nuclear-powered submarine HMS Vanguard would have been successful had it been carried out for real with a nuclear warhead. The Sun reported that a dummy Trident 2 missile was propelled into the air by compressed gas in its launch tube but that its so-called first-stage boosters did not ignite. It quoted an anonymous source as saying, "It left the submarine but it just went plop, right next to them." - Agencies

India police fire tear gas at protesting farmers on Delhi

NEW DELHI: Police in India have fired teargas at protesting farmers who have resumed their march on capital Delhi after four rounds of talks with the federal government failed to end the deadlock. The farmers, who are demanding assured prices for their crops, say they are prepared with months of supplies. Delhi's borders have been fortified with several layers of barricades and barbed wires to stop their entry. But protesters have warned they would use heavy machinery to push through.

On Wednesday, visuals from the Shambhu border between the neighbouring Punjab and Haryana states showed thousands of farmers preparing to push past barriers using bulldozers and earthmovers. Police fired teargas at the protesters as they attempted to move towards the border, BBC Punjabi reported. Farmers seemed better prepared than last week as they used masks, gloves and safety suits to protect themselves from the shelling. Many among the protesters flew kites to interfere with the police's operation of drones, which have been used to drop tear gas shells on them.

Farm leaders also made frequent announcements for unity, appealing to the security forces to not attack their "brethren". Agriculture Minister Arjun Munde has invited farmers for a fifth round of talks. "It is important for us to maintain peace," he wrote on X (Formerly Twitter). Farmers are yet to respond to this invite. Located at a distance of about 200kms

(125 miles) from the capital, farmers have been stationed at Shambhu border since last week when they first attempted to march into the city. Authorities had clashed with the protesters, firing tear gas and plastic bullets in a bid to halt them. The march was put on hold after ministers invited farm leaders for talks. Authorities fear a repeat of 2020, when thousands of farmers hunkered down at Delhi's borders for months - braving extreme temperatures and Covid - against controversial agriculture reforms. Dozens died in the year-long protest which ended only after the government agreed to repeal the laws.

The latest round of protests also come months before the general elections in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is seeking a third term in power. Farmers form an influential voting bloc in India and analysts say the government will be keen not to anger or alienate them.

Farmers' leaders say their march is peaceful and have urged the government to let them enter the capital. "We tried our best from our side. We attended the meetings and discussed every issue, now the decision lies with the government. We will remain peaceful but we should be allowed to remove these barriers and march towards Delhi," farm leader Sarwan Singh Pandher told reporters. The government has so far held four rounds of meetings with farmers' unions. Protesters say the government did not keep promises made during the 2020-21 protest, and also have demands including pensions and a debt waiver. - Agencies

PML-N, PPP steal people's mandate: Aslam Iqbal

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and candidate for Punjab CM slot Mian Aslam Iqbal has said the PML-N and the PPP have stolen mandate of people and the same must be returned. Talking to reporters in Peshawar on Wednesday, Aslam said illegal cases were made against him while he had no hand in May 9 incident. "After getting bail from ATC, I left Lahore on May 7. I have no call about the incident on my phone nor any video. The miscreants must be punished but not the innocent citizens," he explained, adding that he had been in politics for the last 25 years and never resorted to any illegal action. "I am thankful to the Peshawar High Court that I am given bail," he said. Taking about the PPP and PML-N, the former provincial minister said both the parties had been highlighting each other's corruption before the election and now they had joined forces. They are the responsible of ruining institutions and have nothing to do with the people's upliftment, he said, adding they failed in 16 months of their PDM led-coalition government. Meanwhile, the PHC has approved transit bail of Mian Aslam Iqbal. During the hearing, the justice Waqar Ahmed asked he appeared before the court today after May 9 incidents. The additional advocate general told the court he went underground after May 9 incidents. The court was told that no FIR had not been lodged against Mian Aslam Iqbal. The PHC ordered the Iqbal to appear before the Lahore High Court (LHC) within two days and hoped Iqbal would not act like Buzdar.

Dozens of Russian troops 'die in air strike'

KIEV: At least 60 Russian troops have been killed after a training area in occupied eastern Ukraine was hit by two missiles, reports say. Sources familiar with the situation told the media that troops had gathered at the site in Donetsk region for the arrival of a senior commander. Video footage of the incident appeared to show large numbers of dead. The attack reportedly came hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin met his Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. At the meeting, Mr Shoigu claimed Russian successes in several areas of the front line and spoke of the recent capture of the town of Avdiivka. But neither Russia nor Ukraine has so far officially commented on the incident near the village of Trudovske in Donetsk region. Reports say members of the 36th motorised rifle brigade, normally based in the Transbaikal region of Siberia, were waiting for the arrival of Maj-Gen Oleg Moiseyev, commander of the 29th Army of the Eastern military region. A soldier who survived the incident said during a video recording of the aftermath that the brigade's commanders had made them stand in an open field. They were reportedly hit by two missiles fired from the US-made HIMARS launch system. This and other videos and stills show dozens of soldiers apparently lying dead in a field. Estimates, including by those who survived, suggest at least 60 have died. The BBC is working to verify the footage. In a separate development, several pro-Russian sources have reported that the military blogger Andrey Morozov, known as Murz, has killed himself. Morozov, whose Telegram channel has some 100,000 subscribers, wrote in a series of apparently final posts that he had been forced by the military to take down a report about Russian losses in recent battles, including Avdiivka. - Agencies

Solangi grieved over demise of Nazir Naji

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday expressed deep grief and sorrow over the demise of renowned journalist, editor and columnist Nazir Naji.

The minister, in a condolence message, prayed to the Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to the bereaved family to bear the loss with equanimity. Paying tribute to the late senior journalist, the minister said Nazir Naji had dedicated his whole life to journalism and service of the country.

He was a seasoned journalist and analyst as well, who strived to bring a positive change in the society through his services in the field of journalism, he added. The analysis and columns of the late journalist were always informative and insightful, he said, adding it would be very hard to fill the void created in the field of journalism with Nazir Naji's demise.

Two killed as Israeli strike targets Damascus

DAMASCUS: At least two people have been killed when Israeli military aircraft carried out an airstrike against a residential building in the southwestern sector of the Syrian capital city of Damascus. The state-run al-Ikhabriyah Syria television news channel reported that an Israeli attack with a number of missiles targeted an apartment in the Kafr Sousa residential neighborhood. The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) also published images from the Israeli air raid, showing the outside of multi-story building partially blackened and windows blown out.

An unnamed military source was later quoted by SANA as saying that "the Israeli enemy perpetrated an air aggression at around 9:40 a.m. local time (0740 GMT) on Wednesday, and fired missiles from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights at a residential building in the Kafr Sousa neighborhood of Damascus."

Faisal Javed's arrest warrant suspended

ISLAMABAD: The session court in Islamabad has suspended the arrest warrant against Faisal Javed, senior leader of PTI, in the Bani Gala police station case.

The PTI senator surrendered himself before the Civil Judge Quadratullah in the local court of Islamabad. Faisal Javed appeared before the court with his counsel Sardar Masroof in the case hearing.

Civil Judge Quadratullah has suspended the arrest warrant for Senator Faisal Javed on ground of his appearance before the court. The court has also fixed the indictment for March 13 hearing against senator Faisal Javed Khan. Faisal Javed Khan has been facing charges at the Bani Gala police station case. Earlier, the court issued the arrest warrant against him in his absence in the case hearing. - DNA

World condemns US veto of Gaza ceasefire resolution at UNSC

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Condemnations have poured in from world countries after the United States once again vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution that demanded an immediate ceasefire in Israel's months-long genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip. The Algeria-drafted resolution called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and the "unconditional" release of prisoners, with representatives of 13 countries at the 15-member Security Council voting in favor of the resolution and Britain abstaining.

Israel has killed more than 29,000 people, mostly women and children, and injured some 70,000 others in Gaza since the regime launched its US-backed onslaught on October 7, 2023. The veto, which marks the third time Washington has opposed such a resolution, drew criticism from many

countries including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and even close US allies, France and Slovenia. China warned on Wednesday that Washington's decision to veto the UNSC resolution pushed the war in Gaza into an "even more dangerous" situation. "China voted in favor of the draft resolution," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing in Beijing. "The United States has once again single-handedly vetoed it, pushing the situation in Gaza into an even more dangerous situation, in which all parties concerned... have expressed their strong disappointment and dissatisfaction."

Expressing serious concerns about the situation in Gaza, the Chinese official described as a "moral obligation" the halt to the Israeli aggression on the besieged Palestinian territory. "The humanitarian situation in Gaza is becoming extremely serious, and regional peace and stability have been severely impacted," Mao said, adding,

"The Security Council must take action as quickly as possible to bring a halt to hostilities. This is a moral obligation that cannot be put off."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stressed that, "We will continue to work with all parties in the international community to push the Security Council to take further responsible and meaningful actions, and make unremitting efforts to quell the war in Gaza at an early date."

Russia's Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzia said the US veto marked "another black page in the history of the Security Council." Nebenzia said the US was trying to play for time so that Israel could complete its "inhumane plans" for Gaza, namely to squeeze the Palestinians out of the territory and completely "cleanse" the enclave. The Russian envoy added that no matter how bitter the "after-taste" of the vote may be, "we are not in the mood to give up."

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