



Islamabad POST

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Australian PM Albanese slams ICC as 'accessory to genocide' in Gaza

Detailed News On Page-07

PML-N 'opposes' Nadeem Afzal as Punjab governor

Detailed News On Page-08



Haris's central contract set to be reinstated

Detailed News On Page-06



Calls for national consensus

PM announces relief package for rain-hit Gwadar

7,000 ration bags would be provided to provincial govt per day till all those displaced have returned to their homes

STAFF REPORT / DNA

GWADAR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, a day after taking oath as the country's 24th premier, Tuesday announced the federal government's relief package for those affected by the torrential rains in Gwadar. Speaking to the media in the port city of Gwadar, which has been severely hit by heavy downpours in recent days, Shehbaz said that the government would provide Rs750,000 each to those whose houses have been destroyed by rain. Meanwhile, those whose houses suffered partial damage would be given Rs350,000 each. Family members of those who died in the rain would receive Rs2 million, whereas the wounded would be given Rs500,000 each. "The [said] amount would be distributed within [the next] four days," Shehbaz said, adding, that the relief package also applies to areas affected by the rain other than Balochistan. Commenting on the financial loss suffered by the people, the premier said that the provincial government would reimburse Rs400 million worth of losses incurred due to the destruction of as many as 83 boats. Addressing the loss of life due to the recent rain spell in various areas across the country, the premier said that as many as 44 people have died, whereas another 46 are injured, including children and the elderly. Elaborating on the government's response to the disaster, the prime minister announced that seven thousand ration bags would be provided to the provincial government and would duly be distributed among the needy

Continued on Page 06

PPP assures PM of cooperation

Bilawal-led team calls on PM Shehbaz Sharif

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led by former president Asif Ali Zardari called upon newly elected premier Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday in Islamabad, said a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was also part of the delegation which congratulated Shehbaz on his newly assumed position and conveyed their good wishes. The former president assured PM Shehbaz about the PPP's support for the new government and its efforts towards economic stability, development, and prosperity of the country. "I am deeply grateful to Almighty God and the people who have once again allowed me to serve Pakistan," the statement quoted

Continued on Page 06



GWADAR: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif distributing relief items among the affected of torrential rains. - DNA

Indian PM Modi greets Shehbaz



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on Tuesday congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on swearing in as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. "Congratulations to (Shehbaz Sharif) on being sworn in as the Prime Minister of Pakistan," Modi wrote on his X timeline. Prime Minister Shehbaz took the oath of office on Monday after winning prime ministerial election a day earlier. This is his second term for the country's top office as earlier he was elected as the prime minister in April 2022 through a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly against former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Senate polls to be held on April 3

ECP will hold general elections on 48 vacant seats of the Senate

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided to hold the Senate general elections on April 3. According to sources, ECP will hold general elections on 48 vacant seats of the Senate. In this regard, the Election Commission has prepared the schedule for the general elections of the Senate, sources added. Polling for the Senate elections

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Reserved seats PTI to launch movement to reclaim mandate

The leaders argued that the allocation of reserved seats to other parties contradicted the will of the people who had voted for PTI

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced a nationwide protest against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) scheduled for Sunday, March 10. The protest is a response to the ECP's decision of depriving Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) - wherein elected PTI lawmakers have taken refuge after being disallowed to contest the general elections on the party's electoral symbol - of reserved seats and their allocation to PML-N and PPP instead. Addressing the media outside Adiala Jail where PTI founder Imran Khan is incarcerated on Tuesday, party leaders including Sher Afzal Marwat, Shandana Gulzar, Atif Khan, and Shehryar Afridi announced their dissatisfaction with the ECP's ruling. They accused the commission of diverting

Continued on Page 06

ECP finally uploads election-related forms

Election regulator uploads forms almost two weeks after expiry of stipulated time

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: After a prolonged delay, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has finally uploaded Forms 45, 46, 48, and 49, related to the February 8 general elections, amid allegations of massive rigging and tempering results. The election regulator uploaded the election-related forms of all the constituencies of provincial and national assemblies, almost two weeks after the expiry of the stipulated time.

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

PTI demands release of Imran, others

Resolution submitted in the National Assembly

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PTI on Tuesday submitted a resolution in the National Assembly for release of PTI founder, other political leaders and imprisoned journalists. The resolution was submitted in the National Assembly by former speaker Asad Qaiser along with other leaders. In the resolution, the Tehreek-e-Insaf demanded immediate release of PTI founder, other leaders and imprisoned journalists after withdrawing 'illegal' cases against them. The PTI, in its resolution, said the cases instituted on political grounds had no status. Earlier, the leader of PTI Asad Qaiser, while talking to media in Islamabad, had said they would bring a resolution to withdraw cases against PTI founder PTI.

Maryam launches housing project

Plans to construct 100000 houses for low-income persons

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has announced a comprehensive plan to construct 100000 houses for low income persons. Presiding over a meeting regarding 'Apni Chaat Apna Ghar' project in Lahore, the chief minister sought a comprehensive plan to implement the announcement of constructing one hundred thousand houses. It was decided in the meeting that over 3000 houses will be built for low-income people in every district of Punjab. She directed officials to build model houses within six weeks and keep down payment and monthly installments lower. The Chief Minister directed officials to prioritize construction standards and sustainability in these houses.

Extends full support to Palestine Army declares election meddling 'charge' as absurd

Army's top brass slams elements scapegoating others for their 'failings' after elections

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Army's top brass Tuesday deplored allegations that the armed forces interfered with the electoral process after political parties raised serious concerns over the February 8 poll results. The military's media wing, in a statement, mentioned that the army's reservations came during the 263rd Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) held at GHQ, with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir in the chair. Inter-Services Public Relations, quoting the army's top brass,

PICTURE ON PAGE 02

said the CCC noted that the forces "at a great peril to their primary responsibility, provided security environment for the conduct of GE-24 as per the given mandate, and had nothing to do with the electoral process". "However, the forum expressed dismay that some vested small segments of polity and media especially social media have been

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'Imran to decide about reconciliation with establishment'

Imran Khan okays 17-member KP cabinet

MEHTAB PIRZADA

RAWALPINDI: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said Tuesday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan will decide about reconciliation with the establishment. The chief minister made the remarks after meeting the former premier, who is currently incarcerated at Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Tuesday. Gandapur said that both the establishment and institutions "are ours" but the decision for reconciliation with the establishment will be made by

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Asif, Atta Tarar, Dar, Cheema, Anusha, Ahsan Iqbal, Abbasi may get ministries

MQM also to get ministries; Tariq Fazal Ch also among the candidates; Oath taking may take place after Presidential election

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The prime minister is mulling names for the probables of the Federal Cabinet. Sources believe the 46-member cabinet shall be completed in three phases. In the first phase, which is likely to be completed within few days, will include Khawaja Asif as Defence Minister, Atta Tarar as the Information Minister, Anusha Rehman Minister for IT, Ahsan Iqbal Minister for Interior. Similarly, a few new faces shall also be included in the federal cabinet. For example, Naseer Sidh, who defeated PTI and PPP from Lalamusa and who happens to be the younger brother of the sitting Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Sidh, is also likely to get a slot. Tariq Fazal Ch is interested in capital administration ministry. Abid Sher Ali may be handed over water and power ministry. Ishaq Dar may get either Finance or Foreign Ministry. PML Q and the



MQM shall also be accommodated in the federal cabinet. The MQM is also interested in the Port and Shipping Ministry. From PML Q, Tariq Bashir Cheema is likely to be accommodated. He wants the Housing Ministry. Ch. Shujaat son Salik Hussain, sources claim, withdrew in favour of Tariq Cheema. The PPP, which has decided not to be part of the Cabinet, is likely to join the cabinet in the 2nd or 3rd phase. Regarding Ishaq Dar's potential return to the finance ministry, Nawaz Sharif had initially chosen him for the position. However, the emergence of a leaked audio recording, where Dar is purportedly heard making derogatory remarks about both the current and former army chiefs, has significantly undermined his prospects of assuming the ministerial role once more. Concerning the swearing-in ceremony for the cabinet, a notable perspective within

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Trees to be planted to combat climate change

The Mayor said that in parallel with the road construction, PSO ECO STREET had committed to a comprehensive beautification of the surrounding area

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab Tuesday said that climate change was a big challenge for the world including Pakistan; trees would be planted in the city to control environmental pollution. He said this while addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Eco Street project launched by PSO at the Pakistan State Oil head office in Clifton. He said that PSO ECO Street, sustainable plastic road initiative not only beautified our city but also demonstrated environmental responsibility and community engagement. "We applaud PSO's commitment to sustainability, fostering a greener urban landscape, and inspiring other corporate entities to invest in our community's development, we will make this city developed together," he said. On this occasion, PPP Parliamentary leader in the city council Najmi Alam, Deputy Parliamentary leader Dil Muhammad, Special Representative of Mayor Karachi for Political Affairs Karamullah Waqasi, Managing Director/CEO, PSO Syed Muhammad Taha and others were also present. The Mayor said that in parallel with the road construction, PSO ECO STREET had committed to a comprehensive beautification of the surrounding area. The project includ-

ed the reconstruction and renovation of road median, walkways, transforming them into welcoming spaces for the pedestrians.

These areas now boast newly installed planters, graced with an array of indigenous trees and plants further enriching the local biodiversity. He said that KMC was working on afforestation and improvement of parks in all districts of the city and solid waste management system was also being developed in the city on modern lines, along with citizens as well as corporate bodies and Associations located in industrial zones had also contributed in this regard and as a result a positive and pleasant change can be seen within the city. MD & CEO, PSO, Syed Muhammad Taha said that PSO ECO STREET, a sustainable plastic road, is part of PSO's ongoing efforts to reduce plastic waste and promote eco-friendly infrastructure. He said that this significant initiative had turned approximately 49,428 square feet of traditional road into a symbol of green living, utilizing 5,000 kg of recycled plastic waste, primarily from lubricant bottles and cans collected from PSO's Lubricant Manufacturing Terminal (LMT) location in Karachi. He said that the project's core objective was twofold: to significantly reduce the plastic footprint that burdens our planet and to

demonstrate the viability and benefits of sustainable infrastructure. By incorporating plastic waste into road construction, PSO ECO STREET was not only repurposing waste but also enhancing the durability of the road, setting a new standard for environmentally responsible construction, he added. Syed Muhammad Taha, MD & CEO of PSO, embodied the ethos of giving back to society. He emphasized the importance of caring for our surroundings akin to responsible tenants, stating, "This initiative exemplifies PSO's unwavering dedication to sustainability and environmental conservation. We are steadfast in our commitment to pioneering innovative solutions to tackle environmental challenges while simultaneously creating value for our communities." The culmination of these efforts in a vibrant and green transformation of the road aligns seamlessly with PSO's overarching green initiatives. This venture not only showcases the innovative solutions that reduce plastic and carbon footprints but also fosters an eco-friendly and sustainable infrastructure that serves as a model for future developments. The company extends its gratitude to all stakeholders, including local authorities, community members, and project partners, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout the implementation of the PSO ECO STREET initiative.



RAWALPINDI: COAS General Syed Asim Munir presides over 263rd Corps Commanders' Conference at GHQ.—DNA

Rwp admin starts distribution of 'Negheban Ration Package'

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi district administration on the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif here on Tuesday started the distribution of Negheban Ramadan Ration package. According to Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hasan Waqar Cheema, the package contained 10 kg flour with 2 kg each rice, sugar, ghee and gram flour. The distribution of Ramadan Ration Package would be supervised by the Assistant Commissioners, he informed. The district administration teams went door to door and gave Ramadan Ration packages to the deserving people, Hasan Waqar Cheema said adding, all-out efforts would be made to ensure quality and quantity of the essential items included in the Ramadan Ration package. Timely and best distribution of the ration bags would be ensured, the DC said. Ration bags would be delivered at the doorsteps of the deserving citizens. After verification of the lists of the eligible persons registered in BISP and NADRA, delivery of Ramadan Negheban was started, he said adding, the administration would ensure smooth distribution of Negheban Ration package. The teams had been formed by the administration for the distribution of Ramadan Negheban Ration package, he added.

Mayor Sukkur monitors cleanliness operations

SUKKUR: Mayor Sukkur Barrister Arslan Sheikh made a surprise visit to different areas on Tuesday to monitor cleanliness operations. Municipal Commissioner Muhammad Ali Shaikh and other officers of the Sukkur Municipal Corporation (SMC) were also present on the occasion. The mayor said that making the city clean was one of their priorities. He instructed the officials to work with all the energy and available resources to clean the Sukkur city. Mayor Sukkur inspected cleanliness on the roads and talked to the staff engaged in cleaning work. He told them to serve the city with hard work and dedication. Arslan said the Sukkur Municipal Corporation had been directed to keep all its machinery in a proper condition and clear the main points, where rainwater drainage was obstructed and cleaned.—APP

PIDE calls for uniformity in taxing cigarettes

86 percent of the cost of smoking-induced diseases is borne by individuals in 35-64 age group

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Health experts and anti-tobacco activists urge the government to harmonize cigarette taxes with WHO guidelines to protect the country's youth from falling victim to smoking, a consequence of the current affordability of cigarettes*. Imposition of low taxes on cigarettes in Pakistan make them cheaper than not only increases the number of smokers every year but also smoking related diseases and health bill for the government. Dr Maleek Haider has an unending number of patients of smoking-induced ailments. "Most of my patients are poor and bread-winners in their families. I have observed that they start smoking at

an early age and fall sick by the time they cross 30," he said. His observation strikes a chord with the findings of one of the latest studies on smoking in Pakistan conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. It says that 86 percent of the cost of smoking-induced diseases is borne by individuals in 35-64 age group. Alarmingly, it also states that total cost of mortality and morbidity by smoking accounts for 1.6 percent of GDP of a country that spends less than 1 percent of its GDP on healthcare. Shedding light on why cigarettes are cheap, the study says that it is due to overlooking at the guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO guidelines state that "threshold of 70 percent of the retail price or the level required

to cover the costs tobacco makes the country incur. In the latter case, the increase would be four to five times what the tax rate is now. In the short-run, the rates on the two tax tiers should be increased with a higher increase for the second tier so that the gap between them is minimized. In the long run, however, the two-tier system should be abolished to have a single-tier system. This would help in bringing the poor out of the vicious cycle of poverty in addition to reducing the smoking-related disease burden." The total revenue collected from cigarettes taxation in the fiscal year 2021-22 was Rs 150 billion. Hence, the economic and health cost imposed by smoking on society is 3.65 times higher than the overall tax collected from the tobacco industry.

PM Ramzan relief package starts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Once again, the Prime Minister of Pakistan has announced a subsidy of PKR 7.5 Billion for this Ramzan like the previous year in 2023. Utility Stores Corporate will deliver this subsidy to the people of Pakistan across country through its network. 19 basic items of daily use including atta, ghee, edible oil, sugar, daal chana, chickpeas, basian, dates, rice, tea, spices, milk and masroobat will be provided on subsidized rates under the package announced by the federal government. Seeing the convenience of the people during Ramzan, Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan will ensure the delivery of all food items as per PMT-40 instead of PMT-60. This time this subsidy will be awarded to the poor and average families registered under BISP; whereas 20 billion people will take advantage of the subsidy due to PMT-60. As a result of subsidy by Federal Government, atta of 10KG will be available at Rs. 648, Ghee per KG Rs. 365, Sugar per KG Rs. 109, whereas special subsidy on these items such as Rs. 25 on edible oil per liter, Rs. 25 on daal chana per kg, Rs. 25 on chickpeas (white), Rs. 50 on Basian per kg, Rs. 50 on dates per kg, Rs. 25 on Basmati rice per kg, Rs. 25 on Silla rice per kg, Rs. 25 on Tota rice per kg, Rs. 100 on 800gm tea, Rs. 30 on tetra pack milk. Spices and masroobat will also be delivered on subsidized rates which is undoubtedly an initiative for the welfare for the relief of a common man. It's the priority of the current government to provide 20 KG atta, 5Kg Ghee, 5Kg sugar, and 3Kg rice to the registered BISP people under PMT-60.

LCCI brings forth strategy to promote investment

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on Tuesday put forth a well-conceived strategy to promote investment in the country. While addressing a high-profile country-wide delegation from Board of Investment (BoI), the LCCI President Kashif Anwar highlighted the challenges hampering investment in the country. He said that local industry issues should be resolved first to attract foreign investment. Kashif Anwar said that for the past few years, the business community is facing problems like rupee devaluation, inflationary pressure, high policy rate and high cost of doing business, high energy prices, repeated increase in POL (Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants) prices, MDI

charges on closed industrial units, reduction in axle load limit, hike in cargo delivery charges and non-opening of LCs (Letters of Credit). "Settling down all these problems will definitely spur socio-economic development," he remarked. He said that Business Facilitation Center is an important initiative of Punjab government under which more than 100 services of 20 government departments are available under one roof, adding that Lahore Chamber supports the BFC and encourages its members to avail the facilities there. Kashif Anwar said that LCCI and BoI are enjoying good working relations, and the BoI is taking commendable initiatives to promote investment, however, it is more important that local investors must also be encouraged. The LCCI President said that

recently, a new condition is imposed by the government according to which retailers, whose withholding tax under Section 236H in 12 months is more than Rs 100,000, must be POS integrated, fearing that this would increase the burden on small retailers and make it more difficult to achieve the desired goals. These actions would directly hurt the manufacturing sector. He said that before this, the government imposed a condition of sales tax registration for shopkeepers with an area of 1,000 square feet. The LCCI had strongly voiced against it and this condition was withdrawn. He mentioned that regulatory, customs duty and additional customs duty should be abolished on the import of essential industrial raw materials and machinery which are not being produced locally.

Gwadar utilizes all resources to prevent epidemics

GWADAR: Secretary Health Balochistan Abdullah Khan on Tuesday said that measures had been taken to prevent outbreak of any epidemic and improve the situation in the rain-affected areas of Gwadar. All resources were being used for the purpose as medical teams consisting of doctors and staff with essential medicines and ambulances were present in the field, he added. The Secretary Health, who is in Gwadar to monitor the ongoing operation of medical teams, expressed satisfaction over hospital facilities and other services in the area. He visited District

Headquarters Hospital, GDA Hospital, Pak-China Hospital and District Health Office in Gwadar, and Basic Health Unit Shado Band. Abdullah said there would be no compromise on the provision of medical facilities, including medicines, in the hospitals of Gwadar as majority of the people in the area depended on them. The Secretary Health said that the teams of Balochistan Health Department were continuously engaged in providing medical facilities in the rain-affected areas. He added that additional doctors, medical staff and essential medicines had been made available to cope with any

untoward situation. Director General Health Balochistan Dr. Farooq Hot, Manager TB Control Programme Balochistan Dr. Asif Shahwani, Provincial Coordinator Malaria Control Programme Dr. Amir Raisani, Deputy Secretary Health Yasir Dashti, DHO Gwadar Dr. Rahim Buledi, MS District Hospital Gwadar Dr. Hafeez, DHO Lasbela Dr. Hameed, DSMP PPHI and other officials were present on the occasion. Secretary Health also chaired a meeting regarding the provision of health facilities at GDA Hospital Gwadar. He also took round of various departments of the hospital.—APP

Islamic relief Pak delegation briefs RCCI President

The delegation gave a detailed briefing on its project WASYLA in the Semi-urban areas of districts Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta

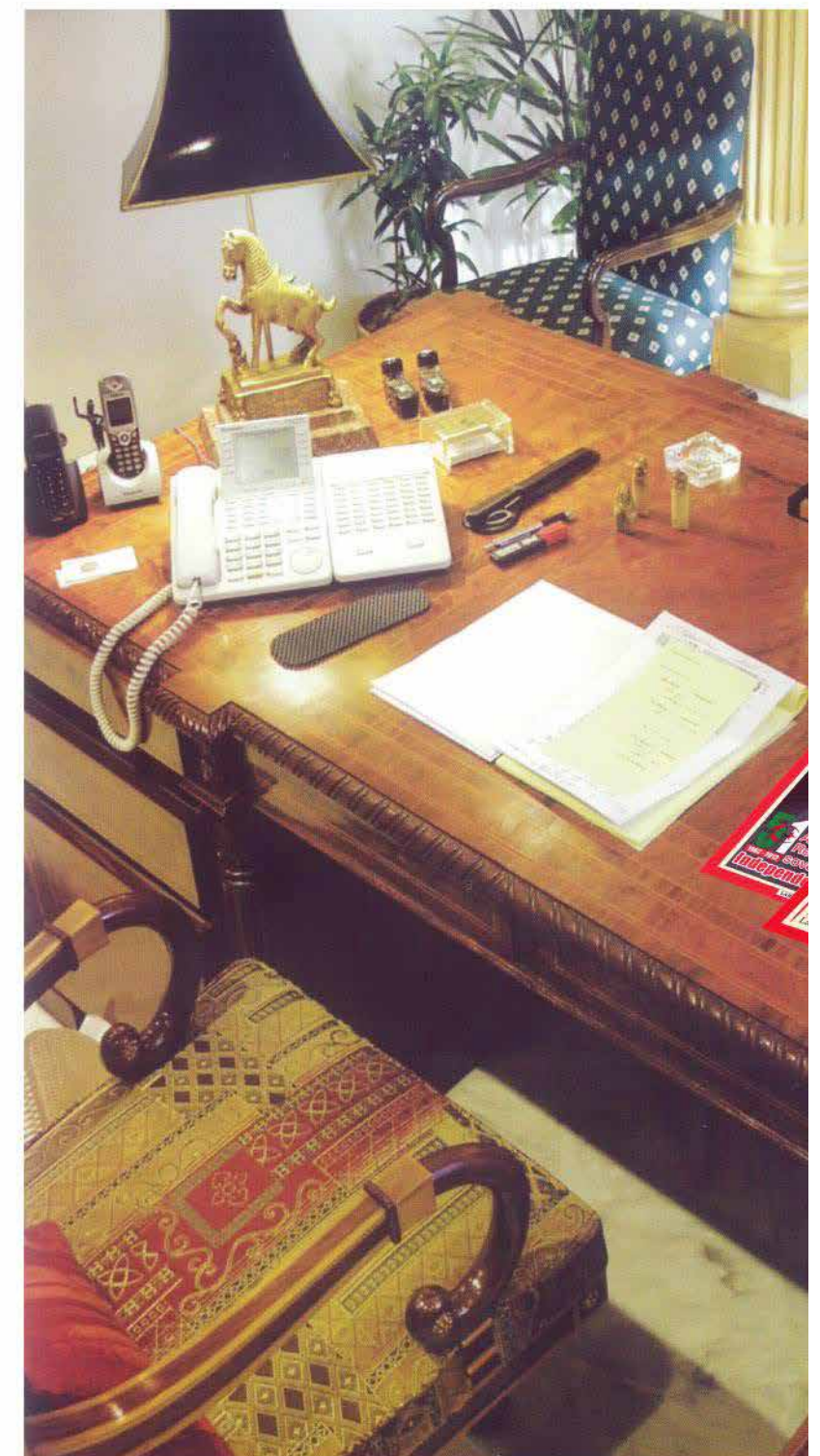
DNA

RAWALPINDI: A delegation of Islamic Relief Pakistan visited the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) and called on President Saqib Rafiq. The delegation gave a detailed briefing on its project 'Women Aligned Sustainable Youth-Centered Livelihood Action' (WASYLA) in the Semi-urban areas of districts Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta. The aim of the project is to uplift the most vulnerable and at risk groups of society i.e., ultra-poor women, people with disabilities, older people, widowed families, and unemployed youth affected by urban poverty through the Poverty Graduation Approach. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq assured all kinds of support and assistance from the chamber platform for their project, "WASYLA". Senior Vice President

Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad and representatives from the Islamic Relief including Said Usman

(Area program manager Rawalpindi), M.Sajid (Food Security & Livelihood Specialist), Naheeda Afridi (Skill Development Officer),

Bushra Najeeb (Enterprise Development Officer), Zunaira Nauman (Senior Project Officer), were also present on the occasion.



National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12 /Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patricks Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
- March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Hotels & Restaurants

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- Marriott.....051- 2826121
- Monal.....0334-5421812



- Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

- Rescue (Police).....15
- Bomb Disposal.....15
- Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
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- Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Japan provides assistance to five Pakistani NGOs

At the signing ceremony, WADA Mitsuhiro expressed his expectation that these development projects in cooperation with local communities would have a positive impact on uplifting the living standards of Pakistani people at the grassroots level

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan has decided to provide grant assistance up to USD 300,800 (equivalent to around PKR 84 million) in total to five local NGOs for development projects in Pakistan. Three out of the five projects are flood rehabilitation projects in the areas affected by the 2022 Pakistan floods. The grant contracts were signed between His Excellency, Mr. WADA Mitsuhiro, Ambassador of Japan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and representatives of the five NGOs at the Embassy of Japan in Islamabad on March 5, 2024. The five NGOs that will implement the projects are (1) Association for Behavior & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT), (2) Fortified Services for Reforms & Transformation (FSRT), (3) Actions For Human Advancement (AHAT), (4) Lok Sudhar Association and (5) Safe Hands Foundation. ABKT will receive a USD 63,518 grant (equivalent to around PKR 17.7million) to reconstruct three flood-damaged suspension bridges in District Upper Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This project will enhance the security of school children and local community members when natural disasters such as flood occur. It will also provide a safe passage to the school children as well as the local people to reach their school safely in this area. FSRT will receive a USD 60,506 grant (equiva-



lent to around PKR 16.8million) to reconstruct flood-affected school building for girls' primary course in Malakand Division, District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This project will provide school children with a safe place for learning, resulting in improving overall literacy rate of Swat, a city with one of the lowest literacy rates in Pakistan. AHAT will receive a USD 57,684 grant (equivalent to around PKR 16million) to reconstruct a flood-affected primary and middle school in Tehsil Jampur, District Rajanpur, Punjab.

This project will enhance learning environment for the children in one of the most flood-affected areas during the 2022 floods in Pakistan. Lok Sudhar Association will receive a USD 51,407 grant (equivalent to around PKR 14.3 million) to establish an ophthalmology operation theater to expand eye care facility in Havelian, District Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This facility will provide eye-related treatment to the patients in accessible and affordable way. In particular, the people will have the opportunity to access to

cataract surgery for the first time in this locality. This project will lead to the improvement of the health sector in the area. Safe Hands Foundation will receive a USD 67,685 grant (equivalent to around PKR 19million) to construct the primary-school building to promote child education in village Khaisata Gul Kalay, District Khyber in KP. The project will provide, in one of the most deservng and vulnerable areas, the school building equipped with a solar system that can accommodate about 200 primary school

children including those currently studying in an open-air classroom. At the signing ceremony, WADA Mitsuhiro expressed his expectation that these development projects in cooperation with local communities would have a positive impact on uplifting the living standards of Pakistani people at the grassroots level. The Government of Japan will provide further flexible and timely support to local NGOs through grant assistance to improve the social well-being of the people of Pakistan at the grassroots level.

Two sessions a special window observing China's development

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Two sessions a special window observing China's development, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday quoting Pakistani media. "The coverage of two sessions gives you a very different perspective and this perspective tells you that how positively and how quickly and rapidly China is developing. China is not only developing for itself. China is developing for all international community

as well," said, a Pakistani political analyst. "I have witnessed a lot of development in every single city of China and it shows that the Chinese government and its provincial and municipal governments including Beijing, Tianjin and Chongqing are focusing on a unified agenda." "This agenda aims to improve the well-being of Chinese people, they are working on it. We notice that China focuses on 2035 when Chinese society will realize socialist modernization," he added. "I think

China's modernization is about the shared future of all mankind. It is going to give a very good hope and opportunities to the international community and our developing countries including Pakistan," he noted. In Pakistan, several media groups also pay special attention to China's two sessions. Riaz Burki, news director of Pakistan Television Corporation, said that he went through speeches delivered by Chinese President Xi Jinping. "First and foremost,

those speeches are about China's development and China's modernization, also the sustainable development. China is working and investing heavily on renewable energy and sustainable development. We have covered almost all the important national and international issues," Riaz said. "We are covering China's development. Two sessions is important annual session and we'll allocate specific individuals and prepare special reports," he said.

Qadri to deliver keynote address on March 9

ISLAMABAD: Renowned Scholar and Chairman of the Supreme Council of Minhaj-ul- Quran International, Dr. Hassan Mohiuddin Qadri, is set to address an event organized by Tehreek-e-Minhaj-ul- Quran on March 9, 2024, at 6 pm in Rawalpindi. Talking to APP, the spokesman of Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) Ghulam Ali Khan said that the occasion would mark the unveiling of Dr. Qadri's latest scholarly work, a two-volume research and analytical book titled "The constitution of Medina and the concept of the welfare state." The event would be held at a local hotel. The audience including academicians, lawyers, legal luminaries, retired judges, and notable figures from various fields would attend the event, he said. Dr. Qadri's book explored the historical significance of the constitution of Medina and its relevance to contemporary notions of a welfare state. With his vast expertise in Islamic jurisprudence and social welfare, Dr. Qadri's address would anticipate to offer insightful perspectives on the intersection of law, governance, and societal well-being, he added. The ceremony followed a recent unveiling of the book at the esteemed Iqbal House in Lahore, underscoring the significance of Dr. Qadri's scholarship in shaping intellectual discourse.—DNA

NUST career connect attracts employers

ISLAMABAD: Around 2500 final-year students of the National University of Sciences and Technology availed NUST Career Connect 2024 to appear in on-spot interviews with leading national and multinational companies at the university's main campus. A total of 114 companies set up their stalls at the career fair, including P&G, Loreal, Food Panda, Total Parco, English Biscuits Manufactures, Packages, National Logistics Cell, Netsol Technologies, Pak Arab Refinery Limited, Jazz, Zong, Kohinoor Textile Mills, State Bank of Pakistan, and BoP to name a few.—APP

China's modernization journey an inspiration

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Consul General in Shanghai, Hussain Haider, has expressed his admiration for China's remarkable modernization journey, viewing it as a valuable source of inspiration for Pakistan as it strives to achieve similar development goals. In an interview with China Economic Net during the ongoing China's two sessions, namely the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which saw the gathering of China's top legislators and



political advisors to discuss and decide on key national policies, the Consul General praised China's achievements in economic growth, technological advancement, and social progress, noting that the country's transformation from a closed economy to a global leader in many industries is truly remarkable. "The Two Sessions are a crucial event that showcases China's democratic system and its commitment to improving the

lives of its people," said Consul General. "The decisions and policies outlined during these sessions will undoubtedly shape China's future and its role in the global community." As Consul General in Shanghai for the past four years, he has closely followed the proceedings of the two sessions and is encouraged by the focus on economic policies, livelihood security and international collaboration. The Consul General noted that China's GDP growth target of approximately 5% for the year is a testament to its strong economic policies and commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth. The World Economic Outlook report released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

in January of this year predicts global economic growth this year to be 3.1%. China is expected to surpass the global average in 2024 and will remain a major contributor to global economic growth. "China's GDP target for 2024 demonstrates its confidence in its economic future and its commitment to high-quality development," he stated. The whole world acknowledges that China's economic development over the past 45 years has been phenomenal. Hussain Haider highlighted that "China continues to open up and liberalize its economy, which has a significant impact on its trading partners and has played a crucial role in global economic stability and recovery.

Eyes on China: "A robust Chinese economy benefits all"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Whether through exports or imports. Consequently, a robust Chinese economy benefits the entire world," Experts said in an interview with China Economic Net during the ongoing Two Sessions - which convene annually to map out development priorities. Mojsmad Asghar who has been reporting the Two Sessions annually since 2017, said, as a foreign journalist in China, he considers it an honor and privilege to cover these major events. Through these sessions, he

gains valuable insights into China's governance system, culture, traditions, economy, and future goals. Likewise, "It is very important for everyone to understand what China got for the previous year and what it expects for the next year," Abubakar Harith from Zanzibar Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Tanzania, told the reporter. This year, Asghar's focus lies on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the past decade, China signed over 240 cooperation documents with more than 150 countries and 30 international organizations on BRI construction, which lead to many cooperation projects, making the initiative the largest

international cooperation platform, highlighted Liu Jieyi, spokesman for the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. "BRI is a win win situation because countries cooperate with each other to achieve benefits and profits," Harith pointed out, adding that it is a big step for China and African countries to get together and lift up the economy, livelihood, and so on. When it comes to economy, official data released earlier showed that the Chinese economy grew 5.2% for 2023, surpassing the target of "about 5%" that the government had

set. He commends China's resilience during the past year as China's economy grew by 5.2%. He mentioned that despite global economic challenges, China's economy not only endured but also demonstrated remarkable strength. While this year, China targets economic growth of around 5 percent in 2024, according to a government work report submitted on March 5 to the national legislature for deliberation. Daniel Rodriguez, a journalist from El Espectador ("The Spectator"), the oldest newspaper in Colombia, thought it is a unique opportunity to explore China's economic landscape during these sessions.

Why to curtail wind power projects -Atif Ikram Sheikh

FAISAL SHEIH

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh, President FPCCI, has expressed his profound concerns that the renewable energy policy 2006 is not being implemented in letter & spirit as costlier and obsolete power projects are still being given preference - while it makes no economic sense to purchase power for the national grid from costlier plants in these times of stagflation, mounting circular debt and burgeoning balance of payments (BoP) & depleting foreign exchange reserves (FER) even further through importing furnace oil. FPCCI Chief noted that this phenomenon is not only discouraging for foreign direct investment (FDI) in energy sector; but, also inflicting financial losses on the existing wind power plants (WPP) in a number of ways: (i) return of investment (ROI) is compromised (ii) curtailment and lack of off take by the national grid is causing operational losses (iii) future investments, JVs and expansion plans are in jeopardy. Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh stressed that special investment facilitation council (SIFC) has made energy as one of the five focus areas; and, lack of enabling, facilitative and protective environment is detrimental to the cause of SIFC - for which all stakeholders of the state have unanimity including private-sector.

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Briefs

Qavi Khan remembered

ISLAMABAD: The veteran actor Qavi Khan was remembered on his first death anniversary observed on Tuesday. Qavi Khan started his career as a child star from Radio Pakistan Peshawar, his birth city. In 1964, he started working at Pakistan Television, becoming one of its early stars. He started his professional career with a play, Lakhon Mein Aik, whereas Andhera Ujala had earned him immense fame across Pakistan. In 1965, Qavi Khan joined the film industry. Some of his films include Mauhabbat Zindagi Hai, Chand Suraj, Sarfarosh, Kalay Chor, and Zameen Asman. The government awarded Pride of Performance and Sitara-i-Imtiaz to Qavi Khan in acknowledgment of his services to the country and the showbiz industry.—APP

ML-N leader invites opposition

ISLAMABAD: Leader PML-N Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh Tuesday stressed that it is the need of the hour that opposition parties must cooperate with the government to bring the country out of difficult times. The government is determined to provide relief to the masses in terms of gas and electricity, he said while talking to Radio Pakistan's current Affair Program. Moreover, the government is also keen to strengthen its bilateral relations with all the neighboring countries, he added. After his election as a Prime Minister, Mian Shehbaz Sharif in his first address highlighted some major challenges that the country is facing, he mentioned. The major challenges include balance of payment issues, trade deficit, energy shortfall and many others, he highlighted.—DNA

Racket involved in supplying drugs to students busted

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting an operation managed to bust a drug peddling racket involved in supplying drugs to the students of educational institutions and arrested two accused including a foreigner, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Tuesday. He informed that the accused involved in selling drugs near educational institutions were rounded up from E and F Sectors in Islamabad. Ice and cocaine were also seized from their possession during the operation. In the next few days, the scope of the operation would be expanded to other cities of the country, he said adding, cases would be registered against the accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act. Collaboration with government and non-government stakeholders would be strengthened, the spokesman informed. ANF is making efforts to fight the menace of drugs, he said and requested the citizens to support ANF in this campaign against drugs and report the drug trafficking on the helpline 1415. Information could also be given on ANF's social media accounts, he added.—APP

Impounding of Pak bound cargo a piracy: Mushahid

Ambassador Masood Khalid articulated China's viewpoint on emerging challenges in the Indian-Pacific region, while Rear Adm (Retd) Jean Mathieu Rey, Senior Research Fellow FMES, France, presented the European perspective

DNA

ISLAMABAD: NIMA in collaboration with the Royal Malaysian Navy - Sea Power Centre (RMN-SPC), Pakistan Embassy in France, Centre for International Studies (CeSI) Italy, and Institute of Regional Studies held an international hybrid seminar at NIMA Head office, Islamabad. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed was the Chief Guest. H.E. Asim Iftikhar Ahmed, Pakistan's Ambassador to France also joined as the Guest of Honor through Zoom. The main focus of this seminar was to develop an understanding on regional and international perspectives about the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and their challenges in 21st Century.

Renowned regional & international scholars shared their insights about this important subject. In opening remarks, President NIMA highlighted the significance of the Indian and Pacific Ocean, its security, related issues, and its effect on maintenance of good order at sea. Ambassador Masood Khalid articulated China's viewpoint on



emerging challenges in the Indian-Pacific region, while Rear Adm (Retd) Jean Mathieu Rey, Senior Research Fellow FMES, France, presented the European perspective. Mr. Tiziano Marino, Head Asia Pacific Analysis Unit at CeSI, Italy, shared Italy's in-

sights. Rear Admiral Dato Pahlawan Abd Halim bin Hj Shaari (RMN-SPC) proffered the perspective of ASEAN countries. Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah elaborated Pakistan's thought process, and the seminar was succinctly summarized by Pres-

ident IRS, Amb. Nadeem Riyaz. In his concluding address by Chief Guest, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed pointed the disruptive behavior of India in the Indian Ocean. Impounding of Pakistani bound commercial cargo, was characterized as a

state sponsored piracy. The event was well-attended by academia, professionals, diplomatic corps, reps of think tanks, subject matter specialists, government officials, faculty members, defense officers, and key maritime stakeholders.

Prime Minister Sharif's economic focus is admirable

The Prime Minister and his party must navigate the difficult journey of reforms alone, as the coalition partners are interested in reaping the benefits

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Tuesday that the Prime Minister's focus on the economy is commendable.

After taking the oath of office, the PM ordered to start negotiations with the IMF, make an action plan for economic improvement, increase investment, and solve the problems of the business community. He added that the PM has also directed automation and transparency in the FBR, selling failed state-run companies, electricity and gas sector reforms, closing down or merging unnecessary departments, and making SIFC more em-

powered. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement today that the Prime Minister's orders reveal his priorities, which is a ray of hope for the disappointed masses and the dejected business community. He said that the new demands of the IMF would be unbearable for the people who have been braving unprecedented inflation for years. The IMF has made several demands to the government, including the 18% GST on various items, including food, medicine, petroleum products, and stationery, to reduce the government's deficit. The government should not increase taxes on items of daily use but seek alternative means to increase revenue. These meas-

ures include expanding the tax net and reducing expenditures. The government should expand the tax net, reduce spending, close loss-making companies, fire officials, and staff involved in the theft of electricity and gas and tax evasion. It should also reduce incentives worth billions of dollars for elites. The business leader said that the country has reached this stage due to the elite; therefore, the burden should not be put on the masses. Now is the time to collect taxes from the wealthy class. Shahid Rashid Butt said that if the current government continues the policy of paying off debts through fresh borrowing instead of re-

forms, it will not solve the crisis but will pave the way for a new crisis. He noted that the development of human resources had been ignored for a long time as the state of vital sectors like health, education, and the justice system in the country was needed to perform. Unemployment in the country has increased a lot, the solution to which lies in expanding industries and SME sectors. The Prime Minister and his party must navigate the difficult journey of reforms alone, as the coalition partners are interested in reaping the benefits. Still, they are waiting to bear the burden of reforms and unpopular decisions.

COMSTECH, Al-Shifa Trust team conduct free eye surgeries

ISLAMABAD: The eight-member dedicated medical team of COMSTECH and Al-Shifa Trust has successfully conducted more than 200 free cataract surgeries at Dalmar Hospital in Mogadishu, Somalia. According to COMSTECH, the Al-Shifa team not only performed surgeries but also provided training to doctors at Dalmar Hospital in cataract surgeries, thereby bolstering. The medical team is conducting free cataract eye surgeries during a ten-day-long camp from March 01-10. Overall, more than 400 cataract surgeries will be performed, restoring vision and improving the lives of hundreds of people in Somalia. The free cataract eye surgery camp was announced by the OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) in collaboration with Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, Rawalpindi under the special instructions and guidance of Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary. Al-NUR Foundation and Benadir University, Mogadishu provided hospital facilities for the camp. The medical team travelled from Pakistan and consisted of eight members, including four ophthalmologists and two OT technicians from Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, as well as a PhD Pharmacist and a coordinator from COMSTECH. Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary expressed his deepest gratitude to Major General (Retd.) Rehmat Khan, the Chairman of Al-Shifa Trust, for his invaluable leadership and initiative in organizing this free surgical camp. Al-Shifa Trust's generous financial and technical contributions have made it possible for COMSTECH to extend its services to the people of Mogadishu, providing them with much-needed eye care and surgeries. This collaborative effort between COMSTECH and Al-Shifa Trust is expected to have a significant positive impact on the lives of people in Somalia. By conducting free eye camps, the organizations aim to not only restore vision but also restore hope and dignity to those who need it most. All necessary medicines, intraocular lenses, and surgical consumables also reached Somalia along with the medical team.—DNA

Out of school children identified: DG PIE

ISLAMABAD: The Director-General of PIE, Dr. Muhammad Shahid Soroya, on Tuesday successfully achieved targets to raise the number of school goers in Islamabad city where every children attaining the age of education were being enrolled with establishing evening and afternoon in formal schools. Pakistan Institute of Education PIE DG while talking to a Private news channel said that its campaign "Zero Out-of-School Children (ZOOSC)" in Islamabad in collaboration with JICA and the Ministry of Education and Professional Training was successfully achieving its targets goals. He said that under this campaign, more than 71,000 children have been enrolled in schools in Islamabad, bringing the number of out-of-school children in the capital to zero. He said that the government wanted to provide education to every child in the province and in this regard, the drive had been launched. "The government is providing all the facilities to the children free books and better environment in the educational institutions," he said. He said that teachers are visiting the nearby localities of their schools and prepare a list of the children and they are convincing the parents to send their children to schools. Shahid said various techniques were being used for the success of this campaign, adding, we had converted our FD schools in evening and afternoon classes. He also thanked everyone involved and highlighted the challenges they faced, especially in ensuring equal access to education. The success of this campaign may inspire similar efforts across Pakistan to reduce the number of children not attending school, he added.—APP

Int'l Day for Disarmament

ISLAMABAD: International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness is being observed on Tuesday (today). The day seeks to promote better awareness and understanding of disarmament issues among the public, especially young people. It also plays a role in deepening the global public's understanding about how disarmament efforts contribute to enhancing peace and security, preventing and ending armed conflicts, and curbing human suffering caused by weapons.—APP

Foolproof security for PSL matches

RAWALPINDI: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region, Syed Khurram Ali has directed the authorities to ensure foolproof security arrangements for the Pakistan Super-League (PSL) matches being played at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. According to a RPO Office spokesman, the RPO during a visit to Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium reviewed all the arrangements including security and issued instructions to ensure foolproof security arrangements for the cricket matches. All the arrangements were finalized keeping in mind the convenience and safety of cricket fans, he said. Police have always played a pivotal role in promoting international sports and cultural activities in the country by providing foolproof security to these events, he added. He said that earnest efforts were being made so that routine activities of the citizens, traders and businessman are not disturbed during the matches as shortest route was being provided to the teams to ensure their security by containing traffic only during the movements of teams from their residential places to the stadium and

vice versa. A control room had also been set up in Shahbaz Sharif Sports Gymnasium to monitor security and all the arrangements, he added. A police spokesman said that City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani had also directed the officers to finalize foolproof security arrangements for the security of the cricket teams, route and stadium. He said that a comprehensive traffic plan was devised to ease traffic flow during the matches on the city roads. A control room had also been established to monitor the arrangements, he added. All available resources were being utilised besides deploying police personnel, including senior officers and officials of different units of police, Dolphin Squad, Police Response Unit and Elite Force, he said. Security personnel were performing security, patrolling and traffic management duties during the matches to ensure foolproof security of the event along with smooth flow of traffic, he added. Three layers of security was being provided at the stadium.—DNA


Dialogue mulls over co-creating solutions

ISLAMABAD: In a groundbreaking effort to address the pressing issue of waste management in Pakistan's urban areas, a two-day Hackathon was organized under the program Green Urban Development (GUD) that mulled over co-creating solutions for youth-led waste recycling in the urban centers of the country. The event was jointly initiated by the Institute of Urbanism and the School of Leadership Foundation with the generous support of the U.S. Embassy Islamabad, a news release said. The Hackathon brought together a diverse array of stakeholders including academia, youth, researchers, media, government officials, and representatives from the private

sector. The primary objective of the event was to find innovative solutions to introduce at-source waste segregation at the household level in cities, while integrating informal waste management stakeholders in a socially and economically just manner. Numerous critical issues were highlighted during the discussions, emphasizing the urgency of addressing the waste management crisis in Pakistani cities. Islamabad alone generates approximately 1,575 tons of municipal waste daily, with a low recycling rate. Plastic waste constitutes a significant portion, estimated to be 14.26 percent of the total waste. Additionally, the lack of updated waste-related data, absence of comprehensive na-


tional-level policies, and the fragmented efforts of informal and private sectors were identified as major obstacles. Samia Afridi, Senior Program Manager at the School of Leadership Foundation, stated, "This Hackathon is a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation in tackling complex societal issues. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, we can harness the creativity and energy of youth to drive meaningful change in waste management practices." Ayesha Majid, Senior Program Coordinator at the Institute of Urbanism, stressed the importance of formalizing segregation at the source and recycling at the community level. She emphasized the need for culturally-rooted


messing, capacity building, and collaborative platforms to promote partnerships among stakeholders. Waleed Hameed of Five Star (PVT) Ltd highlighted the necessity of providing platforms for youth to connect and learn from existing recycling businesses. He advocated for providing seed funding and small grants to encourage innovative approaches to waste management. Shayan Yar applauded the Institute of Urbanism's efforts in promoting waste-based solutions, noting the diverse audience it has been able to attract. He emphasized the importance of continued collaborative efforts to address local waste management challenges.—APP



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Geopolitics in SCS

In recent days, the Philippines has been making frequent statements regarding the South China Sea issue, sometimes expressing hope for "engagement" between the two sides, sometimes smearing China of "aggression;" sometimes talking about "peacefully" resolving disputes, and sometimes warning that the South China Sea could become a "flashpoint." How to understand these statements from the Philippines? Does the Philippines have the intention to return to the correct track of dialogue and negotiation with China to handle disputes, or is it using diplomatic rhetoric to rally other countries to engage activities that confront China in the South China Sea? Regardless of the Philippines' true intentions, its continuous hype of the South China Sea issue on various international occasions, attempting to use international public opinion to pressure China and erode its sovereignty and rights in the South China Sea, is obvious. From last year's Ren'ai Jiao to this year's Huangyan Dao, the Philippines has formed a complete set of operations and propaganda for encroachment and provocation regarding the South China Sea issue. On one hand, it intentionally organizes fishermen, "maritime militia," and others to provoke, while on the other hand, it distorts these actions through the lens of Western media, portraying China as a "bully," thereby shaping an image of China as "a disruptor of regional peace and stability." Recently, it has even devised a narrative to smear and frame China's relevant actions, making baseless accusations such as "Chinese fishermen illegally use cyanide for fishing," and falsely labeling China's legitimate and reasonable safeguarding actions as "violent expulsion" and "signal jamming," among other things. In a sense, the Philippines, with its megaphone policy on the South China Sea issue, has fallen into a state of self-deception and addiction to distortion. The right and wrong in the escalating friction of the South China Sea dispute between China and the Philippines are quite clear. The so-called Huangyan Dao issue was thrust upon the region by the Philippines and its backers, and its related claims are purely a provocative act akin to "deliberately causing trouble." The territory of the Philippines is defined by a series of international treaties. Huangyan Dao is beyond the limits of Philippine territory. The Philippines had never asserted territorial claims over Huangyan Dao until 1997. The Philippines' claim to sovereignty over Huangyan Dao based on its proximity to the Philippines, and its claim to sovereignty rights and jurisdiction over Huangyan Dao based on its location in the Philippines' exclusive economic zones, are both inconsistent with international law. Even the Philippines' favored South China Sea Arbitration, which was illegal, does not endorse the Philippines' claims. As for the Philippines using China's goodwill to provoke troubles in the South China Sea, it can be described as a modern version of "The Farmer and the Snake." China had made proper arrangements for Filipino fishermen to fish around Huangyan Dao. However, China has never allowed Filipino government vessels to intrude into Huangyan Dao, which is completely different from "fishermen's livelihood." Which country's fishing boats and government vessels will carry a large number of Western journalists to fish or even land on the island? Does the Philippines catch a few small fish in the sea, or does it fish for "big fish" in geopolitical speculation?



Large-scale escalation in ME

The spectre of an expanding war between Hezbollah and Israel is becoming difficult to ignore. The Iran-backed group recently fired dozens of rockets into Israel's north, claiming attacks on an air control centre in Meron and a series of other settlements. Hezbollah's attacks were in response to intensifying Israeli airstrikes on Lebanese territory, which have targeted entire towns and villages in the country's south. Western diplomats are scrambling to put a floor beneath tensions, while US intelligence experts anticipate a possible Israeli incursion into Lebanon. Speaking to CNN last week, a senior Biden administration official warned, "We (the United States) are operating (on) the assumption that an Israeli military operation is in the coming months. Not necessarily imminently in the next few weeks but perhaps later this spring. An Israeli military operation is a distinct possibility." Attacks from Hezbollah and Israel have also reached a tipping point. Israel recently marked its most intense bombardment of Lebanon since October 2023, and is threatening to step up attacks against Hezbollah even if a ceasefire with Hamas materialised in Gaza. That is a scenario unacceptable to Hezbollah, which insists that a cessation of hostilities in Gaza is central to a halt in attacks. The pace and frequency of Hezbollah's retaliatory strikes have struck a nerve within Israel. "We (Israel) will continue the fire, and we will do so independently from the south, until we achieve our goals," which include the full withdrawal of Hezbollah from the border, Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant recently said. It is wishful thinking to assume that Israel can completely remove Hezbollah from the border. For months, the group has responded to similar threats by reinforcing its fighter presence in the area. It considers this presence as deterrence against returning Israeli settlers to the north, a stated priority for Israel. Some 60,000 Israeli settlers have been forced to flee the north due to cross-border escalations, and yet fall within attacking range of Hezbollah's anti-tank guided missiles and rocket arsenal. All this makes it difficult for Israel to increase its attacks without risking a large-scale escalation in return. Furthermore, strikes deep into Lebanese territory could mean more pressure on Hezbollah to respond with high-precision attacks, raising the possibility of new weaponry coming into play. In recent weeks, Hezbollah has introduced a surface-to-surface missile and a 50-kilogram warhead, largely supplied by Iran. These are enough for the group to penetrate Israel's northern borderlands and deny the return of tens of thousands of displaced Israelis. Similarly, Hezbollah's attack patterns suggest retaliatory attacks will continue to move beyond the Israel-Lebanon border zone if Israeli warplanes deepen their penetration into Lebanese territory. Its swift response to Israel's Baalbek air raid is a case in point: Hezbollah rockets struck coordinates in the central Golan Heights, and were followed up by high-precision attacks against Israeli air control and military sites. And yet, Washington's current priorities on Lebanon and Gaza strike a telling contrast. For one, it is deeply involved in a temporary Gaza truce effort, and considers this a key step towards negotiations to help calm Israel-Hezbollah escalations. Look no further than US special envoy Amos Hochstein, who helped mediate the 2022 Israel-Lebanon maritime border agreement.

Weathering the economic storm: SIFC and CPEC

Qamar Bashir



The coalition government, too, made tough choices, like hiking utility and fuel prices, which, albeit harsh, were pivotal in stabilizing the economy. However, Pakistan is still knee deep in economic and financial difficulties posing the new government with an immediate challenge: economic stabilization. The contraction of the real GDP, from a positive 6.2% in 2022 to a concerning -0.2% in 2023, coupled with projected modest growth of only 2% in 2024, paints a picture of economic stagnation. This decline in economic activity translates to a reduced ability to

Post-election, the incoming government is set to take charge amidst economic adversities. Though the hard decisions taken by the interim government supported by the armed forces' have significantly contributed to economic steadiness by spearheading actions such as busting illegal financial networks, curtailing cross-border smuggling, deporting numerous illegal aliens, and addressing smuggling and trade malpractices that were bleeding the economy. Additionally, it also put its weight behind the government's efforts to secure financial backing from allied countries, through sizable deposits and their subsequent rollovers which helped in maintaining a critical balance of payments. The coalition government, too, made tough choices, like hiking utility and fuel prices, which, albeit harsh, were pivotal in stabilizing the economy. However, Pakistan is still knee deep in economic and financial difficulties posing the new government with an immediate challenge: economic stabilization. The contraction of the real GDP, from a positive 6.2% in 2022 to a concerning -0.2% in 2023, coupled with projected modest growth of only 2% in 2024, paints a picture of economic stagnation. This decline in economic activity translates to a reduced ability to generate employment opportunities, with the unemployment rate surging from 6.5% in 2022 to a worrisome 8.5% in 2023, with estimates suggesting little improvement in the foreseeable future. Further compounding this challenge is the significant escalation of the Consumer Price Index, which rose from 12.1% in 2022 to a staggering 29.2% in 2023, and is projected to remain around 24% in 2024. This rampant inflation erodes the purchasing power of individuals and households, disproportionately impacting their ability to afford essential goods and services, thereby negatively impacting overall living standards. Furthermore, the nation grapples with the burden of substantial external and general debt, ranging from 80.7% to 76.8% of its GDP over the past three years. Additionally, the prevailing economic uncertainty discourages foreign investment which in 2022 was on \$ 2.7 billion compared to FDI of India which was \$ 80.2 Billion. This low level of FDIs, further restricting the availability of resources for modernization and expansion, threatens the prosperity for its people and stalls the nation's development engine, squeezing household budgets and eroding savings. Soon after assuming power, the new government would be faced with the daunting task of completing the last review of the IMF Stand by Arrangement (SBA). Next daunting challenge would be to reach an early agreement

with the IMF staff on a new medium-term facility, which is conditioned with carrying forward critical reforms on restructuring of the FBR, privatization of the loss-making SOEs including PIA, and the implementation of the SOE policy for improved governance and financial performance. The new government caught between lack of fiscal and budgetary space and ambitious plans outlined in its manifesto will be in a deep fix. Pre-Election promises such as inflation reduction, targeted subsidies for vulnerable populations, job creation, and support for agriculture, revitalize industries at all levels, encourage youth entrepreneurship through accessible banking, and foster agricultural advancement through initiatives like improved seeds, subsidized fertilizers will need a lot of fiscal space. It also promised to provide affordable utilities besides healing the wounds in Balochistan and KP province, knowing very well that transforming promises is tough though not impossible. It would need the collaboration of stakeholders, political and non-political alike, to define the priority areas and set clear objectives with a time-bound deadline. Though the clouds of economic and financial challenges are very thick, and many hard decisions have to be made, there are a few silver linings as well. The monthly economic update for Feb 2024, noted restoration of market confidence which led to a pick-up in economic activity. GDP growth accelerated to 2.1% in Q1 FY2024, after two consecutive quarters of negative growth. The agriculture sector, the backbone of the country, posted impressive 5% growth and manufacturing activity registering 2.5% growth. The PKR has stabilized and the PSX has shown sustained performance improvements. The inflation outlook for the upcoming month points towards a downward trajectory owing to better crops and a smooth supply of commodities. The industrial activity in December 2023 remained positive, exports are steadily increasing encouraging business confidence coupled with exchange rate stability, contributing to a positive economic outlook for Pakistan amidst ongoing challenges. To start with, the new government should fully activate three vehicles for rapid economic and financial stabilization, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and its agricultural sector. Firstly, SIFC can streamline the investment process, particularly for CPEC projects. By minimizing bureaucracy and offering a one-stop shop for approvals, SIFC can attract both domestic and foreign capital. Furthermore, SIFC can foster

public-private partnerships within CPEC, encouraging innovation and job creation while ensuring the project's long-term sustainability. Additionally, SIFC can leverage Pakistan's diplomatic ties to broaden CPEC's scope, attracting international investment and maximizing its transformative impact. Secondly, Pakistan's agricultural sector presents a wealth of untapped potential. SIFC can play a crucial role in attracting investment in modern farming techniques, storage infrastructure, and food processing. By focusing on value addition through processing and marketing, Pakistan can not only increase agricultural production but also create a more robust and profitable sector, fostering economic growth and prosperity. Banking upon these gains, the new government should immediately develop short, medium and long term strategies. In the short term the government would need to curtail development spending though vital for long-term growth and must prioritize projects with immediate economic benefits and efficient implementation. Salary increases for government employees should be weighed carefully against fiscal constraints. Infrastructure projects must be chosen for their potential to generate revenue and jobs. Price controls and subsidies need effective management to curb inflation. Investment in education, health, agriculture, and research and development remains crucial, but efficient resource utilization is paramount. Fiscal management, external debt control, job creation, and a commitment to transparency and accountability will be essential components of the government's strategy. Collaboration with international partners can provide crucial support. Beyond immediate stabilization, medium-term reforms are needed. These include gradual deficit reduction, a comprehensive debt management strategy, improved tax administration, energy market reforms, and enhanced workforce competitiveness. Sustainable development efforts focusing on climate-resilient infrastructure and innovation will also be crucial. In the long-term, human capital development through education and healthcare investments, combined with gender equality initiatives, will unlock Pakistan's full economic potential. Embracing technology and transitioning to a green economy will further drive sustainable growth. Adaptability, public engagement, and strong governance will be critical throughout this multi-phase recovery program. By taking decisive action and prioritizing the well-being of its people, the new government can navigate the current economic storm and emerge stronger.

—The writer is Press Secretary to the President(Rtd).

Afnan Wasif



If one is hopeful and optimistic about anything, he may feel secure at once. In a state of nature, devoid of laws, chaos reigns, rendering no individual secure. However, one must admit flaws in implementing the law – the source of hope. The matter of fact is that institutions such as courts, ombudsman, ICJ, ICC

Security is an idiosyncratic and contested notion, subject to individual interpretation. A generic explanation of security is the absence of peril or trepidation. Optimism and hope may be termed as security. And hope and optimism may or may not be a "Law". It may be rules, precedents, norms, values, customs and traditions. If one is hopeful and optimistic about anything, he may feel secure at once. In a state of nature, devoid of laws, chaos reigns, rendering no individual secure. However, one must admit flaws in implementing the law – the source of hope. The matter of fact is that institutions such as courts, ombudsman, ICJ, ICC, etc are also paramount in implementing laws - actualization of hope - and making a society secure. Consider the allegations by PTI regarding the purported theft of the people's mandate in the 2024 General Elections. But the aggrieved party is still 'hoping' for justice – fostering a sense of security. For instance, Asad Toor, a journalist has been picked up by FIA in allegations, of maligning CJP. Whether he has done so or not but was feeling secure as he is privileged by the constitution under Article 19 – a law making one secure. It goes the same way for the countries. The US is using the jargon "Rules-based

International Order" in its rhetoric against China to keep itself hopeful that China would abide by the rules set by the international community. In the case of the Israel-Palestine Conflict, why South Africa went to ICJ? Because they were hopeful that it would penalize the Zionist entity Israel and give some sense of security to innocent Palestinians against its brutal aggression.

The populace's hope for decisive action in conflicts like Israel-Palestine even shapes political outcomes, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between hope and security. It is evident in the US as it is facing intense criticism domestically because it holds a higher moral authority. The youth of the US was hoping that POTUS would act immediately and press Israel to stop aggression against innocent Palestinians. But it didn't happen and eventually, President Joe Biden seems to be losing upcoming elections. It proves a point that hope and optimism is security. When hope is vanished people get insecure in one way or the other. Given the Operation Swift Retort, people were expecting the same kind of response to feel secure from any external aggression such as Iranian missile strikes inside Pakistan. On the environmental front, we are hoping to see a transition in

energy sources from non-renewable to renewable. Electric vehicles are one of the hopes, of making ourselves secure from the looming specter of climate change. Hope or optimism is augmented by Law. During the Stone Age, there was no hope of getting better off because there were no laws. In the presence of law, might is not right. Might is questionable and answerable to the law. The same is the stance of China towards the dominance of the US. They question the double standards of the US on some parameters set out in International Law, the UN Charter, norms, and rules.

The absence of fear is security. When hope is killed fear prevails. And fear is insecurity. For example, a man is fearful of losing his job at a company. He is now insecure. And there is another man, who is experiencing the same circumstances but he applied for a position in another organization. Now he is not fearful of losing his job because he is hoping to get adjusted somewhere else. He is fearless, expecting another job and feeling secure. The absence of optimism is insecurity. If there is some hope or optimism it means there is security.

—The author is a student of Strategic Studies at National Defence University.

Briefs

PM announces relief package for rain-hit...

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via a collaborative effort between the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the Balochistan administration. "The ration drive would continue till all the displaced people have returned to their homes," he said. Earlier, upon arriving on his maiden visit to the province, PM Shehbaz was briefed by the NDMA regarding rescue and relief efforts being carried out along with the damage suffered by Gwadar's infrastructure. Directing authorities to utilise satellite imagery for early detection and warning of natural disasters, the PM sought a detailed assessment of damage to private property along with a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of those affected by the calamity.

PPP assures PM of cooperation

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the premier. Shehbaz also expressed his gratitude to allied parties. "I am thankful for the trust of our allied parties in the NA for electing me." The PM maintained that his government is determined to "work day and night for the development and prosperity of Pakistan with the grace of God and hard work". Chief Minister Sindh Murad Ali Shah was also part of the PPP delegation. Senator Ishaq Dar, Senator Azam Nazir Tarar, and former interim chief minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi were also present. Shahbaz, 72, took the oath of office on Monday to officially become prime minister for a second time - nearly four weeks after the general election at a simple but impressive ceremony at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Army declares election...

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maligned Armed Forces of Pakistan with unsubstantiated allegations of interference which is highly deplorable," the statement added. The top commanders said rather than focusing on real issues such as good governance, economic recovery, political stability, and public well-being, the entire focus of such vested elements is on creating political instability and uncertainty by attempting to scapegoat others for their own failings, as per the ISPR. The military's top brass also emphasised that due legal processes be followed with evidence and proof rather than resorting to unconstitutional and uncalled for baseless political rhetoric and emotional outbursts.

Senate polls to be held...

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will be held in the national and four provincial assemblies. On April 3, twelve senators will be elected from Sindh and Punjab each and two senators from Islamabad while eleven new senators will be elected from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan each. As many as 52 members of the Senate will retire on March 11 after completing their term. After completing their term, 12 from Punjab and 12 from Sindh whereas 11 senators from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 11 from Balochistan 2 senators from Islamabad and 4 senators from erstwhile FATA will retire. According to the 25th constitutional amendment, there will be no re-election on the four senate seats of erstwhile FATA.

Asif, Atta Tarar, Dar...

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the PML-N holds that the new President should be the one to administer the oath to the Cabinet. This viewpoint may stem from reservations within the party regarding taking the oath from President Arif Alvi. Alternatively, there is a possibility that President Arif Alvi may decline to officiate the oath for the ministers.

Merit above everyone

Mohsin Naqvi addresses key issues in Pakistan cricket

The former caretaker CM Punjab was elected unopposed as the chairman PCB

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) new chairman Mohsin Naqvi met with Pakistani cricketers on Tuesday where he emphasised the importance of merit within the team. Naqvi, who was elected the chairman of PCB without any opposition, addressed the players in Islamabad where they gathered to participate in the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 9. Talking to players, Naqvi stated that the team will be selected solely based on merit and no wishes of any individual will be taken into consideration.

"The team selection will not be done on the will of anyone, the team selection will be done only on merit," Naqvi stated. "The most promising thing is that merit will be kept in front, I don't want to criticise anyone." He then reas-



sured that every deserving player will get the chance and if merit is broken, the entire selection committee will bear its consequences. "Every player's turn will come on merit, if the merit is broken, it

has been decided that the entire selection committee will go," he added. "There are ups and downs in the team, Pakistan cricket team has star players who have to be respected. "If the players are play-

ing well, they will be selected in the team, I will never say that the players should sacrifice." Earlier today, it was reported that the petition against the appointment of Mohsin Naqvi was challenged in

the Islamabad High Court, according to Geo News. Chief Justice Islamabad High Court Aamer Farooq reserved a verdict on hearing the case against the appointment of PCB Chairman Naqvi. According to the petitioner, the Pakistan constitution clearly differentiates between an elected prime minister and a caretaker. The caretaker doesn't have the authority to nominate the chairman of the PCB as its patron-in-chief. He encouraged players to fight valiantly in matches, emphasizing the spirit of competitiveness over mere outcomes. Naqvi confirmed ongoing efforts to appoint a competent coaching staff, ensuring the best available individuals are selected for the roles. The meeting was attended by PCB Chief Selector Wahab Riaz, Chief Operating Officer Salman Naseer, and other senior officials, reflecting a unified approach towards elevating Pakistani cricket to new heights.

Imran to decide about reconcilia...

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Khan, who is the only prime minister to be ousted through a no-confidence motion. Insisting on his strong stance towards the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the firebrand PTI leader said that the government in the Centre stole his party's mandate. "We will not reconcile with mandate thieves. We will create such a system that no one can steal the mandate in future," he said. The KP CM said the provincial government would maintain a working relationship with the federal government in the future. "The federal government has stolen our mandate and we will not compromise with vote thieves," he alleged. He also demanded the chief justice form an inquiry commission to probe the May 9 events when violent protests broke out in many parts of the country following the PTI founder's arrest in a corruption case last year. "Our women workers are in jails. We demand that those who benefited from the May 9 [riots] be held accountable," he added. Speaking about the hooliganism and verbal assault on a party's woman lawmaker in the recent session of the KP Assembly, Gandapur blamed the PML-N lawmaker Sobia Shahid for using "woman card". "The woman was at fault but I apologised to her as CM," he said.

PTI to launch movement...

FROM PAGE 01

the mandate given to PTI by the voters to rival parties, specifically the PML-N and PPP. The leaders argued that the allocation of reserved seats to other parties contradicted the will of the people who had voted for PTI. They claimed that the ECP's decision was a blatant misuse of power and announced their intention to hold a nationwide protest against this alleged injustice. The PTI leaders further criticised the state of Pakistan's economy, highlighting its dependence on foreign remittances and accusing the Sharif family of sending their wealth abroad. They claimed that with the support of overseas Pakistanis, the country could generate quick revenue, emphasising the need for a change in leadership. In a bold move, the leaders demanded that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conduct an audit of the election process. They also challenged the legitimacy of the Shehbaz Sharif government, suggesting that if it was deemed legitimate, it should be granted loans.

ECP finally uploads election...

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The deadline for publishing the forms expired on February 22. Last month, a senior ECP official conceded it was unlikely for the electoral body to meet the legal deadline despite the best efforts, something it could not do in the past as well, owing to various reasons. He explained that some 300 petitions, regarding the difference between forms 45 and 47 had landed at the ECP on the orders of high courts. The official pointed out that many petitioners were carrying Forms 45 which were different from the ones the respondents had in possession. Earlier this week, lambasting the eight-party ruling coalition in the National Assembly, PTI leader and Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) lawmaker Omar Ayub Khan dubbed newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif a "product" of Form 47 - a document which provides insight into unconfirmed results of a constituency, including the number of votes cast and cancelled. The PTI claimed its mandate was stolen in the February 8 general elections and results were changed in Form 47s. The Imran Khan-founded party also claimed they won 180 NA seats as per the statistics of Form 45s. It is pertinent to mention here that Form 45, also known as the Presiding Officer's Results of the Count, is the form that the presiding officer (PO) is required to sign and provide with his thumb impression and signature to the polling agents.

Nadal's opening match at Indian Wells revealed

DNA

LONDON : Rafael Nadal is set to play his second tournament of the season where he will take on Milos Raonic in the opening match of the upcoming Indian Wells, which will be played in the United States, on March 6.

The former world No.1 is poised to return to the court in Indian Wells after a brief absence due to a minor muscle tear in his hip region. Nadal recently played against Carlos Alcaraz in an exhibition match at the Netflix Slam, which ended in a narrow defeat. However, his last ATP event was in January at the Brisbane International, where he reached the quarter-finals.

Nadal's upcoming opponent, Raonic, also faced injury setbacks. Despite being a former Indian Wells finalist, the Canadian is currently ranked outside the top 200 and has retired

from two of his five matches this season. This will mark the 11th Tour-level encounter between the two, with the Spaniard emerging victorious in eight of their previous meetings. If Nadal progresses past



his opening match, he could face Danish seventh seed Holger Rune next. However, a challenging path awaits with potential matches against Taylor Fritz, Daniil Medvedev, Novak Djokovic, and reigning

champion Alcaraz. Top seed Djokovic will commence his campaign against either a qualifier or Aleksandar Vukic. This marks the Serb's return to the event since 2019, having missed recent editions due to COVID-19-related reasons.

His projected route includes matches against Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Tommy Paul, and potentially Casper Ruud and Daniil Medvedev.

In another section, Sinner and Alcaraz are competing for the No.2 ranking, with the current Australian Open champion defending 360 points compared to Alcaraz's 1000 points. Several noteworthy first-round matches include Stan Wawrinka facing Tomas Machac, Denis Shapovalov against former US Open quarter-finalist Botic van de Zandschulp, and Andy Murray starting against a qualifier with the winner advancing to face Andrey Rublev.

Haris Rauf's central contract set to be reinstated

ISLAMABAD: Haris Rauf's central contract could be reinstated by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) after the pacer lodged an appeal few days back, according to sources. The sources added that chances are bright that Rauf's contract will be restored. Rauf's central contract was terminated by the PCB last month following a probe into the pacer's refusal to join Pakistan's Test squad for the tour of Australia 2023-24. Rauf's central contract was terminated from December 1, 2023. The right-arm bowler will also not get No Objection Certificate (NOC) to play any foreign league up to June 30, 2024.

"The PCB management provided a chance for a personal hearing to Haris in compliance with the principles of natural justice on 30 January 2024 and his response was found unsatisfactory," the PCB said in a press release on February 15. "The PCB states that playing for Pakistan is the ultimate honour and privilege for any sports person. Refusal to be part of Pakistan's Test squad in the absence of any medical report or justifiable reason is a material violation of the central contract." It must be noted that Rauf had refused to play Australia Tests citing injury concerns and workload management. Rauf has only played a solitary Test match for Pakistan over the course of his career after making his debut against England in 2022 in Rawalpindi. The 30-year-old has 69 wickets in 37 ODIs, while also bagging 90 wickets in 66 T20Is. The speedster is currently out of action after his shoulder was dislocated during a match in the ongoing Pakistan Super League season nine. - Agencies

Bairstow set to feature in 100th Test for England

NEW DELHI: Jonny Bairstow is gearing up for an "emotional" milestone as he prepares to join the elite ranks of England's cricketers by playing his 100th Test match. The 34-year-old will achieve this significant feat amidst the stunning backdrop of Dharamsala, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, as England seeks to conclude their tour of India on a positive note. Despite the tourists already conceding the series, following a five-wicket loss in Ranchi which handed India an unassailable 3-1 lead, Bairstow remains focused on making his 100th Test memorable, potentially by notching his 13th Test century. "It means a hell of a lot. Every young kid that sets out on a journey playing professional cricket wants to try and play 100 Test matches," said Bairstow. - Agencies

65 Pakistan players register for The Hundred Draft

Notably, 46 Pakistani players have registered for The Hundred without specifying a reserve price. Players in this category include Salman Ali Agha, Abrar Ahmed, Umar Akmal, and Asif Ali

ISLAMABAD: 65 Pakistan cricketers, 60 men and five women, have registered for 2024 The Hundred Draft set to take place on March 20. In an early development, Manchester Originals retained Usama Mir, while Welsh Fire retained pacer Haris Rauf. High-profile names like Hasan Ali and Naseem Shah have entered the draft, commanding an impressive reserve price of £100,000. Shadab Khan and Iftikhar Ahmed have established their reserve prices at £75,000. Meanwhile, Mohammad Amir, Saim Ayub, Aamer Jamal, and Abdullah Shafique have set a base price of £60,000. Fakhar Zaman, Mohammad Harris, and Imad Wasim have entered the draft with a reserve price of £50,000. Mir Hamza, Mohammad Hasnain, and Azam Khan are among those with a £40,000 reserve. Notably, 46 Pakistani players have registered for The Hundred without specifying a reserve price. Players in this category include Salman Ali Agha, Abrar Ahmed, Umar Akmal, and Asif Ali. Heider Ali, Umar Amin, Faheem Ashraf, and Shahnawaz Dahani have also thrown their names into the hat without a set reserve price. Zaman Khan, Shan Masood, Mohammad Nawaz, Roman Raees, Saud Shakeel, Haneen Shah, and Wasim Junior are also without a reserve price. In the women's category, Iram Javed, Nida Dar, and Fatima Sana have registered with a reserve price of £17,500. Aliya Riaz and Javeria Rauf are additions to the draft without a reserve price. In the men's competition, there are 245 domestic players and 389 overseas players registered for selection. Every player has a reserve price. This is the minimum amount of money that a team can pay for them. If all teams fill their slots at that price band and above, then that player can no longer be selected. The fourth edition of The Hundred is scheduled to kick off on July 23. - DNA

Kerr pleads not guilty to racially aggravated offence
CEO and coach say they found out through media reports

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LONDON: International women's football star Sam Kerr is facing trial in England after pleading not guilty to a racially aggravated offence against a London police officer, prosecutors said. The Chelsea striker and Australia captain was charged following an incident in January last year, when the Metropolitan Police said they were called to a dispute over a taxi fare. The 30-year-old Kerr, born to an Anglo-Indian father and Australian mother, is a treasured sporting figure in Australia and one of the most famous players in women's football. Australia's all-time leading scorer last year graced the cover of the FIFA video game alongside Kylian Mbappe. She is expected to face trial in February 2025. The charge, relating to "threatening, abusive or insulting" behaviour, can carry a fine or custodial sentence if proven. The alleged incident occurred before last year's World Cup, which was held in Australia and New Zealand, but was not publicly disclosed until now and appeared to take Australian football bosses by surprise. Matildas coach Tony Gustavsson said he had only found out about the allegation on Tuesday and was yet to speak to his skipper. "I was informed this morning and obviously I was surprised," he said. "I can't comment on the offence because it's a legal matter at this point. The only thing I can comment on is my experience and interaction with Sam as a person, and as a footballer. "And I have only had positive experiences," he said. Gustavsson said it was too early to say whether the allegation would rule Kerr out of selection for this summer's Paris Olympics.

Kerr has been sidelined since January with a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament. "I think it's a bit too early to look at selection at this time and as we all know with Sam's serious injury in January, there's obviously a very big question mark whether she will even be up for selection," said Gustavsson. Football Australia CEO James Johnson called the allegation "unsettling" and "very serious". "We've got our own ques-



tions that we'd like to know. We've got to find out what actually happened," he said. "It's regarding racism, and there's no place for racism in our sport. At the same time, Sam has rights, natural justice rights, procedural rights, that she's going to work her way through and we're respectful of that." Former Australia men's team captain Craig Foster said the news was unexpected and distressing. "Racism is a very serious issue (not only) in sport. Let's acknowledge the rights of the other person involved and hope that February absolves Sam," he posted on X, formerly Twitter. Kerr has been credited with helping drive the booming popularity of the women's game both in Australia and globally. She played Australian Rules football as a youngster and was convinced she would one day represent her beloved West Coast Eagles, like her elder brother. She switched to football aged 12 and made her full international debut against Italy in 2009, a precocious talent aged just 15 at the time. Known for her pace, agility and heading ability - as well as her trademark backflip goal celebrations - Kerr left for the United States in 2013. She went first to Western New York Flash, then Sky Blue FC in New Jersey and finally Chicago Red Stars. After moving to Chelsea in 2020, Kerr rose to a new level. The 2023 Ballon d'Or runner-up scored the only goal in Chelsea's 1-0 win over Manchester United in last season's FA Cup final. As her star has continued to rise over the years, Kerr has signed lucrative endorsement deals with the likes of Nike and Mastercard. She has scored 99 goals in 128 games in all competitions for Chelsea. In 2019, Kerr became the first Australian, man or woman, to score a hat-trick at a World Cup.

Briefs

Macron heads to Prague

PRAGUE: French President Emmanuel Macron will visit Prague on Tuesday to clarify his country's standpoint on a Czech plan to buy weapons outside Europe for war-ravaged Ukraine. Macron is due to meet Czech President Petr Pavel and Prime Minister Petr Fiala, and address a nuclear forum during his one-day visit. At a security conference in Munich last month, Pavel said the Czech Republic – an EU and NATO member of 10.8 million people – was able to collect a substantial amount of weaponry for Ukraine outside the continent. He said that working with Canada and Denmark, the Czechs had "identified" 500,000 rounds of 155-millimetre ammunition and 300,000 122-millimetre shells "which we would be able to deliver within weeks" given the needed funds. The Financial Times said Prague was looking to amass \$1.5 billion to pay for the munitions for Ukraine, which has been battling a Russian invasion for two years. Fiala said at an international conference in Paris last week that around 15 nations were ready to join the initiative, including France. APP

Tesla factory in Germany halts production

BERLIN: Tesla halted production at its car factory in the German capital, Berlin, on Tuesday morning after a suspected arson attack nearby. An electricity pylon close to the plant caught fire, causing power outages in the factory and nearby towns. Environmental activists who have been protesting against the site's expansion have denied responsibility for the fire. Tesla said workers had been sent home but its building was in a "safe state". The fire did not reach the electric car maker's factory itself but did burn an electricity pylon and high-voltage wires. "The rule of law will react to such an act of sabotage with the utmost severity," said Interior Minister for Brandenburg state Michael Stueben. However, he cautioned against "premature speculation" over who was responsible for the suspected arson. There are currently around 100 environmental activists camping in the forest near the factory, protesting against its expansion. APP

Unions back improved NHS doctor pay offer

LONDON: Unions representing senior doctors in England have given their backing to an improved pay offer in England. But it will now be put to consultant members of the British Medical Association and smaller Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association to see if they are willing to accept. The deal put forward includes an extra £3,000 for those a few years into their consultant careers. Consultants have staged four strikes in their pay dispute so far. The BMA said the new deal includes an extra 2.85% - worth £3,000 - for those between four and seven years into their consultant careers, on top of the 6% all consultants got in April. The previous offer meant those at this stage got no additional uplift, while other consultants were getting up to an extra 12.8%. He said alongside the extra money, the government has agreed to reform the body which makes recommendations about doctor pay. "Ultimately, each consultant will have their own decision to make, but the BMA's consultants committee believes the offer marks significant progress in reaching our aims of reforming the pay review process and preventing further pay cuts," Dr Sharma said. Health Secretary Victoria Atkins described it as a "good offer for consultants, patients and the taxpayer." When the previous offer to consultants was made the Royal College of Nursing called it "galling". Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents health managers, said NHS bosses would be relieved with this development. APP

ICCI conference in Dubai seeks investment boost for Pakistan

ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari expressed his gratitude for the conference's organization and highlighted the participation of over 170 Pakistani delegates

DNA

DUBAI: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) President Petr Pavel hosted a business conference in Dubai, aiming to attract investment to Pakistan. The conference drew a significant turnout, with over 400 attendees including investors and business leaders from Pakistan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), around the world. Abdul Rahman Al Muaini, UAE's Secretary of Economic Affairs, addressed the conference, emphasizing Dubai's cosmopolitan nature with a population exceeding 200 nationalities. He attributed the city's attractiveness to its modern business systems, extensive trade opportunities, and secure investment environment. He further praised Pakistan's potential for investment, particularly in sectors like agriculture and IT. ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari expressed his gratitude for the conference's organization and highlighted the participation of over 170 Pakistani delegates. He emphasized Pakistan's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and its vast potential for investors. He specifically mentioned opportunities in real estate, hospitality (five-star



hotels and shopping malls), and IT sector in Pakistan. Pakistan's Ambassador to the UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, applauded the ICCI's initiative to bring investment in Pakistan. He expressed confidence that the conference would encourage Emirati investment in Pakistan, further strengthening bilateral relations. The Amba-

sador envisioned the conference fostering a new environment for collaboration and mutual benefit. Group Leader founder group ICCI Khalid Iqbal Malik said that the purpose of this business conference is to increase business and trade opportunities between the two countries. The Government of Pakistan is providing a

business and investment-friendly environment. Investors from all over the world, including UAE, should benefit from this. Former president ICCI Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said that we have built Centaurus Mall in Pakistan which is running successfully. We are also investing in real estate and hospitality. Pakistan is a safe country

for investment. On this occasion, ICCI Vice President Azharul ul Islam thanked the guests and other participants for attending the conference. Shamaila Shehzad, Javed Malik and others also addressed the conference. At the end of the conference, shields were also distributed among the guests and participants.

Australian PM slams ICC as 'accessory to genocide'

Australian PM becomes the first Western leader to be referred to the ICC for being an "accessory to genocide in Gaza"

WEB DESK

SYDNEY: The Australian prime minister becomes the first Western leader to be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for being an "accessory to genocide in Gaza," over his extended support to the Israeli regime during the war on Gaza. A 92-page document compiled by a legal team of more than a hundred Australian lawyers, which was submitted to the office of ICC prosecutor Karim Khan King's Counsel on Monday, supported the referral under the article 15 of the Rome Statute. The

document has revealed how Anthony Albanese acted as an "accessory to genocide" in Gaza. Led by King's Counsel Sheryn Omeri, the team spent months documenting the complicity and outlining the individual criminal responsibility of Albanese with respect to the situation in Palestine. Among the several allegations, the document says that the sexagenarian froze the \$6 million funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), amidst a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. It accuses Albanese of providing military defense exports and offering military assistance to Israel, for the use of

the occupation forces during commission of genocide and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, Australians were granted permission, whether explicitly or implicitly, to journey to the occupied territories and enlist in the IOF, thereby participating in its military operations against Gaza. The political statements made by the prime minister, as well as other members of parliament, including the leader of the opposition, clearly demonstrated unwavering political support for Israel's actions, the document stated. Albanese had also ordered for the deployment of the Australian military contingent to the region without disclosing its location and

specific role. Australian police forces have attacked pro-Palestine protesters at a port in the Australian city of Melbourne, who were calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. "The Rome Statute provides four modes of individual criminal responsibility, two of which are accessory," Omeri explained in a statement. According to Omeri, the aid Australia has "most particularly" provided since October has been the export of F-35 fighter jet parts as well as military intelligence through the government's surveillance work at Pine Gap – a facility in Australia's northern territory, which is jointly operated by the US and Australia.

US sanctions Zimbabwe President over alleged abuses

WASHINGTON: The United States has sanctioned Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa, his wife and senior government officials for their alleged involvement in corruption and human rights abuses. The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control announced the sanctions – targeting three companies and 11 people, including the Mnangagwas, Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, and retired Brigadier-General Walter Tapfumaneyi – after a review of the sanctions programme that had been in place since 2003. Other than the people listed on Monday, Zimbabweans formerly under US sanctions will see restrictions lifted. "The changes we are making today are intended to make clear what has always been true: our sanctions are not intended to target the people of Zimbabwe," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said. "We are refocusing our sanctions on clear and specific targets: President Mnangagwa's criminal network of government officials and businesspeople who are most responsible for corruption or human rights abuse against the people of Zimbabwe," he said. Mnangagwa is accused of protecting gold and diamond smugglers that operate in Zimbabwe and directing government officials to facilitate the sale of gold and diamonds in illicit markets and taking bribes in exchange for his services. APP

Trade, submarines feature at ASEAN talks in Australia

NEWS DESK

MELBOURNE: Australia unveiled plans to ramp up investment in Southeast Asia on Tuesday, setting aside US\$1.3 billion to bolster trade in a region of rising economic might. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the funding as leaders from the 10-nation ASEAN forum met in Melbourne for a three-day summit. "The government I lead has made it clear. More than any other region, Southeast Asia is where Australia's future lies," Albanese told a business forum on the summit's sidelines. Following a series of bruising disputes, Australia has increasingly looked to build economic ties outside of major trading partner China. Fuelled by years of swift and sustained population growth, the ASEAN bloc is widely seen as an emerging economic powerhouse. With vast deposits of critical minerals and a booming appetite for electricity, Southeast Asia is also poised to play a major role in the global push for clean energy. Australia's new funding package will provide export financing and loans geared largely toward infrastructure and renewable energy projects. Albanese said it was "the most significant upgrade of Australia's economic engagement with ASEAN for a generation". While leaders were eager to focus on trade and business, more sensitive questions about China's growing sway in Southeast Asia were never far from mind. Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the city-state would gladly host Australia's fleet of nuclear-powered submarines once they were up and running – an offer likely to raise Beijing's hackles.

Bezos dethrones Musk to reclaim title of world's richest man

LONDON: Jeff Bezos has reclaimed the title of the richest person on Earth, surpassing Elon Musk, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index on Monday. The Amazon founder's net worth was \$200 billion, while Musk followed at \$198 billion. Musk has lost about \$31 billion over the past year, while Bezos has gained \$23 billion, according to the index. Tesla shares had tumbled more than 7% on Monday. Musk had reclaimed the title of world's richest person in May 2023, edging out LVMH (LVMHF) CEO Bernard Arnault, who runs one of the world's biggest conglomerates and includes brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dior and Celine. The three centibillionaires – Musk, Arnault and Bezos – have been in competition with each other for the top spot for months. Arnault had held the title as his wealth climbed due to a boom in luxury goods sales that helped drive up LVMH's stock price. Earlier this year, a Delaware state court judge threw out Musk's 2018 pay package – worth more than \$50 billion – that helped to make him one of the richest people in the world. Tesla shares also tumbled about 24% year-to-date. Of course, the title of the richest person on earth swaps every few months, depending on markets performance. APP



Politicians, bureaucrats, engineers usher in new era of development in Sindh

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI



Syed Murad Ali Shah's re-election as the Chief Minister of Sindh has brought a renewed focus on the development of the province. Under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has been committed to the development of Sindh, and the recent election has shown the people's confidence in this vision. The PPP has made significant progress in improving the infrastructure of

Sindh, particularly in the areas of road networks, water supply, and irrigation. The commitment to development projects has been evident in the construction of similar projects in areas of both voters and political rivals, as directed by Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and implemented by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah. One of the key achievements of the PPP government has been the improvement of the road network throughout Sindh. This includes the construction of high-quality dual carriageway roads and farm-to-market roads, which have made it easier for people to travel and for farmers to transport their agricultural produce to the markets. The improvement of the road network has had a positive impact on the financial conditions of the people, as it has facilitated economic activities and improved access to markets. In addition to the road network, the PPP government has also focused on the

completion of water supply and sewerage schemes. This has resulted in the provision of clean water to urban populations and villages in the interior of Sindh, improving the living conditions of the people. Furthermore, the completion of sewerage schemes has helped in the proper disposal of polluted water, leading to a reduction in the spread of diseases. Government approved machinery has been installed in all water supply and sewerage schemes. The irrigation department has also been active in carrying out flood protection works, construction of small dams, and repair works of canals. These efforts have contributed to the protection of agricultural lands and the improvement of water management in the region. The success of these development projects has been instrumental in the increase of the PPP's vote bank. It is clear that the people of Sindh have recognized and appreciated the efforts of the government in

bringing about positive change in the province. The hard work and dedication of the Secretaries, Engineers and other personnel involved in these projects have been crucial in turning the vision of the PPP leadership into a reality. However, it is concerning to note that the engineers of Sindh have been deprived of technical allowance, which is being provided to engineers in other provinces and regions. The lack of technical allowance for engineers in Sindh is a matter of concern, as it affects the morale and financial conditions of these professionals. Despite their hard work and dedication, they have not been given the same recognition and support as their counterparts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and AJK. It is imperative that the Sindh government takes immediate steps to approve technical allowance for engineers, as this will not only improve their financial conditions but also motivate them to continue their efforts in bringing about more devel-

opment projects in the province. The approval of technical allowance for engineers is crucial for the future development of Sindh. It will not only provide much-needed support to the engineers but also ensure the continuation of high-quality development projects that benefit the people of the province. The PPP leadership must recognize the importance of this allowance and its potential impact on the morale and performance of the engineers. By providing this allowance, the government will not only be acknowledging the hard work of the engineers but also signaling its commitment to the continued development of Sindh. The re-election of Syed Murad Ali Shah as the Chief Minister of Sindh has brought a renewed focus on the development of the province. Under the leadership of the PPP, significant progress has been made in improving the infrastructure of Sindh, particularly in the areas of road networks, water supply, and ir-

rigation. The success of these development projects has been instrumental in the increase of the PPP's vote bank, reflecting the people's recognition and appreciation of the government's efforts. However, it is crucial for the Sindh government to approve technical allowance for engineers, as this will not only improve their financial conditions but also motivate them to continue their efforts in bringing about more development projects in the province. The approval of technical allowance is essential for the future development of Sindh and the well-being of its people. Acknowledging the skills and dedication of the Bureau of Engineers in Sindh is important for further progress and development. Their expertise and commitment play a crucial role in achieving the targets for the development of the region. Recognizing and supporting their efforts will contribute to the continued growth and prosperity of Sindh.

Japan PM to address US Congress on April 11

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has been invited to address a joint session of the US Congress during a visit next month, congressional leaders said. The April 11 speech will be the first by a premier of the close US ally since the late Shinzo Abe did so in 2015. The trip, which includes a state dinner, shows Washington's focus on a crucial alliance as both nations try to manage an increasingly assertive China and unpredictable North Korea. The Senate's Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Kishida's visit and address would "deepen the diplomatic and security relationship between our two countries." North Korea denounces South Korea-US military drills, warns of consequences "At a time when democracy is under threat from authoritarian regimes around the world, it is now more important than ever for the United States to show our support and maintain relationships with our allies and partners," he said in a statement on Monday.

French protest 'Flour Massacre' in Israel

PARIS: Throughout France, supporters of Palestine have marched to denounce Israel's constant atrocities and war crimes during the invasion of Gaza. The world has been stunned by what's been dubbed the "Flour Massacre"; the death of over 100 Palestinians and the wounding of nearly 800 others when Israeli troops opened fire on hungry civilians waiting for food. Some 600,000 people in Gaza or 25% of the population are currently at risk of famine. The French Foreign Ministry said the shootings were unjustifiable and backed a call for an independent investigation by the United Nations. French President Emmanuel Macron demanded truth, justice, and respect for international law and called for an immediate ceasefire. In the western world which is and remains an accomplice with the Israeli genocide; but a slight change in the tone of all those Western leaders, including Emmanuel Macron.

Turkiye captures 51 Daesh suspects

ANKARA: Turkish security forces on Tuesday detained 51 suspected members of the terror group Daesh in countryside raids and launched an investigation to capture 19 others linked to the PKK. Counterterrorism and intelligence units of the police caught 51 suspects actively working for Daesh in 17 provinces, including Istanbul, Antalya, Gaziantep and Afyonkarahisar. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said via X. In the capital, Ankara, the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office issued warrants for 19 suspects operating under the banner of the "Democratic Student Council" of the PKK's so-called "youth formation" across the city. APP

Briefs

Turkiye arrests 7 linked to Mossad

AGENCIES

ISTANBUL: Turkiye on Tuesday said it had detained seven people, including a special detective, suspected of spying for Israel's Mossad intelligence service. The operation by Turkiye's spy agency and Istanbul counter-terror police showed the suspects had passed on information to Mossad for money, the Anadolu state news agency reported. The raids come after Turkish authorities rounded up 34 people in January suspected of planning abductions and spying for Mossad. Istanbul prosecutors had then said 12 other suspects remained at large. Relations between Turkiye and Israel imploded after the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly five months ago. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned into one of the world's harshest critics of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He has compared Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler and asked Israel's Western allies to drop their support for the "state terrorism" being conducted in Gaza. After the January arrest, Erdogan said the Turkish operation "seriously disturbed" Israel. "Wait a minute," he said, referring to the Israeli authorities. "You will get to know Turkiye."

PML-N 'opposes' Chan as Punjab governor

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has opposed PPP's Nadeem Afzal Chan as Punjab governor. Chan, who had been opposing PML-N during the formation of the government, is a strong contender for the Punjab governorship, the sources said, while the PML-N has opposed it. Sources further say, PPP thinks Nadeem Afzal Chan is the best choice for the Punjab governorship while PML-N has reportedly shown its consent on the names of Qamar Zaman Kaira and Makhdoom Ahmed Mahmood. The PPP will get the office of the Punjab governor as per the power-sharing formula with the PML-N. As per the power-sharing pact, Shehbaz Sharif was voted for by the PPP in Sunday's PM election, whereas Asif Ali Zardari will be the joint candidate for the position of president of Pakistan. The senate chairman, NA deputy speaker, Punjab and KP governors will be from the PPP, whereas NA speaker, Sindh and Balochistan governors will be from PML-N, as per the power-sharing formula between both the parties.

Ethiopian 128th Adwa Victory Day

Ambassador Jemal Beker highlights Adwa Victory's role in Pan-Africanism

Commemoration day featured multiple events including documentaries on history of the Adwa victory of Ethiopia against the then colonizers



ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Khawaja Muhammad Asif, former Defence Minister and MNA, governor Sindh Kamran Tesori, Murtaza Solangi, Ambassador of Ethiopia Jemal Beker and others cutting cake to celebrate the Adwa Victory Day. - DNA

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Tuesday celebrated the 128th Adwa victory day in Islamabad in the presence of a large number of government officials from different Ministries and Armed Forces, Members of Parliament, diplomatic corps, business community, civil society, media, and above all Ethiopian Diaspora in Pakistan. Celebrated with a national

zeal and fervor, the commemoration day featured multiple events including documentaries on history of the Adwa victory of Ethiopia against the then colonizers, Ethiopia's role in laying the foundation of Pan-Africanism and its consistent diplomacy for promoting the regional integration. Senior Parliamentarian and Member of the National Assembly H.E. Khawaja Asif graced the celebration ceremony of the Adwa victory Day as the chief guest. Governor Sindh H.E. Kamran Tessori was the guest of honour at the ceremony Speaking on the occasion, H.E. Jemal Beker Ab-

dula, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the FDRE to Pakistan, extended his felicitations to the whole Africa especially the people of Ethiopia on the occasion of 128th Adwa Victory Day commemorated under the theme of "Adwa Black People's Victory". He expressed gratitude to the people of Pakistan for gracing the 128th anniversary of the Black People's Victory in such a large number. H.E. Ambassador Jemal Beker briefed the honorable participants in Islamabad on historical role played by the Adwa battle in igniting movements

for freedom, equality and liberty in the whole Africa and in other continents against the colonization. On March 2, 1896, a united Ethiopia achieved the biggest victory in battle field against the invading forces which, indeed, changed the course of history, humanity, political and social narration at the global level, the ambassador noted.

Adwa's victory is an inspiration and spirit of Pan-Africanism that ignited anti-colonial movements all across the world, the ambassador remarked.

The Adwa victory symbolized Ethiopian unity and pan-Africanism, he said while highlighting the major initiatives of the reformist Government of Ethiopia that further fostering regional integration in the region. He said Ethiopia had built Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam which would further promote regional integration through energy export. Ethiopia was already sharing its resources with the people of neighboring countries and would continue to do so. The ambassador said Green Legacy Initiative of H.E. Dr Abi Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, was also another major initiative of the government to boost collaboration with regional countries in mitigating global issues like climate change and food insecurity. 32.5 billion seedlings of different fruits, plants, trees and animal feed were planted during the last four years under the Green Legacy campaign, he added. The ambassador also expressed resolve to further strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries through economic diplomacy. He announced Hijra Trip II, another business delegation of Pakistani business community to Ethiopia in this year, for boosting the trade between the two countries. Last year, the Embassy of Ethiopia mobilized a historic delegation of 75 business persons to Ethiopia, the ambassador added. Chief Guest Khawaja Muhammad Asif also congratulated the people of Ethiopia and Africa on the Adwa victory day. He also stressed the need for the Pakistani business community to explore African markets especially through Ethiopia which was a gateway to the African continent.

China sets economic growth target of 5%

China also unveiled its annual military budget for 2024, which will increase by 7.2%

MONITORING DESK

BEIJING: China has set an ambitious economic expansion target of "around 5%" for 2024, as its leaders vowed to "transform the growth model" in the face of significant challenges facing its development. The figure - similar to last year's growth target - was announced by Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Tuesday at the opening of the annual gathering of the National People's Congress (NPC), the country's rubber-stamp legislature, which draws nearly 3,000 delegates to Beijing for a week-long meeting. "Stability is of overall importance, as it is the basis for everything we do," Li said during the delivery of his maiden work report.

"In particular, we must push ahead with transforming the growth model, making structural adjustments, improving quality, and enhancing performance."

Li's proclamation comes as Beijing is seeking to boost confidence in China's economy, while grappling with a troubled property sector, deflationary pressures, an exodus of foreign capital, a battered stock market and a record low birth rate. He delivered the report to an auditorium filled with delegates inside the cavernous Great Hall of the People. Delegates clapped in unison in time with a military band serenade as top leadership entered the room in a line led by Chinese leader Xi Jinping. The political heart of Beijing, where the event is taking place, was under heavy security ahead of the event, with barricades and traffic controls restricting access to the public square and surrounding government buildings.

At the event, China also unveiled its annual military budget for 2024, which will increase by 7.2% to 1.67 trillion yuan (\$230.6 billion), according to a draft report released separately. The growth rate for the defense budget is the same as last year's. The gross domestic product (GDP) target and military spending are among the most closely watched figures during the opening day of proceedings. But investors appear to be disappointed about the lack of major stimulus measures. Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng Index fell 2.6% by afternoon trade, the worst performer in Asia. The Hang Seng Tech Index sank 4%. A target of "around 5%" is ambitious but achievable, said Larry Hu, chief China economist at Macquarie Group.

Notices issued to PTA, info ministry on closure of X

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued on Tuesday notices to the Ministry of Information and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) regarding the closure of social media site X, formerly Twitter, in the country. IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the petition against the closure of X which has remained largely restricted in Pakistan since February 17 with people accessing the popular site using a VPN. During the hearing on the plea today, IHC CJ asked: "Is X closed?" At this, the petitioner's lawyer replied that X had been closed in Pakistan since February 17. "This matter was also before the SHC, what happened to it?" asked Justice Farooq. The lawyer replied that the SHC will hear a petition related to

contempt of court today. After this, Justice Farooq said that he was issuing notices for the next week. A similar petition was filed in the SHC last month as well and in the plea authorities were directed to restore social media platform X and ensure uninterrupted access to the site across the country. SHC Chief Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi issued the orders on a plea filed by multiple petitioners including ZarrarKuhro, Amber Shamsi, ZebunnisaBurki and others against intermittent disruptions faced by users in accessing the renowned social media platform which has witnessed various "unannounced" sporadic suspensions in recent weeks. Ahead of the February 8 general elections, users were unable to access several social media sites, for which authorities concerned blamed an error. However, on the polling day, the internet was shut down to avoid terrorism, according to the caretaker government.

Gaza ceasefire talks end with no breakthrough

Health ministry in Gaza said that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardments climbed to 30,631 martyrs

NEWS DESK

CAIRO/RAFAH, Gaza Strip: Ceasefire talks between Hamas and mediators broke up on Tuesday in Cairo with no breakthrough, with just days left to halt fighting in time for the start of Ramadan. Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim told international news agency the resistance group had presented its proposal for a ceasefire agreement to the mediators during two days of talks, and was now waiting for a response from the Israelis, who stayed away from this round. "Netanyahu doesn't want to reach an agreement and the ball now is in the Americans' court" to press him for a deal, Naim said. Israel has declined to comment publicly on the talks in Cairo. Israel was staying away because Hamas had rejected its demand to furnish a list of all hostages who are still

alive. Naim said this was impossible without a ceasefire first as hostages were scattered across the war zone and held by separate groups. The Cairo talks had been billed as a final hurdle to reach the war's first extended ceasefire - a 40-day truce during which dozens of hostages would be freed and aid would be pumped into Gaza to stave off a manmade famine, ahead of Ramadan, which is due to begin at the start of next week. Meanwhile, The Hamas Movement has strongly denounced UN official Pramila Patten for claiming in its report that Palestinian resistance fighters committed acts of sexual violence, including rape, during the October 7th events. "This report came after failed Zionist attempts to prove this false accusation, which was already found to be baseless and aim to demonize the Palestinian resistance and marginalize the report issued earlier by UN rapporteurs.

Pakistan armed forces take 'great pride' in SCO partnership: JCSC

Pakistan hosts SCO members' seminar

RAWALPINDI: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza attended the opening session of an SCO Member States Seminar being hosted by Pakistan in Rawalpindi, said a statement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Tuesday.

The theme of the session is 'Challenges in Military Medicines'. General Mirza highlighted that the "emergence of new and complex healthcare challenges, pandemics and humanitarian crisis merit crafting of collective preparedness, response strategies and more importantly strengthening

of multilateral collaboration amongst SCO nations especially in the field of military medicines". He also reiterated that the country and its armed forces take great pride in the SCO partnership and are "fully committed" to further enhancing cooperation. "He expressed his gratitude to SCO for affording this platform for dialogue and cooperation; and the delegates from partner countries for their wholehearted attendance," said the statement by the military's media wing. dialogue and cooperation; and the delegates from partner countries for their wholehearted attendance. - DNA



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