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Spain PM proposes parliament recognition of Palestinian state

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Saudi Arabia announces relief for Gwadar

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Sammy opens up about Pak coaching role

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14th head of state

Asif Zardari sworn in as President

CJP Qazi Faez Isa administers oath to newly elected president; outgoing president Alvi, PM Shehbaz attend ceremony

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, who was elected as the 14th president of the country with a big margin a day earlier, has taken oath as the head of state today (Sunday). Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to the newly-elected president at the swearing-in ceremony took place at the Aiwan-e-Sadr in Islamabad. The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, outgoing president Arif Alvi, all three service chiefs, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) General Sahir Shamsahad Mirza. Moreover, governors of all four provinces, chief ministers and foreign diplomats also participated in the ceremony. Zardari, who was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance, was elected as the country's president for the second time on Saturday after he defeated PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai by a huge margin. The president-elect secured 411 electoral votes in parliament and all four provincial assemblies with the backing of allied parties – mainly Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P). Meanwhile, his rival, Achakzai bagged 181 votes as he was only able to secure the majority of votes in the PTI-backed SIC-dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. In the National Assembly, Zardari bagged 225 votes while Achakzai received 119 votes.

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World leaders congratulate President Zardari

Chinese, Iranian heads of state send messages

DNA

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Pakistan Peoples Party Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari was elected as Pakistan's new president on Saturday. Zardari received 411 votes, as against the 181 received by the opposition-backed candidate, according to a local media tally of votes by members of the National Assembly, the Senate and provincial assemblies. This will be Zardari's second term as the country's president, having earlier served in the role from 2008 to 2013.

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa administers oath of the office to President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan e Sadr. – DNA

Two killed, one injured in Peshawar blast

PM Shehbaz strongly condemned the "terrorist attack" and offered his condolences to the families

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Two people were killed while another sustained injuries in a blast on Peshawar's Board Bazar road, police officials confirmed on Sunday morning. Speaking to Geo News, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi said that the bomb disposal unit's (BDU) report revealed that it was not a suicide blast. "An explosion took place

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Ramadan moon sighted in Saudi Arabia

People in kingdom, UAE and other Middle Eastern countries to observe their first fast tomorrow (Monday)

DNA

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced sighting the crescent of the new lunar month marking the beginning of holy Ramadan in the kingdom. Social media handle for news and announcements about the two holy mosques, the Grand Mosque of Makkah and

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Police detain key PTI leaders

KP CM demands judicial action against polls rigging

In Lahore, police arrested several protesting PTI workers from GPO Chowk as authorities deployed a heavy contingent of police on the city's Mall Road and other areas

SHAMIM SHAHID/DNA

LAHORE/PESHAWAR: A number of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders, including Latif Khosa and Salman Akram Raja, were taken into custody during the police action in different cities as the former ruling party Sunday staged countrywide protests against alleged rigging in the February 8 general elections. PTI supporters and activists today took to streets almost across the country with rallies being held in Rawalpindi along with protests in Karachi, Kandhkot, Tank and other cities, following the Imran Khan-founded party's call for demonstrations against "manipulation of election results and stealing" of the PTI's mandate in the recent elections. In Lahore, police arrested several protesting

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Minister to take oath today Cabinet absence delays key economic decisions

Once the federal cabinet is in place, the IMF will dispatch a team for negotiations with Pakistan regarding financial matters

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The absence of a federal cabinet has led to a delay in

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Ukrainian army loses 150 troops

Operational-tactical aviation, drones, missile forces and artillery attacked the Ukrainian troops and equipment in 136 regions in the past 24 hours

DNA

MOSCOW: Ukraine's armed forces lost more than 150 troops and an ammunition

depot in the South Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, Russia's Defense Ministry reported. "In the South Donetsk direction, the units of Battlegroup East inflicted fire damage to troops and equipment of the 72nd mechanized brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces and the 128th territorial defense brigade near the settlements of Ugledar and Staromayorskoye of the Donetsk People's Republic," the ministry said.

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Briefs

PTI's Meher Bano to move Supreme Court

Daughter of former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has claimed that she secured victory in the Feb 8 polls

DNA

MULTAN: Meher Bano Qureshi, a leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has asserted that she would move to the Supreme Court if the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) wouldn't probe the rigging allegations and provide justice. According to PTI's account on X (Twitter), the daughter of former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has claimed that she secured victory in the February 8 polls with the public's votes, but the public mandate was stolen through tampering and rigging of the poll results.

Ruet-e-Hilal committee to meet today

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee is set to convene on Monday (today) for the holy month of Ramazan moon sighting at the office of Administrator Auqaf in Peshawar, under the chairmanship of Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad. The meeting will witness the participation of esteemed members from both Central and Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committees, including Director General Syed Mushahid Hussain Khalid from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Ghulam Murtaza from the Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, Dr Sardar Sarfaraz from the Pakistan Meteorological Department, and Zainul Abedin from the Ministry of Science and Technology.

As hunger rises

UNRWA warns of 'tragic' situation in northern Gaza

Health ministry added that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardments and shooting attacks, which started on October 7, climbed to 31,045 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 72,654 people

NEWS DESK

GAZA: The UN agency for Palestinian refugees has warned of the "tragic" situation in the northern Gaza Strip, calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the besieged territory ahead of the holy month of Ramadan. The United Nations Relief Works and Agency (UNRWA) made the warning in a post on X on Sunday, as the Israeli regime continues to deny UN aid agencies the ability to deliver aid in the northern part of Gaza despite repeated calls. "Ramadan is approaching. The death toll continues to rise,"

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JI announces million march towards US embassy

Sirajul Haq said that the OIC has also failed to play its due role

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) announced to carry out a million march toward the United States embassy on

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Challenges ahead for Shehbaz Sharif govt

COMMENT

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI



PRIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif is poised to embark upon a transformative journey, drawing inspiration from his previous leadership during the PDM government. As he resumes his responsibilities, he aims to build on the lessons learned and address the challenges that marred his previous 16-month tenure. Acknowledging the allegations of misgovernance and political victimization that clouded the past, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is committed to fostering a transparent and accountable administration. Learning from past experiences, his government would like to prioritize effective governance, ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the people take center stage. The challenges faced during the previous tenure have provided valuable insights into areas that require improvement. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is determined to institute reforms that enhance governmental efficiency, curb corruption, and promote inclusivity. By fostering a climate of fair play and equal opportunities, his administration should seek to dispel any lingering doubts about political victimization. Recognizing the pivotal role of opposi-

tion parties in a thriving democracy, the new government under Shehbaz Sharif ought to aim to promote a culture of constructive dialogue. Embracing inclusiveness and open communication channels, the administration must seek to bridge the gap between different political entities, creating a more collaborative and cooperative political landscape. While the PTI has emerged as a popular party, the Shehbaz Sharif-led government would like to present itself as a compelling alternative. By addressing the concerns that contributed to the rise of the PTI, such as governance lapses, the new administration aims to regain public trust and demonstrate a commitment to the welfare of the nation. Enhancing political stability should be the foremost priority for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, recognizing that a stable political environment is crucial for the successful completion of his tenure. Notably, Pakistan has witnessed a historical trend where no prime minister has managed to serve a full term, even those with a two-thirds mandate faced premature exits. In this context, the Shehbaz government faces a particularly challenging scenario, with its sustainability heavily reliant on the support of allied parties. The pervasive issue of corruption poses the most formidable challenge for Shehbaz Sharif. Without effectively curbing corruption, the prospect of steering the country towards progress remains elusive. Unfortunately, both the PML-N manifesto and the Prime Minister's maiden address to the National Assembly fell short of addressing this pressing threat. It is noteworthy to acknowledge KPK

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur for his commendable initiative. He compelled all PTI lawmakers to take a solemn oath, pledging their commitment to abstain from corrupt practices and to prevent others from engaging in corruption. While the effectiveness of this pledge in eradicating corruption in the province remains uncertain, the very act of making such a commitment underscores the high moral standards that the PTI aspires to establish in its governance. The pertinent question now arises: Do other provincial assemblies and the national assembly possess the moral courage to undertake similar vows? The future of our nation's progress hinges on our collective commitment to address and eliminate corruption at every level of governance. China has consistently demonstrated a proactive approach in extending warm greetings to Shehbaz Sharif upon his election as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The immediacy of Chinese engagement can be attributed to the historical precedent of flourishing bilateral relations whenever the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) assumed power. Both Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif successfully cultivated personal relationships with Chinese leadership, fostering mutual trust and cooperation. During PML-N tenures, China staunchly supported Pakistan, contributing to the elevation of bilateral ties to unprecedented levels. However, this close association also stirred feelings of envy and apprehension among other political parties, notably the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Consequently, the transition of power to PTI marked a notable

downturn in China-Pakistan relations. The strained relations under PTI rule underscored the challenges of maintaining the same level of warmth and collaboration witnessed during PML-N's tenure. This shift highlights the delicate nature of international relationships, where personal connections between leaders play a pivotal role. It remains to be seen how the dynamics between China and Pakistan will evolve under the current political landscape and whether efforts can be made to rebuild and strengthen the bond that has historically existed between the two nations. The current scenario on the ground reveals a significant stagnation in all projects associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Remarkably, these projects have been at a standstill since the tenure of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. With the recent formation of a government that maintains a positive relationship with China, there is a heightened anticipation that bilateral relations will undergo a complete restoration, paving the way for the revival of CPEC initiatives. In terms of our relationship with the IMF, the current government appears to be well-positioned and unlikely to encounter significant challenges. It's crucial to acknowledge that the IMF's decision-making process is multifaceted, involving both economic and political considerations. Fortunately, the present administration enjoys robust support from both the national and international establishments, further strengthening its standing. Given the solid backing, the release of the IMF tranche is ex-

pected to proceed smoothly. The genuine challenge, however, seems poised to arise from the domestic sphere. The apparent surge in prices is undeniably exacting a substantial toll on a broad spectrum of the population. The survival of the middle and lower-middle class has unquestionably become a formidable challenge in Pakistan. In navigating these economic hardships, the current government must orchestrate transformative measures to shift the momentum in its favor. The key lies in implementing innovative strategies that have the potential to alleviate the burden on the citizens. It necessitates a proactive approach that goes beyond the conventional methods employed during the 16-month tenure of the previous PDM government. If all unfolds as anticipated, the Shehbaz government is poised to maintain unimpeded governance for at least a year and a half. However, a pivotal juncture awaits in November 2025 with the impending appointment of the army chief. The dynamics between the PML-N and the Establishment, currently in a state of camaraderie, might witness a shift post the crucial decision – be it a new appointment or an extension. Historically, Pakistan has not witnessed a prime minister completing a full five-year term. This entrenched tradition appears likely to persist unless the Shehbaz government can orchestrate a remarkable transformation, not only stabilizing the political landscape but also effecting a substantial turnaround in the economy. – The writer is the Editor Daily Islamabad POST/Centreline journal.

NH&MP conducts mock exercise for emergency preparedness

MULTAN : National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) conducted a mock exercise to deal with emergency-like situation on Motorways in which Rescue 1122 and other emergency departments participated.

An exercise on how to respond to dangerous accidents on highways or motorways was organized by Motorway Police Central Two Zone Sector-I Beat 23 in collaboration with a private company and Pakistan State Oil. Along with the Motorway Police, other emergency agencies also participated in the mock exercise. An exercise was conducted for the rescue and fire prevention of a full oil tanker that accidentally overturned. Sector Commander Nadeem Ashraf Warraich, FWO Brigadier Hamid Anwar, Deputy Director Explosive Department Hafeezullah, Assistant Commissioner Customs Habib-ur-Rehman, DSP Beat 23 Masroor Ali and other officers and employees were present on this occasion. The mock exercise included accident handling, securing the accident scene, ensuring smooth flow of traffic, use of allied and recovery services, providing first aid to the injured and safely shifting them to the hospital. Sector Commander Nadeem Ashraf Warraich said that the purpose of the mock exercise was to highlight the professional skills of the officials so that they could perform their duties efficiently and could easily control all kinds of situations in case of any untoward incident. DSP Masroor Ali said that the Motorway Police was striving to prevent accidents and training of officials and staff was conducted so that there is minimal loss in case of any untoward incident.—APP

Beggars' swarm irk shoppers in city ahead of Ramadan

DNA

PESHAWAR : The swarms of beggars arrived from different cities to Peshawar on Sunday has irked the shoppers and general public ahead of the holy month of Ramadan ul Mubarak. In spite of begging has been declared illegal under the country's laws, the beggars' influx including male, female, children and persons with disabilities are being witnessed in crossing points, mosques' gates and mostly frequented public places and food outlets in the city and cantonment areas, making shopping difficult for Ramadan. Hashtnagri, Gantagar, Firdus, Nothia, Tehkal, Gulbahar, Faqirabad, Meena Bazaar, Karimpura, Shafi Market, Saddar Road, University Town, City Tower, Jawad Tower and Deans Trade Centre are flooded with beggars on Sunday. The professional and non professional beggars have tried hard to cash the situation after witnessing an increase of buyers at Dean's Trade Centre, Karimpura, Qissa Khwani, University Road, Hashtnagri, Faqirabad, Qissa Khwani and others famous bazaars, which were flooded with customers and shoppers.

Joining hands for a Nobel cause

Niaz Support, STEP partner for wider PWD outreach

Niaz Support has established itself as a social enterprise at the forefront of providing customised wheelchairs to individuals with disabilities in Pakistan

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Niaz Support, a leading social enterprise providing customised wheelchairs, and Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP), a program dedicated to advancing the human rights of persons with disabilities, are proud to announce a collaborative partnership. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on March 8th, 2024, signifies a shared commitment to expanding outreach and empowering individuals with disabilities throughout Pakistan. The signing ceremony was graced by the presence of Mr. Hussain Odhwani, Founder of Niaz Support, and Mr. Muhammad Atif Sheikh, President of STEP. Their leadership and dedication to the cause of disability inclusion paved the way for this impactful collaboration. The official signing of the MoU was carried out by Aroosa Salahuddin, National Outreach Manager for Niaz Support, and Asfandyar Khan, Project Coordinator for STEP.



This signifies the commitment of both organizations to working together at the operational level to achieve their shared goals. Niaz Support has established itself as a social enterprise at the forefront of providing customised wheelchairs to individuals with disabilities in Pakistan. Their dedication to personalised solutions ensures that each wheelchair caters to the specific needs of its user, maximizing mobility and independence. STEP plays a crucial role in actively championing the human rights of persons with disabilities. Their tireless efforts pave the way for greater inclusion and ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to opportunities and resources. This exciting collaboration between Niaz Support and STEP will leverage their combined expertise to create a more impactful and comprehensive support system for individuals with disabilities in Pakistan. Through this partnership, Niaz Support aims to reach a wider range of deserving beneficiaries across the country and create a more inclusive environment.

BOP, NBP win CSR for women development awards

The 'CSR for Women Development Awards' ceremony was a momentous part of the 10th edition of 3-day long 'Aurat Hunar Mela'

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan's two prestigious financial institutions, Bank of Punjab and National Bank of Pakistan, were awarded 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for Women Development' awards here Saturday at a revered ceremony. The National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) won two awards for its large CSR portfolio of women's education, and health and hygiene while the Bank of Punjab (BOP) was conferred upon award for the comprehensive and inclusive women development, empowerment and engagement strategies and products. The 'CSR for Women Development Awards' ceremony was a momentous part of the 10th edition of 3-day long 'Aurat Hunar Mela' (National Women-at-Work Festival) that kicked off on March 8 with a showcasing women's work, products and services including an art exhibition 'Herself' at the Lok Virsa, Shakarparian, Islamabad. The 'Aurat Hunar Mela' (National

Women-at-Work Festival) is an annual flagship event of Devcom-Pakistan (Development Communications Network) to mark the UN's International Women's Day that falls on March 8. This year the 3-day event is being organized in collaboration with the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (Lok Virsa), Federal Ministry of National Heritage and Culture. Earlier, a conference on the 'CSR for Women Development' was also organized. The panelists included the Bank of Punjab Head of Customer Services Rai Usman Mujahid, entrepreneur and Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IWCCI) Vice President Sadaf Asim Abbasi, entrepreneur and human resource management expert Tahira Haider, Lok Virsa Director Research and Publications Dr. Zobia Sultana and, art and design mentor and Devcom-Pakistan Creative Director Riffat Ara Baig. Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director Munir Ahmed conducted the panel discussion. Rai Usman Mujahid said: The Bank of Punjab is a leading

financial institution with 900 branches nationwide and is committed to creating a workplace that champions women empowerment and inclusivity. Our comprehensive initiative includes the implementation of women-friendly policies, such as flexible work arrangements to support work-life balance. Mentorship programs have been introduced to provide guidance and facilitate career advancement for female employees. Tailored leadership development opportunities aim to enhance the professional growth of women within the organization. Furthermore, we actively organize targeted networking events and forums to foster a supportive community. Our commitment to gender inclusivity extends to regular training programs on diversity and inclusion for all employees, ensuring a workplace that not only values but actively promotes equal opportunities for every individual to thrive. He said there are numerous CSR initiatives including The Citizens Foundation's girls-education and the Indus Hospital, and financial inclusion of marginalized community women through interest-free loans. The bank, he said, is open to engage with different development and women organizations to create women-friendly workplaces and financially empowered women. Sadaf Asim Abbasi said: (CSR) plays a crucial role in the development and empowerment of women by promoting initiatives that address gender equality, access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare, and leadership development. The women's chambers of commerce are struggling to create economic and financial opportunity for the women especially for the middle-class individuals. Tahira Haider education and skill development is very crucial for the community women where the CSR programs may be aimed at increasing access to education and skill development opportunities for women and girls. This can include scholarships, vocational training programs, and workshops designed to enhance their employability and entrepreneurship skills.

HRMA minister vows to protect minorities

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Punjab Minister for Human Rights & Minorities Affairs (HRMA) Ramesh Singh Arora has affirmed his commitment to ensuring the protection of minorities throughout Punjab under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. He stated this while participating in a prayer ceremony of Christian community at FGA Ground, Kot Lakhpat, here on Sunday. Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora expressed gratitude to the Christian community, which offered special prayers for Mian Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. He acknowledged Maryam Nawaz's historic achievement as the first woman Chief Minister of Punjab. He congratulated Maryam Nawaz on behalf of the Christian community and expressed confidence that Pakistan's minorities would always stand united with their leadership. The minister reiterated the importance of safeguarding minority rights, emphasizing guidance received from Maryam Nawaz Sharif. With 3.3 million religious minorities in Punjab, the commitment to their service remains unwavering, as highlighted during Maryam Nawaz's dedicated efforts. Over the next four months, a development package of Rs 850 million would be allocated for various schemes, including the renovation of a church in Lahore, and up-gradation in Mariamabad and Youhanaabad, he said. Furthermore, initiatives include a 5 percent job quota and a 2 percent quota in higher education. He urged public to prioritize education for their children, especially considering the unfortunate tendency for minority children to be overlooked in this regard. The minister also shared positive news with the Christian community, announcing that scholarships are set to be doubled. Pastor Anwar Fazal, during the ceremony, offered special prayers, expressing hope for a Christian package akin to the laptop and Ramadan packages, featuring a special scheme for Christian students. Pakistan National Interfaith Peace Committee Chairman Waseem Anjum Sindhu, Pastor Shaikat Fazal, and a significant representation from the Christian community, attended the prayer ceremony.—DNA

BISP utilizes social media platforms for awareness

ISLAMABAD : As a part of its efforts to provide authentic information about various pro-poor schemes, the internationally acclaimed Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is utilizing different social media platforms to facilitate existing and intending beneficiaries and counter fake information. The BISP has earlier launched its Whatsapp channel for disseminating public awareness about its initiatives which has now over 7,000 followers. According to an official source, the BISP had urged the existing and intending beneficiaries to follow the official Whatsapp channel of BISP to get all the valid information about the programmes. The citizens can follow the BISP Whatsapp channel through this web link: <https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaL06DJ9B602I388U2I>.—APP

Free heart treatment for underprivileged children

PIC and Qatar charity partner to provide free heart treatment for over 150 underprivileged children in Peshawar

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC) and Qatar Charity Pakistan on Sunday joined hands to provide free heart treatment for orphaned and underprivileged children. According to the spokesperson of Peshawar Institute of Cardiology, Riffat Anjum, the Chief Executive and Medical Director of PIC, Professor Dr Shahkar Ahmed Shah, and representatives of Qatar

Charity Pakistan Sajjad Khan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Under this agreement, Qatar Charity will provide financial assistance for the treatment of over 150 children suffering from cardiac diseases. The initial project duration is set for four months, with the possibility of extension. Professor Dr. Ijaz Hussain, Head of Pediatric Cardiology at PIC, expressed gratitude for the financial support, stating that it would prove to be a beacon of hope for orphaned

and underprivileged children. The funding will cover free treatment, including heart surgeries, for children with congenital heart defects and open-heart surgery needs. Qatar Charity Pakistan and the people of Qatar have been acknowledged for their support in becoming a lifeline for these vulnerable children. Professor Dr Shahkar Ahmed Shah, CEO and Medical Director of PIC, highlighted that PIC's commitment to providing top-notch cardiac care has gained recognition

not only within Pakistan but internationally. He emphasized that PIC strives to offer the highest standard of treatment to every heart patient, especially children, making it a preferred choice for international institutions. It is important to note that Peshawar Institute of Cardiology boasts a state-of-the-art facility and a team of qualified international doctors specializing in cardiology and cardiac surgery, dedicated to treating children with heart ailments.

Mutual respect ensures stability in Pakistan-Afghanistan ties

Pakistan's special envoy Asif Durrani addresses Afghan stakeholders on security, trade, and educational opportunities

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Refusal of Afghans to cross into Pakistan with a passport defies the logic of relations between two sovereign countries, Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Durrani said during his interaction with the Afghan religious, tribal, and business stakeholders, while highlighting the security threats posed by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the detrimental effects of their activities. The interaction was part of the Pak-Afghan Stakeholders Conference organized by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), in collaboration with its Afghan partner Organization for Economic Studies and Peace



(OESP), as part of their initiative Beyond Boundaries. Ambassador Asif Durrani emphasized the need for cooperation in countering terrorism (CT) efforts and promoting peace in the region. He emphasized that terrorist groups like Daesh (ISIS) pose a threat not only to Afghanistan but also

to the wider region and the world. He stressed the importance of collective efforts to combat terrorism and promote sustainable regional peace. The envoy addressed issues related to trade and border management, emphasizing the importance of documentation such

as passports and CNICs for security purposes. He advocated the necessity of implementing biometric measures for border cross-border movement of people to bolster security and minimize threats from non-state actors. Ambassador Durrani stressed the need for mu-

tual respect for sovereignty between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He refuted the perception of Pakistan using coercion in its dealings with Afghanistan and said the refusal of Afghans to cross into Pakistan with a passport defies the logic of relations between two sovereign countries. Durrani accused external actors, particularly India, of supporting TTP militants, citing evidence of their involvement, and underscored the need to address the issue of the militant outfit's funding and external support. The envoy expressed Pakistan's commitment to ongoing discussions with Afghanistan and assured that efforts were underway to address existing challenges and achieve positive outcomes.



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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



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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Bomb Disposal.....15
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TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

CCP to begin negotiation with Russian market regulator

Both CCP and FAS recognize the importance of promoting fair competition, enhancing market efficiency, and safeguarding consumer welfare. The proposed MoU aims to establish a framework for bilateral relations based on principles of equality and mutual benefit

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) begins negotiations with the Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS) of the Russian Federation for bilateral cooperation. The Federal Government has approved the commencement of negotiations. Under the leadership of Dr Kabir Ahmed Sidhu, the CCP has intensi-

fied its efforts to forge partnerships with key regulatory bodies worldwide. This initiative is aimed at enhancing CCP's international standing, with a particular focus on improving its current rating of three stars out of five. The FAS is at the forefront of implementing a robust digital agenda. Russia has enacted legislation to facilitate the digitalization of the economy. Pakistan stands to gain valuable insights and exper-

tise from the Russian experience in this regard. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Russian regulator is expected to facilitate capacity building for CCP, especially in the realm of digitalization. The collaboration will also pave the way for joint research projects in crucial enforcement areas, which will further strengthen CCP's enforcement capabilities. Both CCP and FAS recognize the

importance of promoting fair competition, enhancing market efficiency, and safeguarding consumer welfare. The proposed MoU aims to establish a framework for bilateral relations based on principles of equality and mutual benefit. By partnering with FAS, CCP aims to gain valuable insights into emerging challenges such as digital markets and cross-border cartelization. This collaboration will also help in eliminating entry barriers and ad-

ressing anti-competitive practices, thereby creating opportunities for Russian companies to invest in Pakistan and contribute to the development of various markets in the country. Overall, the collaboration between CCP and FAS aligns with CCP's broader objectives of enhancing its international presence and promoting a positive perception of Pakistan on the global stage as an attractive marketplace for investors.



Children at play in G-8 Park, Islamabad, are facing disappointment as a significant portion of the park's swings and other infrastructures have fallen into disrepair. The residents of the area are now urgently calling upon the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to take immediate action and restore the park equipment to its former glory.—DNA

AIOU organizes first Alumni homecoming

Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood said that AIOU has completed 50 years of its establishment and around 50 lac students have graduated in this period

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) hosted an inaugural alumni homecoming ceremony and dinner during which former students reconnected with fellows. The event was graced by distinguished guests, including renowned Urdu poet Iftikhar Arif, prominent columnist and analyst Muhammad Izzat ul Haq, Director General of Pakistan Institute of Education Dr. Shahid Soroya, Chairperson of Pakistan Academy of Literature Dr. Najeeba Arif, and Vice-Chancellor of Health Service Academy (NIH) Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan. The alumni participants at the event included Lt. Gen. Asif Mumtaz Sukhera, Executive Director of National Language Promotion Department, Dr. Rashid Hameed, renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Afzal Bashir, Syed Mohsin Ali Shah, Dr. Zahid Majeed (AIOU), Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Chaudhry (AIOU), and others. The Director of Student Advisory and Counselling Services

(DSA&CS), AIOU, organized this homecoming event. Vice Chancellor, alumni and other participants congratulated the Director, DSA&CS, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali, and his team for the excellent arrangements. The AIOU alumni expressed their gratitude to the Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, for providing them with an opportunity to come together and reminisce about old memories and the time they spent at AIOU. They acknowledged that the university played a vital role in their lives and that they consider themselves to be family members of AIOU. The alumni vowed to always be there to contribute to the prosperity and progress of the University. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood said that AIOU has completed 50 years of its establishment and around 50 lac students have graduated in this period. "The alumni are our proud and they are playing their full role for the development and betterment of the country", he said.



Iftikhar Arif while congratulating on the 50th anniversary of AIOU said that he had been associated with the university as a member of the executive council. He said that the educational services of this university are commendable. Iftikhar Arif also recited his ghazals and a few stanzas from his poetry. Muhammad Izzat ul Haq said that the alumni of AIOU are lucky that they can come to their alma mater. "I am a graduate of Dhaka University where I am unable to go", he said. Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, Dean, Faculty of Sciences, Prof. Dr. Hajra Ahmed, Dr. Tahira Bibi and Director Student Affairs, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali also spoke at the event.

APBF asks new govt to encompass long-term vision

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has asked the new government that its strategies should not only focus on short-term gains but also encompass a long-term vision for sustained progress. He emphasized that such transparency from the government is crucial for instilling confidence in the business community and investors. The APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed that the country has had trouble raising enough money to cover its expenses. Due to the low tax-to-GDP ratio, borrowing and outside help are heavily relied upon to close the fiscal imbalance. There is

a recurring budget deficit because the government spends more than it takes in. The national debt burden has risen, as a result, needing substantial financial resources for debt repayment. Both internal and external debt in Pakistan has been constantly rising. He called upon the newly-elected government to announce clear and robust economic strategies, as the country has stuck in low economic growth situation, where double-digit policy rate for the last few years has diminished capacity to increase domestic production, and exports, negatively impacting domestic resource mobilization. The APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi said that the new government that comes into office will have

its work sharply cut out as far as the economic challenges are concerned. Coming at the back of fast-unfolding climate change crisis and recent Covid pandemic that pushed millions into poverty with little fiscal capacity of government to provide anywhere near close to what was needed in stimulus spending. Then there is acute debt distress, and seriously high inflation at the back of global aggregate supply shock, and accentuated by a world of rising conflicts, mainly in Ukraine, and the Middle East. Ibrahim Qureshi said that even though Pakistan's economic crisis in 2022-2023 is a recurring factor in the country's political unrest, it has a history of ignoring the nation's true issues, which

include poor governance, a broken judicial system, outdated laws, complicated tax system, lack of transparency, duplication in the government system, ineffective bureaucracy, improper use of our human, natural and water resources, lack of efficient local government, inadequate data for country's planning, and the consistent flaws in policies in execution by the government departments. Pakistan's GDP growth rate has always remained below its potential despite efforts to boost economic growth. The APBF President said that the development of important sectors and investment prospects was hampered by inadequate revenue collection, structural problems, and governance issues.

Kyrgyz Honorary Consul's office opens in Lahore

ISLAMABAD: Kyrgyz Ambassador Ulanbek Totuaev inaugurated the newly established office of the Honorary Consul of Kyrgyzstan here on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that it signifies a pivotal step towards bolstering bilateral trade between the two countries. "Situated in Lahore, a bustling economic hub in Pakistan, this initiative aims to facilitate and cater to the needs of traders from either sides", he remarked. Congratulating the newly appointed honorary Consul of Kyrgyzstan in Lahore, Meher Kashif Younis, he added, the Consul office will serve as a diplomatic liaison, promoting ties and cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan. "It will provide essential consular services including visa facilitation, legal assistance, and support for exchange of trade and educational delegations," he mentioned. Honorary Consul Meher Kashif Younis, who is also the Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House (KTH), said that he would provide a platform for showcasing Kyrgyzstani products and connecting Kyrgyzstani businesses with potential partners and investors in Lahore and across Pakistan. This office, he said, would help enhance accessibility to Kyrgyzstani goods and promotes trade relationships. "The strategic location of Lahore and the cultural affinity between the two countries, this collaboration holds immense potential for mutually beneficial trade opportunities and further strengthening the ties between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan," he observed. Later, the Ambassador Ulanbek Totuaev handed over Meher Kashif Younis the letter of permission to operate the honorary consulate in Lahore including the territory of Punjab. He also visited different sections of the consulate and expressed satisfaction.—DNA

Call to reform tax system

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ferozpur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has warned the high cost of doing business has been hurting the economic growth, as the inflation rate bounced back, hurting the trade and industry the most, who faced the brunt of a staggering increase in gas prices. The FRIA senior vice chairman Shahbaz Aslam said that the failure to reform the tax system is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government. Shahbaz Aslam said that the most serious threat to the economy in the current fiscal year would be inflation, because it is already hitting economy due to continuous rise in oil prices and depreciation of local currency. Quoting the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, he said that the Consumer Price Index surged to 29.2 percent last month compared to a year ago.

Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat: A Pillar of Administrative Justice in Pakistan

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI



On January 24, 1983, the Wafaqi Mohtasib, a federal ombudsman institution, was established in Pakistan through a Presidential Order. Since its inception, the institution has played a crucial role in providing administrative justice to the people, in line

with the constitutional provisions outlined in Article 37(d). The Wafaqi Mohtasib was established with clear objectives aimed at diagnosing, investigating, redressing, and rectifying injustices resulting from maladministration. The institution serves as a watchdog, undertaking investigations into allegations of maladministration against government agencies and their officials. Additionally, it aims to provide speedy relief to citizens by addressing their grievances promptly, contributing to the promotion of good governance. The Wafaqi Mohtasib may also conduct studies to identify the root causes of corrupt practices and injustices, recommending steps for their eradication. Maladministration and bad governance are intricately linked, thriving in environments marked by favoritism, discrimination, and corruption. The President's

Order defines maladministration as actions contrary to law, rules, or regulations, departure from established practices, and decisions based on irrelevant grounds. Addressing maladministration becomes crucial for upholding human rights, achieving good governance, and establishing the rule of law. The Wafaqi Mohtasib has shown remarkable performance in handling public complaints. In 2023 alone, the institution received and processed a record 194,106 complaints, with 193,030 being successfully disposed of, marking an 18% increase from the previous year. The implementation rate of decisions reached an impressive 85.4%, with relief granted to complainants amounting to Rs. 4.898 billion. The availability of options for review or representation ensures transparency and accountability in the resolution process. To extend

its reach, the Wafaqi Mohtasib has established Regional Offices and Complaint Collection Centres across the country. Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR) mechanisms, Khuli Katcheries (Open Katcheries) systems, and the use of Information Technology have been employed to provide speedy redressal of complaints, especially in remote areas. The introduction of the Integrated Complaint Resolution (ICR) system and the emphasis on online hearings further demonstrate the institution's commitment to leveraging technology for efficient complaint resolution. Recognizing the significant contributions of overseas Pakistanis, the Wafaqi Mohtasib has dedicated resources to address their concerns. One Window Facilitation Desks (OWFDs) at international airports and a Grievance Commissioner for Overseas Pakistanis

ensure responsive services for the diaspora. The institution also focuses on the welfare of children, with a dedicated helpline and initiatives like the Zaimab Alert Response and Recovery Act 2020. In 2018, the Supreme Court entrusted Wafaqi Mohtasib with studying the country's criminal justice system and suggesting reforms. The subsequent Committee's recommendations included measures to improve prison conditions, online meetings for prisoners, and better facilities for their health and education. Quarterly progress reports submitted to the Supreme Court highlight ongoing efforts to implement these reforms. In line with its mandate, the Wafaqi Mohtasib conducts studies on systemic issues, contributing valuable insights to improve service delivery in various sectors. Independent professionals and experts prepare these studies, and recom-

mendations are forwarded to relevant ministries for implementation. The ongoing study, "Objective Assessment of the Working of Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat," reflects the institution's commitment to continuous improvement. The Wafaqi Mohtasib, as the first ombudsman institution in Pakistan, has played a pivotal role in providing administrative justice, upholding human rights, and promoting good governance. Through its multifaceted approach, the institution has successfully addressed maladministration, streamlined complaint resolution processes, and embraced technology to enhance accessibility. Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi, as Wafaqi Mohtasib, and his dedicated team have contributed significantly to the prominence and international recognition of the institution, ensuring that it continues to serve as a beacon for administrative accountability and justice in the country.

Briefs

PTCL group steps up as Gwadar battles floods

DNA

ISLAMABAD - In response to the devastating floods sweeping through Gwadar, Pakistan's largest telecommunications and integrated ICT services provider, PTCL Group joined forces with Pakistan Red Crescent (PRC) to provide essential relief and deliver up to 30,000 liters of clean drinking water every day for a month to the affected communities. Torrential rains have plunged Gwadar into chaos, displacing families and leaving them desperately short of necessities, with clean water being the most pressing concern. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, PTCL Group and PRC have stepped up to ensure a steady supply of clean drinking water is delivered directly to those reeling from the disaster. Commenting on the effort, Atif Raza, Chief Marketing Officer, PTCL & Ufone 4G, said, "Access to clean water is indeed a fundamental human right, crucial for survival. PTCL Group, in collaboration with Pakistan Red Crescent, is acutely aware of this pressing need. Our joint efforts are dedicated to delivering clean drinking water to thousands of affected families in Gwadar. Recognizing the indispensable role water plays in sustaining life, we tirelessly work towards ensuring impacted communities have unfettered access to this vital resource. Together, we are dedicated to creating a positive impact in the lives of those who are in need." In the forefront of disaster response efforts, PTCL Group exemplifies a commitment to aiding the affected community in Gwadar. Beyond the provision of clean drinking water, earlier Ufone 4G had extended a helping hand by offering 70 free minutes for calls over 7 days so that the affected communities can stay connected and reach out to the relief organizations. By enabling individuals to stay connected with their loved ones in times of distress, the Group stands as a beacon of support and resilience in the face of adversity.—DNA

Traditional Chinese culture to tap international market

ISLAMABAD: "We will bring more products of traditional Chinese culture to the world!" said Jin Ruirui, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), and a Yi embroidery inheritor, in an interview with China Economic Net. Yi embroidery is a form of intangible cultural heritage that has a long history and rich culture. It is a folk art that uses needles and colored thread to decorate fabric with various patterns and symbols. After graduation from college, Jin came back to her hometown and set up her own Yi embroidery company, hoping to help more local embroiderers who know well about the culture employed, empowering rural women and revitalizing the countryside. With a history of more than 1,700 years, Yi embroidery is the "fingertip art" that the Yi people are proud of. Jin Ruirui told China Economic Net that last year she was very honored to participate in the Milan Fashion Week in Italy, and took her embroidery to the international stage. "It was my very first time going abroad!" She smiled, adding that she felt very proud to see Yi embroidery, which has been inherited for more than 1,700 years, go global. Jin noted said that many foreigners are quite interested in Yi embroidery and other Chinese intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, how to turn such culture into something enchanting enough that overseas customers would like to buy remains a question worth thinking about. Returning home, she focused more on inheriting and innovating Yi embroidery culture, and exploring more products that could integrate with the international market. "That trip did open my mind," Jin said that she was impressed by the love that the international friends showed for Chinese culture.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Guests posing for a picture on the occasion of the Army Day of Nepal, held at Islamabad Serena Hotel.—DNA

Deputy Commissioner presides Peace Committee meeting

ATTOCK: The Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif Raza has said on Saturday that the month of Ramadan teaches us the lesson of peace, tolerance and sacrifice, by following which we can achieve success in this world and the hereafter. He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting of the District Peace Committee. The meeting was attended by District Police Officer Attock Dr. Ghiyas Gul Khan, members of Peace Committee and others were also present on this occasion.

Deputy Commissioner and District Police Officer (DPO) briefed the peace committee members about the measures to be taken in Ramadan. As per reported by our district representative faisal munir that The Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif said that all municipal and other public services will be provided in Attock district during Ramadan. Strong security measures have been taken for all religious gatherings during Ramadan. The members of the District Peace Committee assured the district administration officers of their full cooperation to maintain religious harmony in the holy month of Ramadan. DCO said that consolidated harmony is needed among all sects to ensure a peaceful Month of Ramadan in the district. He said religious unity is the essence of our religion and under current scenario it is the need of the time to maintain complete religious synchronization that will send a message to all that muslim community is united and strong. He further said that in Month of Ramadan to facilitate all pray mosques a comprehensive plan has been chalked out by all tehsil administrations that will also be implemented in letter and spirit.—APP

BMP calls for promoting industry, lowering production cost

Anjum Nisar says business community facing tough challenges because of limited business

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FPCCI) Businessmen Panel (BMP) has said that business community has been facing tough challenges because of limited business. In this context, he sought attention of the government for formulation of regional, provincial and central level task force, and formulation of sector wise regional policies which would help the government address the problems confronted by exporters. The FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian An-

jum Nisar called for promoting industrialisation and enhancing exports through lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch and relaxing import policy for industrial raw material. He suggested that One Window Operation should be introduced for the replacing the lengthy procedures that involve interaction of manufacturers with various agencies. The government agencies were harassing the textile industry every day. Social Security, EOBI and other taxes should be merged and deducted at the source. Mian Anjum Nisar asked the government to appreciate the role of industry for its potential to harvest maximum benefits, providing mass employ-

ment to the jobless population of the country. He also sought government's attention for formulating aggressive marketing plan and hurdle-free policies as well as urgent decisions in favour of exports while taking on board major stakeholders. He called for concerted efforts for exploring new markets both traditional and non-traditional in order to introduce home made products. He urged the government to announce favourable policies and allow duty-free import of raw material and accessories. This move will attract investors and help in setting up new industries in the country which will create wide opportunities for employment. We direly need a stimulus

economic plan coupled with relief package by the government to maximise production. He also emphasized the need for seeking technical knowhow from China and other countries for the sake of innovation, and improvement of products. The BMP chairman said the sustainable solution to Pakistan's problems lies in reforms, as we can see very large inefficiencies in tax collection. So, the tax compliance must be improved and tax base be broadened. This cannot be achieved with a single policy change, but by a systemic approach, he added. He observed the government preferred direct taxation to meet revenue shortfall as opposed to re-sorting to increasing indirect taxes because direct taxes

tend to be more progressive in nature; therefore, the burden on the lower income strata of the population is lesser. He emphasised that concentrating on import substitution is imperative to narrow import bills and certain imported products such as oil are of a fixed nature; therefore, the government needs to enhance focus on import substitution industries, as chemicals, agriculture and steel are potential industries. He said that undertaking structural reforms require political will. He said that enacting structural reforms, such as improvements in tax collection system, bureaucracy and ease of doing business requires major political will and strict implementation of policies, he added.

'New quality productivity forces' inspiring for BRI

This sends a positive signal to China's international partners such as Pakistan." Mian Abrar added

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "New Quality Productive Forces" have emerged as a central focus for Chinese delegates and members during the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's national legislature. Chinese society as a whole is mobilizing to prioritize high-quality development, emphasizing the need to intensify innovation, nurture emerging industries, adopt forward-thinking strategies for developing future-oriented sectors, and enhance the modernized industrial system. "In the midst of the country's accelerated efforts to foster new growth drivers and promote high-quality development, developing "New

Quality Productive Forces" is the way forward. I believe this is a path that not only China but also the rest of the world should follow," said Pakistani scholar Mian Abrar, in an interview with China Economic Net. As collaboration between China and Pakistan penetrates various sectors of development in Pakistan, including infrastructure, agriculture, energy, space science, and artificial intelligence research and development, keeping a close eye on the Chinese Two Sessions and conducting corresponding policy research has long been a norm among scholars and elites, including Mian Abrar. "I think the core structures for future development remain modernized industrial systems. The new concept emphasizes that innovation

must lead the way in cultivating new quality productive forces, as advanced productivity moves away from traditional economic growth models and paths of productivity development. It is characterized by high technology, high efficiency, and high quality, aligning with the new development philosophy," remarked Mian Abrar. "It is worth noting that the development of new quality productive forces does not entail neglecting or abandoning traditional industries; rather, it involves pragmatically leveraging local realities, tailoring initiatives to suit regional resources, industrial foundations, and research capabilities in China. This careful promotion of new industries, models, and drivers holds significant guidance for the joint building of

the Belt and Road Initiative. Countries along the Belt and Road, including Pakistan, should, based on their own national conditions, choose the most suitable path for their development," he added. "The development of 'New Quality Productive Forces' proposed in China also entails discourse on China's international cooperation, emphasizing proactive alignment with high-standard international economic and trade norms, steadily expanding institutional openness, enhancing the linkage between China's domestic and international markets, and consolidating the foundation of foreign trade and investment. This sends a positive signal to China's international partners such as Pakistan." Mian Abrar added.

PIAF vows to resolve business matters

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chief Fahimur Rahman Sehgal, in the lead of Pattern-in-Chief Mian Anjum Nisar, along with former Chairmen Muhammad Ali Mian and Mian Abuzar Shad, Senior Vice President Lahore Chamber,

Chaudhry Zafar, PIAF members, Malik Khalid, Sheikh Sajjad Afsil, Shaban Akhtar, Umar Sarfaraz, Ahsan Shahid, Ashfaq Ahmed and market officials visited the main commercial centers of Lahore, including Baden Road, Cooper Road and adjacent markets, and held meetings with the officials of the organizations. Addressing the meeting, PIAF chairman

Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol called for taking all steps to ensure a business and investment-friendly environment as it was imperative for economic progress and prosperity of the country. Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol observed that in view of achieving economic growth through consistency in policies, the government will have to take solid measures to strengthen the trade and industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small businesses. Mian Anjum Nisar, on this occasion, observed that the successive governments should pursue the same set of objectives.

Cross-Border E-commerce development urged

DNA

ISLAMABAD "Hong Kong, with its status as a free port and one of the world's most liberal economies, offers significant advantages for cross-border e-commerce development," stated Choi Koonshum, a committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and Chairman of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Entrepreneurs Alliance. During this year's Two Sessions, the National People's Congress (NPC) and the CPPCC, multiple Hong Kong CPPCC members expressed their support for leveraging the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, particularly Hong Kong's foreign trade advantages, to boost cross-border e-commerce development in China, China Economic Net reported. The goal is to enhance the regional economy and increase

international competitiveness. "Although China has strongly supported e-commerce development and the industry has demonstrated strong resilience, cross-border e-commerce still faces certain challenges." Choi Koonshum highlighted the restrictions faced by cross-border e-commerce in mainland China, such as taxation, logistics and consulting service limitations. In a proposal submitted during the Two Sessions, Choi Koonshum suggested policy support to encourage e-commerce platforms to establish overseas warehouses in Hong Kong. "Establishing overseas warehouses in Hong Kong would enable mainland businesses to handle goods-related issues more smoothly, eliminating the cumbersome process of returning them to mainland China. Hong Kong serves as a convenient transit point for both import and export activities, provid-

ing efficient solutions for logistical challenges. Additionally, the option of legal arbitration in Hong Kong adds to its convenience in resolving disputes," added Choi Koonshum. Lam King-nok, a CPPCC member and Chairman of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, also proposed further promoting cross-border e-commerce cooperation between Hong Kong and mainland China. According to the China E-commerce Report (2022), China's e-commerce transaction volume reached 43.8 trillion yuan in 2022, with a year-on-year growth rate of 3.5%. Online retail sales accounted for nearly 14 trillion yuan, growing at a rate of 4.0%. Cross-border e-commerce imports exceeded 550 billion yuan, accounting for nearly 30% of overall imported consumer goods. Lam King-nok stated, "The retail market in mainland China is enormous, and the development of e-com-

merce is fairly mature. Currently, cross-border e-commerce has become one of the crucial channels for imported consumer goods in mainland China, and the Hong Kong business community is actively engaging in e-commerce operations, striving to expand their market presence." To strengthen cooperation between Hong Kong and mainland China in the e-commerce sector, Lam King-nok proposed expanding the coverage of the national cross-border e-commerce retail import goods list. He also recommended improving port inspection facilities, enhancing interconnectivity, and developing electronic port infrastructure to alleviate the high costs of cross-border logistics. "Hong Kong serves as a crucial node in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative and can play a pivotal role as a super connector in the development of Silk Road e-commerce," suggested Lam King-nok.



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Axis of Resistance

IN the case of Lebanon and the building of the resistance, Chairman Mao's statement took on a literal meaning, despite the nominal anti-communism of many Islamic groups. After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the collective decision to bring Iranian aid to Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, the Pasdaran (Iranian Revolution Guard Corps as they are more popularly known) arrived and began to integrate themselves into the slow, pastoral life of the Bekaa Valley and idyllic pastures of southern Lebanon. According to Daher: During the first half of the 1980s the Pasdaran were thus seen working on the land alongside the peasants and field workers of the north Bekaa, sowing, reaping, and helping farmers raise cattle and sheep...it was not so much that revolutionary Islam was broadcast in the mosques but rather that it demonstrated in the fields, by fighters with rolled up sleeves and scythes in hand, illustrating the theory with hands-on practice. This collective action and work crystallized in Imam Khomeini's advice that although the original members of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon (IRL) might not see the fruits of their labor in their lifetimes, that 'what matters is to work'. While the late 1980s up until the present have shown the military prowess of Hezbollah and the IRL, defeating the Zionists in 2000 and 2006, it is again their social services which bring the masses to support them thoroughly. Between 2000 and 2008, the Jihad al Bina (Developmental Association for the Construction Effort) trained over 50 paramedics, 40 electricians, and 42 carpenters. They have also rebuilt houses demolished by the Zionist military, especially those housing families of martyrs. There is no evidence that Hamas or the other Islamic charities provide assistance conditional upon political or religious support. Charity aid and zakat donations are preferentially distributed to widows, female-headed households or families of slain martyrs, as well as to orphaned children. In depth studies bear out the efficiency and professionalism in the service delivery of Islamic charities. Much like Hezbollah, Hamas focuses their aid to the families of the martyrs as well as orphaned children. It is because of this that Hamas gained so much support, not only in the 2006 electoral victory but also in the present where Hamas is still seen as incorruptible when compared to the Palestinian Authority. The poll taken last December by the PCPSR revealed that 72% of Palestinians are happy with the role of Hamas in Palestine. As I stated above, scoring military victories cannot be the only reason for this. That is because it has taken years and years for Hamas to achieve the military prowess they have today, but in the interim they have provided social services to the Palestinian people which are desperately needed after years of blockade. This makes the Zionist desire to 'destroy Hamas' as a signal of 'victory' all the more untenable. The only way to 'destroy Hamas' is to entirely depopulate Gaza, which is the genocidal intent of the Zionist regime. Another claim by the Zionists is that of mass rapes by Hamas on October 7th and the accusation of maltreatment of POWs. Evidence came late last year when 'Israeli' captives were released in a prisoner swap and those same 'Israelis' commended the Islamic Resistance for treating them well and providing them with food and medicine. It is in fact the Zionists who are killing their own citizens, abusing and torturing Palestinian prisoners, and making our noble Palestinian women (and men) endure sexual violence.

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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



The Zionist propaganda

EUROPEAN sensibilities have made many of us distinguish between Jewish people and Zionists, even though, since the late 1940s, most Jewish Europeans have probably come to support the Jewish colony in Palestine. In 2024 that may be changing. How different was the situation in the Arab world, where had been no systematic persecution of Jewish people and, on the contrary, in places like Iraq, a long history of peaceful religious co-existence. However, after the Second World War, an alliance of British and French governments, with the European Zionists, drove a mass migration of European Jews to Palestine. At first presenting themselves as refugees, the Zionists soon enforced their British-backed claim to large parts of Palestine, saying that these lands 'belong to the Jews'. Those claims were not limited to Palestine, as Herzl's ideas of a 'Greater Israel' stretched 'From the Brook of Egypt [the Nile] to the Euphrates.' 'The Jews' is how the Zionists presented themselves to the indigenous Arab peoples of the region. At the time of writing, the Israeli regime not only occupied all of historic Palestine and parts of Lebanon and Syria but also Yemen's Socotra Island. It should be obvious that the Yemenis are referring to the Jewish colonists, against whom they now (early 2024) wage war and enforce a naval blockade, to defend the Arab people of Gaza and Palestine. In this tradition, the Israeli colonists, themselves the purveyors of deep racism against the indigenous Arab peoples, have tried to 'weaponise' accusations of anti-Jewish prejudice as a shield against critics of the Jewish colony. Yet the accusation of 'anti-Semitism', which Zionists launch against virtually any critic of Israeli crimes, has a very different meaning amongst Europeans and Arabs. For Europeans, it means a sort of anti-Jewish prejudice which might be linked to the racist crimes of European regimes. For Arabs, or peoples of West Asia, it is an inconsequential slogan meant to justify colonial privilege. Are many Arabs prejudiced against Jewish people? No doubt, but that prejudice has its basis in colonial violence. This 'antisemitism' may be a prejudice, but it is subaltern prejudice founded in colonial subjugation and aimed at those practicing colonial violence, as UN expert Francesca Albanese said of the resistance violence of 7 October 2023, cited at the top of this article. It has no real link to the historic European crimes. Attacking prejudice against Jewish people in the Palestinian and Arab context is like attacking other forms of indigenous prejudice against Europeans and white people. Such verbal attacks have little substance and only serve to cover up the substantial racism of the colonists. Let us also consider for a moment that the term anti-Semitism itself is Euro-centric. Jewish Europeans were presented by racial theorists as outsiders with some links to the 'Middle East', a fiction which the Zionists came to adopt. In reality, Semitic peoples are those of several language groups in West Asia and North Africa (MENA), principally Arabic and Amharic, but also Hebrew (an ancient language resurrected for the Jewish colony). In the MENA context then, the accusation of anti-Semitism against Arabs (themselves Semites) is a nonsense. The ready labeling of any criticism of the Israeli colony as 'anti-Semitic' was called a "trick" by former Israeli government minister Shulamit Aloni. "Anti-Semitism is a trick. We always use it." It is a trick into which a great deal of effort has been invested.

President Elect Asif Ali Zardari as I know him...

Qamar Bashir



Additionally, the government prioritized women's empowerment through various schemes and legislation, including anti-harassment laws. Notably, Pakistani media enjoyed freedom of speech, enabling them to critique government officials and ministers, thereby amplifying the voices of the general public. One of the notable achievements of the PPP was its commitment to empowering women and protecting their rights. The government resumed trade union activities and ensured their security. Industrial workers were incentivized with 500,000 shares to boost productivity. Additionally, the implementation of the Benazir Tractor Scheme provided affordable tractors to impoverished villagers...

PRESIDENT-ELECT Asif Ali Zardari has secured a significant mandate from both provincial and national assemblies, excluding the KP assembly, which is a comprehensible outcome. However, his forthcoming tenure may differ substantially from his previous stint, characterized by extensive executive authority, especially with his close ally, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, as Prime Minister. With Shahbaz Sharif assuming the role of Prime Minister this time, Zardari may encounter a different dynamic in the presidency, notwithstanding the lavish privileges inherent to the position. The President House, although unassuming from its exterior, sprawls over an area equivalent to an entire sector of Islamabad. It encompasses official residences for staff, stables, military accommodations, a swimming pool, gym, car workshop, and expansive lawns. Manned by thousands of full-time and support staff, it provides logistical support to the President from all branches of the armed forces, including dedicated aircraft, helicopters and boats and a dedicated security division. The President, as the supreme commander of armed forces, enjoys extensive logistical backing and protocol assistance, with the Office divided into Public and Personal sides, each overseen by senior officials. During my tenure in the Information Ministry, I held the position of Director Media under President Asif Ali Zardari from January 2013, and later served as Press Secretary and Media Advisor to President Alvi from May 30th, 2022. Working closely with President Zardari alongside Mr. Farhat Babar, the media advisor at the time, provided me with firsthand insight into Zardari's political acumen. In comparison, President Alvi, unlike Zardari, demonstrated a different approach, highlighting distinct political styles between the two leaders. Asif Ali Zardari possessed a remarkable knack for garnering loyalty through genuine connection rather than coercion. His talent lay in winning over individuals by earning their trust and respect. Zardari demonstrated a keen eye for selecting top-tier bureaucrats like Salman Farooqi, among others, who remained steadfast in their service to him. Their dedication played a pivotal role in infusing quality and depth into his decision-making process. Zardari fostered an atmosphere of open dialogue and mutual regard within his team, actively seeking their input on policy matters. He valued their expertise and provided clear direction, effectively leveraging their insights for effective policy implementation. During Yousaf Raza Gilani's tenure as Prime Minister under President Asif Ali Zardari, the presidency wielded extensive control over the government. Nearly every decision, regardless of its magnitude, required presidential approval. Asif Ali Zardari's official routine typically commenced around 1 pm and concluded by 5 pm on regular days. During the initial working hour dedicated to official matters, Mr. Salman Farooque and the military secretary would

handle official business. By 5 pm, Zardari would retreat to his residence, situated just a few yards away from his office within the President's House. There, he would often meet with workers, delegations, and party leaders. However, his engagements with close political colleagues and leaders often extended late into the night, with Zardari usually retiring to bed in the early hours of the following morning. Despite being perceived as not entirely free from corruption, Asif Ali Zardari consistently seized every opportunity during public and official meetings at the Presidency to address the dire living conditions of the most impoverished. Whether engaging with politicians, bureaucrats, or delegations from civil society, he never missed a chance to advocate for the amelioration of the plight of the poorest of the poor. This mindset was the primary impetus behind the establishment of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) in 2008, which has since become Pakistan's leading social safety net initiative. Designed to alleviate poverty and uplift marginalized communities, particularly focusing on empowering women, who disproportionately face economic challenges, BISP targets impoverished households. Through cash transfers, the program provides a vital lifeline to beneficiary families, enabling them to meet fundamental needs such as food, healthcare, and education expenses. Additionally, BISP offers opportunities for skills development, vocational training, and access to microfinance, further enhancing its impact on poverty reduction and socioeconomic empowerment. His people-oriented approach was evident in the PPP government's divergence from completing the IMF program, as it resisted implementing the IMF's stringent demands, such as subsidy cuts. Instead, it allocated Rs. 70 billion to support over 7.5 million needy families through the Benazir Income Support Program. Furthermore, the government raised government officials' wages by up to 158%, maintained utility prices at affordable levels, refrained from imposing harsh taxes on the populace, and reinstated thousands of dismissed government workers. Additionally, the government prioritized women's empowerment through various schemes and legislation, including anti-harassment laws. Notably, Pakistani media enjoyed freedom of speech, enabling them to critique government officials and ministers, thereby amplifying the voices of the general public. One of the notable achievements of the PPP was its commitment to empowering women and protecting their rights. The government resumed trade union activities and ensured their security. Industrial workers were incentivized with 500,000 shares to boost productivity. Additionally, the implementation of the Benazir Tractor Scheme provided affordable tractors to impoverished villagers, revitalizing Pakistan's struggling primary sector. This initiative reportedly led to a remarkable surge in the rural economy, from 50 billion rupees

in 2008 to 800 billion rupees by 2013. During his presidency, despite facing numerous political challenges, Asif Ali Zardari achieved significant legislative milestones. The reinstatement of the 1973 constitution and the enactment of the 18th, 19th, and 20th amendments marked key developments that granted provincial autonomy and fortified democratic institutions. Initially, the full impact of the 18th amendment may not have been fully grasped by political elements or the establishment. However, it became apparent later that by enacting this amendment, Zardari had consolidated power not only for himself but also for his family, particularly in Sindh. As other politicians and the establishment belatedly realized the implications, it was already too late, as the center had ceded control to the provinces, notably benefiting Sindh and diminishing the influence of Punjab and the establishment. With remarkable foresight, Asif Ali Zardari transferred significant presidential powers to parliament, effectively curbing the president's ability to dismiss governments and dissolve assemblies. This move closed the door on unilateral actions by the president to remove elected governments. Additionally, he streamlined the process for appointing caretaker governments and granted greater autonomy to the Election Commission of Pakistan, further strengthening democratic processes and institutions. In the final days of his presidency, Asif Ali Zardari visited Iran and signed an agreement to bring cost-effective gas to Pakistan through the Pak-Iran gas pipeline, despite opposition from the US and the West. He defended his actions by highlighting the unfairness of their reluctance to invest in Pakistan while discouraging trade and investment from China and Iran. Zardari also signed an agreement with China and entrusted the Gwadar Port to them, a move made after Singapore failed to deliver desired outcomes. Even though President-elect Asif Ali Zardari may not wield the same level of power as he did during his previous tenure, his position as the figurehead of the government, judiciary, parliament, and supreme commander of the armed forces still holds significant influence. With this authority, he stands in a strong position to further solidify PPP's dominant control over Sindh, while also potentially expanding political influence into Punjab, Balochistan and KP provinces. Moreover, his presidency could pave the way for a future ascension to the premiership by his political heir Bilawal Bhutto and Asifa Bhutto, particularly if current Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif fails to deliver, or in the aftermath of the next general elections. Zardari's return to power carries the potential for far-reaching impact and strategic maneuvering within Pakistan's political landscape.

— Former Press Secretary to the President
Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRBC

External perceptions of next US presidential election

Dr. Theodore karasik

The international scene is no less divisive for the US presidential election. A major war in Europe and the tragedy of Palestine and Israel means that US domestic issues will become highly inflamed via rhetoric and information warfare. American universities are exploding from the hatred that is rising, affecting the quality of the education received. Universities today are not learning environments but incubators of narrative hatred

THERE is no doubt that foreign observers are looking at the US and wondering what will come next. On the foreign front, both Russia and Gaza are key vectors of further international attention. Having just completed Super Tuesday, the US is moving toward its presidential election in November 2024. What type of America will international observers see, as both foreign policy challenges and internal discontent and political jockeying continue? First, a quick notation: Although a new Trump administration is a possibility, there are still many legal steps that could derail former President Donald Trump's candidacy, but not stop his political machine or base from operating. So, the prospect of President Joe Biden winning also brings with it many pros and cons. Both leaders are seen as being at a unique stage of their older life. Some in Washington feel that at the end of the day Biden and the Democrats will win because of Trump's criminal convictions and doubts over his financial affairs. To be sure, outside observers see American society is divided across a number of different planes that are becoming more complex and creating very sharp divisions. Never has there been such breakdown in family and personal relationships, especially between generations. Polarization runs rampant in the halls of the US Congress all the way down to what's left of the family dinner table. Four years ago, in the run-up to the presidential election, there were predictions of major problems on a US local or regional level. Trump-era laws help to complicate local politics, such as abortion, in the US, and the current administration seems to counterbalance

gender identity and, consequently, there are urban and state divides over halting current trend lines in these two issues and others. Here polarization takes a whole new level of stress as a factor in the inability to communicate on key policy questions. Issues regarding Texas stand as a case in point. Many outside observers view this behavior as "strange" for America. The international scene is no less divisive for the US presidential election. A major war in Europe and the tragedy of Palestine and Israel means that US domestic issues will become highly inflamed via rhetoric and information warfare. American universities are exploding from the hatred that is rising, affecting the quality of the education received. Universities today are not learning environments but incubators of narrative hatred. We are seeing now in universities and in workplaces across the US greater divisions leading to major lawsuits, and dismissals of university personnel and suspension of students. Naturally, many are looking at the possibility of Trump returning to office based on the fact that Biden has fudged America's foreign policy to the point of failure at a key moment in regional history in the Middle East. Outside observers note this moment frequently in their analyses, and many different actors are expanding their influence, such as Iran. Concepts such as strategic failure begin to arise and the discourse regarding what is ongoing with America and what will come next. Consequently there are two key questions: Is a Trump administration really going to restore Washington's wrecked moral standing? Do outside observers see Trump as better suited to fix regional issues because

of previous and ongoing relationships? The answer is not easy. Policymakers and stakeholders who were observing the situation in Washington are increasingly seeing the pluses of a change in administration and would welcome it because continuation of the current phase and what comes next with both Russia and Gaza is a key determinant. On top of this break in continuity between the administrations is how the next leader will deal with accusations of human rights violations and genocide. How a new Trump administration would use this as a potential political tool is an interesting question. A rules-based order does not seem to be on the cards, so how will the International Court of Justice contend with such an America? The next administration, whether Biden or Trump, is going to have to deal with the legalities surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and radical settler actions as well as accusations against US government officials. The presidential election is also showing to the rest of the world that the US has no fresh blood for a political renewal or thinking. Many joke about the Soviet-like nature of the age of America's leaders, and they do have a point. But Trump would be more willing to use a hammer instead of Biden's light touch on major policy issues. That fact makes some foreign observers curious, and nervous, about what comes next from the US. A US election is supposed to be a renewal. Current events preclude more immediate credibility problems. What the morning of Nov. 6, 2024 brings will be seen in the following years.

— Source: Arab News

Briefs

Asif Zardari sworn in as President

FROM PAGE 01
Meanwhile, in the Sindh Assembly, he gained 53 votes while his opponent could only get three. Zardari received 43 votes in the Punjab Assembly, eight in the KP Assembly and 47 in the Balochistan Assembly while his rival bagged 18, 41 and 0, respectively. This is the second time Zardari has won the presidency. He earlier served as the 11th president of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 and has been a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan since August 2018. Born in 1955, Zardari was brought up and educated in Karachi. He was married to Pakistan's former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in December 2007.

World leaders congratulate...

FROM PAGE 01
ISLAMABAD: The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee is set to convene on Monday (today) for the holy month of Ramazan moon sighting at the office of Administrator Auqaf in Peshawar, under the chairmanship of Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khair Azad. The meeting will witness the participation of esteemed members from both Central and Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committees, including Director General Syed Mushahid Hussain Khalid from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Ghulam Murtaza from the Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, Dr Sardar Sarfaraz from the Pakistan Meteorological Department, and Zainul Abedin from the Ministry of Science and Technology.

KP CM demands judicial...

FROM PAGE 01
PTI workers from GPO Chowk as authorities deployed a heavy contingent of police on the city's Mall Road and other areas. During the protests, PTI-backed Punjab Assembly lawmakers Hafiz Farhat Abbas and Mian Haroon Akbar were also arrested by the police. PTI leaders Latif Khosa and Salman Akram Raja were also arrested in Lahore. PTI ticket holders and senior politician Javed Hashmi's son-in-law and grandson - Zahid Hashmi and Qasim Hashmi - were arrested in Multan. Whereas in Karachi, police and Sindh Rangers personnel have been deployed in front of the Korangi Deputy Commissioner's office in anticipation of protest by PTI workers.

Cabinet absence...

FROM PAGE 01
crucial economic decision-making processes, with approval for significant summits pending. Despite being elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan a week ago, the formation of a federal cabinet is still pending, leading to a delay in approving crucial summaries. Sources revealed that, after the establishment of the federal cabinet, critical economic decisions and approval of summaries will be made. Sources also revealed that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has placed conditions on sending a team, tying it to the formation of the federal cabinet.

Ukrainian army loses...

FROM PAGE 01
The Ukrainian army lost over 150 troops, two military armored combat vehicles, four cars, two D-20 howitzers, as well as a Gvozdika artillery system, the ministry said, adding that the Ukrainian army's ammunition depot has been destroyed. Operational-tactical aviation, drones, missile forces and artillery attacked the Ukrainian troops and equipment in 136 regions in the past 24 hours, Russia's Defense Ministry reported, adding that a Ukrainian brigade command post, two fuel depots and two ammunition depots were also destroyed.

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Sri Lankan High Commissioner Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne (Rtd also joined Rising Stars hockey club. He used to be a goalkeeper in the Lankan Navy team. This Saturday he joined the Club formally and had a group picture with the team. High Commissioner of Brunei and Acting Ambassador of Romania also in the picture. - DNA

IU beat MS in last ball thriller to seal spot in playoffs

Islamabad joined Multan Sultans and Peshawar Zalmi in the PSL 9 playoffs as there is just one place left with two teams, Karachi Kings and Quetta Gladiators



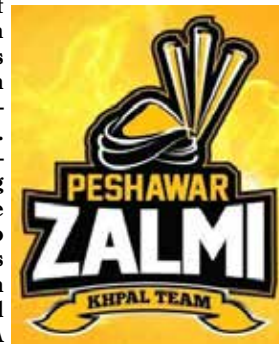
OUR CORRESPONDENTS

RAWALPINDI: Islamabad United Sunday hand table-toppers Multan Sultans a stunning three-wicket defeat to qualify for the playoffs in the 27th match of the ongoing

Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. The breathtaking encounter went to the last ball where Islamabad's Imad Wasim guided his side to a crucial win. Islamabad joined Multan Sultans and Peshawar Zalmi in the PSL

'Peshawar Zalmi has reached playoffs for ninth time'

KARACH: The Head Coach of Peshawar Zalmi Darren Sammy on Sunday said that the Peshawar Zalmi has reached the playoffs for ninth time. While talking to media persons after a practice match at the National Bank Stadium here, he said, 'We trusted the young players from the first year.' He said that the credit went to the players for consistency. Sammy said that experience had come into the team because of Babar Azam. He said, 'Babar Azam is a superstar and he always tries to learn.' The Zalmi's Head Coach said that his love for Zalmi was different and coaching was his passion. He said, 'I am here representing Peshawar and I will not say anything about the coaching of Pakistan.' He further said, 'We look forward to playing matches in Peshawar.' He said that a day would come when they would play in Peshawar and see how they were welcomed. - DNA



9 playoffs as there is just one place left with two teams, Karachi Kings and Quetta Gladiators, competing for it. Chasing the target of 229 runs, Islamabad met with early blows as two of their top-order batters, Alex Hales and Salman Ali Agha, lost their wickets within the first two overs. However, after losing two early wickets, United's skipper Shadab Khan came to bat and formed a 141-run partnership that not only brought Islamabad back into the game but put them in the driving seat. Shadab scored 54 off 31 before departing for the pavilion, leaving his side 145-3 in 12.2 overs but Colin Munro continued the charge against the opponents. Munro became Chris Jordan's victim after posting 84 runs on just 40 balls courtesy of nine fours and five sixes. Following the left-handed batter's dismissal, destructive batter Azam Khan came to bat but returned to the pavilion without scoring a single run, increasing Islamabad's worries.

UNRWA warns of 'tragic'...

FROM PAGE 01
the UNRWA said, stressing the need for humanitarian access across Gaza and an immediate ceasefire to save lives. The Israeli military has restricted the delivery of humanitarian supplies to northern Gaza for weeks, and thousands of children are going without sufficient food and medication. The United Nations has already warned that child deaths will "rapidly increase" in Gaza if humanitarian aid deliveries do not immediately increase.

JI announces million march...

FROM PAGE 01
the 27th of Ramadan to express solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine. Addressing a Gaza Solidarity March in Islamabad, JI Ameer Sirajul Haq said that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has also failed to play its due role for Palestinians and just is restricted to statements only. "Our parliament also passed ineffective resolutions and now the lawmakers don't even talk about the situation of Gaza," he added. Sirajul Haq said that millions of people would be marching towards the American embassy on the 27th of Ramadan.

Two killed, one injured in Peshawar blast

FROM PAGE 01
during the transfer of explosives. Three people were transporting the explosives of which two of them were killed in the blast and one of them sustained injuries," he said. The injured person, who is in a very critical condition, is being treated at Khyber Teaching Hospital, said spokesperson Sajjad Khan. The bodies have also been moved to the hospital. Officials of the counter-terrorism department (CTD) and rescue teams are also present to collect evidence. An investigation into the incident is taking place and the police has cordoned off the area. Board Bazar is a busy road in Peshawar where usually there is heavy traffic. However, at the time of the blast, the traffic was slow.

Ramadan moon sighted in Saudi Arabia

FROM PAGE 01
the Prophet's (PBUH) Mosque in Medina, confirmed the Ramadan crescent citing the nation's moon-sighting committee. People in Saudi Arabia will observe their first fast tomorrow (Monday). According to Khaleej Times, the Saudi Supreme Court announced that the crescent was spotted on Sunday (March 10) evening.

Hartley, Catherine call for organising women's PSL

ISLAMABAD: England's former World Cup winner Alex Hartley and Ireland's Catherine Dalton have joined voices in advocating for the initiation of a women's Pakistan Super League (PSL), emphasising the necessity of mainstream visibility and accessibility for women's cricket. Both the women are currently in Pakistan and are now in command of PSL team Multan Sultans bowling attack with Dalton coaching the fast bowler and Alex Hartley at the helm of spinners coaching. Last year, the PCB organised three exhibition matches for women which was seen as a step towards the start of women's PSL, however, this year the practice was discontinued. The move to discontinue the women's games in PSL has received criticism from Alex Hartley, who has represented England's women's team in 28 ODI and 4 T20Is. "I think it's a real shame that the exhibition games haven't happened this year," said Hartley while referring to those matches as a step closer to a women's PSL. "They had those exhibition games, they were a success. And then they almost got forgotten about this year. So, I am really disappointed in that." Hartley stressed the significance of visibility, stating, "For women to get involved in cricket, they have to see it on the TV, they have to see it on the main stage and see that it's accessible to all." However, she remained hopeful that there will be a women's PSL at some stage Catherine Dalton, a former cricketer from Ireland, echoed Hartley's sentiments, expressing her belief in the potential success of a Women's PSL. "Yeah, I 100% think there should be a women's PSL," stated Dalton. "I think it would be massive here. I think the passion for cricket in this country is incredible." - Agencies

Real Madrid youngster draws inspiration from Ronaldo

AGENCIES
LONDON: Real Madrid midfielder Eduardo Camavinga drew inspiration from club's legend Cristiano Ronaldo who represented the Whites from 2009 to 2018. Ronaldo, who joined the club in 2009 from Manchester United on a 90-million-euro deal, played for Los Blancos for almost nine years and is widely considered the club's greatest player. Camavinga joined Real Madrid in 2021, three years after Ronaldo left, but the Frenchman is still heavily inspired by the Portuguese who is a role model for millions around the world. Even at age of 39, Ronaldo is still one of fittest players in the world and is playing at a top level with the Saudi Pro League club Al-Nassr.

Djokovic escapes major upset at Indian Wells Serbian

World number one recorded the milestone 400th Masters 1000 win of his career with a 6-2 5-7 6-3 victory over Vukic

SPORTS DESK

INDIAN WELLS: Novak Djokovic struggled to a winning comeback at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters five years after his last appearance, defeating Aleksandar Vukic 6-2, 5-7, 6-3. World number one Djokovic, who had not played since losing an Australian Open semi-final to eventual champion Jannik Sinner in January, is chasing a sixth title at the desert venue in the season's first Masters event. The 36-year-old Serb captured the 400th Masters-level victory of his career, joining Rafael Nadal as the only men to reach the 400 milestone at the elite level. The 24-time Grand Slam champion has won his last 11 Masters matches, collecting titles last season in Cincinnati and Paris Bercy. Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka saved four match points on the way to her 6-7 (2/7), 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) second-round victory over 64th-ranked Peyton Stearns, and US Open champion Coco Gauff rallied in the final set to beat France's Clara Bu-

rel 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4). Djokovic admitted to some nerves in his first match since Melbourne. He claimed the opening set in 35 minutes with two service breaks but had to come from a break down in the third against his 69th-ranked Australian opponent. Vukic held for 6-5 in the second set and landed a reflex service return winner on the line to square the match at a set each. In the third, top seed Djokovic broke for a 3-2 edge and closed out victory with a second break after just over two hours, notching his 51st win at the tournament where he first competed in 2006. "I was a bit nervous at the beginning, you know, whether I'm going to start off well," Djokovic said. "I had not played a match in more than five weeks. "He made me produce some really important points in games in order to prevail. "I'm glad that I was pushed, which is important." Women's world number two Sabalenka had an even tougher time against Stearns. After saving four match points she needed four of her own and rolled an ankle along the way.

Pak plans Saudi investment conference for economic boost

The Chairman Khurshid Barlas said that there are attractive opportunities for Pakistani investors in many sectors of Saudi Arabia's economy, including tourism, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, chemical industry, real estate and food processing

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Gilgit-Baltistan Planning Minister Nasir Ali Khan yesterday met the founder chairman of Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry Khurshid Barlas and Fahad Barlas Convener Exhibition at their residence at their residence. Briefed that Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry is organizing Pakistan Investment Confer-



ence on May 11, 2024 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In which a large number of different business community related to tourism, pharmaceutical, minerals, medical, civil aviation industry, dairy and agriculture, construction material, private developer, capital market and stock exchange, education, information technology and other sectors will participate. Chairman Khurshid Barlas said that there are attractive opportunities for Pakistani investors in many sectors of Saudi Arabia's economy, including tourism, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, chemical industry, real estate and food processing. The Pakistan Investment Conference is being organized to take advantage of and to strengthen the Pakistani economy. He will fully cooperate and participate in the Pakistan Investment Conference in Saudi Arabia. Planning Minister Nasir Ali Khan said that there are vast investment opportunities in the tourism sector in the region, we need institutions where people can be trained in this regard so that they can play their role in promotion of tourism.

Briefs

Gunmen
abduct over a
dozen
students in
Nigeria

ABUJA : Suspected bandits have kidnapped more than one dozen students and a woman in northwestern Nigeria, according to a school official. A gang of gunmen stormed Gidan Bakuso, a remote town in the Gada Local Government area in Sokoto State early Saturday, said residents Liman Abubakar. Abubakar, who is the head of the Islamic school, said the attackers shot sporadically, killing a resident and abducted the students who were fleeing amid the pandemonium. He said 15 students are missing following a head count after the incident. Police spokesman, Ahmad Rufai, however, told Anadolu news agency that authorities are yet to ascertain the number of people abducted. "We don't know the exact figure of persons abducted. We have deployed our tactical team to the area to know how it happened for our immediate action," he said. Kidnappings have been on the rise in Nigeria since January. More than 400 women and children have been kidnapped in two separate attacks on schools and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the past week in the northern region.—APP

Paris de-
mands Gaza
cease-fire:
thousands
protest

PARIS : In response to a call for pro-Palestine protests launched by the Urgence Palestine collective, supported by the political party, France Insoumise (French Unbowed), a huge march Saturday proceeded through Paris from the famed Place de la République. Holding banners proclaiming "SOS Gaza" and with Palestinian flags, demonstrators denounced the ongoing "genocide" of Palestinians and called for boycotts of Israel and an immediate cease-fire in Gaza from Israeli attacks which have killed 31,000 people. Jean-Luc Melenchon, the French Unbowed leader and head of the party's list in June's European Parliament elections, was present with other members of parliament. Manon Aubry and French-Palestinian activist Rima Hassan, who also appear on the list, joined the protest as well. "A few months ago, I took part in all these mobilizations as a citizen. Today, I am delighted to continue them alongside a political family, a political movement, and that of France Unbowed," Hassan said at the beginning of the demonstration. "France's voice counts and more than ever. It must resonate in the European Parliament to obtain a permanent and immediate cease-fire and peace," she added. On Friday, the presidential majority in France accused France Unbowed of courting "antisemitic voters" by nominating Hassan for the European elections. They criticized her over her statements criticizing Israel. Hassan is ranked seventh on the list of the political party candidates. During the elections on June 9, she can win a seat in the European Parliament if she gets a vote percentage of more than 5%.—DNA

Spain PM proposes parliament
recognition of Palestinian state

"I will propose granting Spain's recognition to the Palestinian state," Spain PM Sanchez

FOREIGN DESK

BILBAO : Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that he will propose that Spain's parliament recognizes a Palestinian state.

"I will propose granting Spain's recognition to the Palestinian state," Sánchez said. "I do this out of moral conviction, for a just cause and because it is the only way that the two states, Israel and Palestine, can live together in peace." Sánchez added his voice to a chorus of other European leaders and government officials who have said that they could support a two-state solution in the Middle East as international frustration grows with Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories. French President Emmanuel Macron said last month that it's not "taboo" for France to recognize a Palestinian state. British Foreign Minister David Cameron said that the United Kingdom could officially recognize a Palestinian state after a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. Sánchez said that his position on the conflict in the Gaza Strip is much like his country's support for Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion more than two years ago. He stressed that Spain demanded "respect



for international law from Russia, and from Israel, for the violence to end, the recognition of two states, and for humanitarian aid to reach Gaza." His comments at a rights conference in the city of Bilbao came as aid shipments were headed for Gaza amid the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a new international willingness to work around Israeli restrictions. Five months after Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage, Israel's military has battered the territory, killing more than 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Moldova navigates Russian
threats, pursues EU membership

Moldova in more than three decades as it faces threats from Russia in multiple spheres of public life: Moldova FM

WEB DESK

CHISINAU : The past two years have been the hardest and most tumultuous for European Union candidate Moldova in more than three decades as it faces threats from Russia in multiple spheres of public life, the country's foreign minister says. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, its neighbor Moldova has faced a litany of crises that have at times raised fears the country is also in Russia's crosshairs. These included errant missiles landing on its territory; a severe energy crisis after Moscow dramatically reduced gas supplies; rampant inflation; and protests by pro-Russia parties against the pro-Western government. Moldova has also taken in the highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita of any country. "This past two years without exaggeration have been by far the most difficult in the past 30 years," Mihai Popsoi, appointed foreign minister in late Jan-

uary, told The Associated Press in an interview. Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but Russia continues to see the country — sandwiched between Ukraine and EU member Romania — as within its sphere of influence. Moldovan officials have repeatedly accused Russia of conducting a "hybrid war" against the country — funding anti-government protests, meddling in local elections and running vast disinformation campaigns to try to topple the government and derail Moldova from its path toward full EU membership. Russia has denied the accusations. Last week, Moldova's national Intelligence and Security Services agency said it has gathered data indicating "unprecedented" plans by Moscow to launch a fresh and sprawling destabilization campaign as Moldova gears up for a referendum on EU membership and a presidential election later in the year. "We know that the Kremlin is going to

invest a lot of energy and financial resources through their proxies to try to get their way," said Popsoi, a lawmaker from the governing Party of Action and Solidarity who also serves as deputy prime minister. "They're trying to bribe voters and use citizens to bribe them," he added. "The Russians are learning and adapting, and they're trying to use the democratic process against us ... to topple a democratic government in Moldova." Tensions have also periodically soared in Moldova's Russia-backed breakaway region of Transnistria — a thin strip of land bordering Ukraine that isn't recognized by any U.N. member countries but where Russia maintains about 1,500 troops as so-called peacekeepers, guarding huge Soviet-era weapons and ammunition stockpiles. Shortly after the war started, a string of explosions struck the region; an opposition leader was found fatally shot in his home last July; and anxieties soared last month

when some feared the region would ask to be annexed by Russia. Instead, the region appealed to Russia for diplomatic "protection" amid what it said was increasing pressure from Chisinau. Popsoi acknowledged that the situation with Transnistria is tense, and he worries that the speculation could adversely impact investment. "The situation will remain tense as long as the front line is 200 miles away," he said. The 37-year-old minister noted the testing period Moldova has been through has nevertheless also been transformative for his country, which has a population of about 2.5 million people. "When we look at the energy security of Moldova, two years ago there was very little," he said. "Now Moldova is quite independent or has alternatives and can choose where to buy gas and electricity." The same can be said, he added, for his country's defense capabilities, the resilience of key institutions such as intelligence, police force.

India signs \$100bn free trade
deal with European EFTA bloc

India to lift import tariffs for several industrial products from four-nation group in return for 15-year investment

NEW DELHI : India has signed a \$100bn free trade agreement with a four-member European bloc and will lift most import tariffs on industrial products from these countries in return for the investment over 15 years. The deal signed on Sunday with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) — after several rounds of negotiations spanning 16 years — will see investments across a range of Indian sectors, including pharmaceuticals, machinery and manufacturing. The EFTA comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, all non-European Union nations, that will get access to a fast-growing market of 1.4 billion people, said India's Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal. "The India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) marks a historic milestone in our growing partnership," Goyal said after the signing in New Delhi. It "will pave the path for mutual growth and prosperity" by boosting exports, promoting investment and creating employment, he added. In the last two years, India has signed trade agreements with Australia and the United Arab Emirates, and officials say a deal with the United Kingdom is in the final stages as Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims to hit \$1 trillion in annual exports by 2030. India will lift, or partially remove, very high customs duties on 95.3 percent of industrial imports from Switzerland, excluding gold, either immediately or over time, the Swiss government said in a statement. "Norwegian companies exporting to India today meet high import taxes of up to 40% on certain goods," Industry Minister Jan Christian Vestre said in a separate statement. "With the new deal, we have secured nil import taxes on nearly every Norwegian good." Under the agreement, Indian agricultural exporters will enjoy liberalised trade rules in the form of tariff concessions in the European bloc. Professionals will also be able to take up jobs in the EFTA zone, officials said. The pact covers some new elements such as intellectual rights and gender equity, Goyal said, telling a news conference, "It is a modern trade agreement, fair, equitable and win-win for all five countries." The five must ratify the deal before it can take effect, with Switzerland planning to do so by 2025. The signing comes ahead of India's general elections, due by May, in which Modi will seek a third term. India is EFTA's fifth-largest trading partner after the EU, the United States, the UK and China, with total two-way trade of \$25bn in 2023, its Ministry of Trade estimates. Formed in 1960 as a counterweight to the EU, the EFTA has signed about 30 trade agreements with some 40 countries and territories outside the EU.—Agencies

Israel may use chemical
weapons in Gaza : Algeria

El Djazair : Algeria has alerted the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that Israel may resort to using chemical weapons against Gaza given its insistence on violating international law. Salima Abdelhak, Algeria's permanent representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, issued the warning on Saturday at the 105th session of the Executive Council held in The Hague. This came after Algeria was chosen as the African region ambassador to assume the position of vice president of the Organization's Executive Council for a one-year term starting on May 12, 2024. Abdelhak said Algeria is concerned about the Palestinian tragedy and condemns Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian people in blatant violation of international law. She also warned of the potential resurgence of chemical weapons and the risk of their deployment by non-state entities, particularly amidst ongoing armed conflicts across the globe. There is a risk that the occupying power "may resort to the use of chemical weapons in its war against the Palestinians, given that the Zionist occupation is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and is not bound by its provisions," the ambassador added. Abdelhak went on to say that the "tragic and catastrophic" situation in Gaza underscores the importance of the OPCW persisting in its mission to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and ensure all countries adhere to its regulations. She said Algeria supports the request for assistance submitted by the State of Palestine to the Technical Secretariat related to opening an investigation into the use of this type of weapon in Palestine, calling on the Technical Secretariat to provide member states with regular updates about the outcomes of these investigations. She further noted that the increasing threat of chemical terrorism is becoming more concerning as tensions escalate in various regions, providing opportunities for terrorist organizations to engage.—Agencies

Türkiye detains
33 Daesh suspects
pre-vote plot

ISTANBUL : Türkiye has detained 33 suspects tied to the Daesh terror group who were allegedly preparing attacks ahead of the local elections later this month. The suspects were "preparing and searching for action before the upcoming local elections," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said Sunday on X, formerly Twitter. Nationwide elections are due to be held on March 31. Counterterrorism police in Sakarya in northwest Türkiye recovered weapons, cash and "organizational documents" during raids. "We will not tolerate any terrorists. We will continue our fight uninterrupted with the superior efforts of our security forces," Yerlikaya said. The network was providing personnel for war zones and financial support for Daesh while operating from illegal mosques and religious schools, he said. Türkiye has ramped up operations against Daesh terrorists after the group attacked an Istanbul Church in late January, killing a civilian man during Sunday mass. Daesh operates a so-called Khorasan Province (Daesh-K) network in Türkiye, which looks for new "methods" and recruits more foreign members for its activities after constant counterterrorism operations became a "challenge," security sources say. The National Intelligence Organization (MIT) thwarted the terrorist group's efforts for recruitment, obtaining funds and logistics support after its latest operation in the aftermath of the church shooting. Daesh remains the second biggest threat of terrorism for Türkiye, which faces security risks from multiple terrorist groups and was one of the first countries to declare it as a terrorist group in 2013. In December last year, Turkish security forces detained 32 suspects over alleged links with Daesh, who were planning attacks on churches and synagogues, as well as the Iraqi Embassy. Daesh extremists have not previously targeted places of worship on Turkish soil, but they have carried out a string of attacks, including against a nightclub in Istanbul in 2017 that left 39 people dead and a 2015 bombing attack in Ankara that killed 109. Turkish airstrikes also target hideouts of Daesh in northern Iraq and Syria near the Turkish border. Terrorists from Daesh and other groups such as the PKK and its Syrian wing, the YPG, rely on a network of members and supporters in Türkiye. In response, Ankara has been conducting pinpoint operations and freezing assets to eliminate the terrorist groups at their roots. Türkiye deported 9,000 foreign terrorist fighters, mainly from Daesh, from 102 different nationalities, of which 1,168 are from the U.S. or the European Union member countries, since 2011.—DNA

Maldives
procures
Turkish
drones for
maritime
patrol

ANKARA : Maldives has for the first time acquired surveillance drones from Turkey for patrolling its vast exclusive economic zone, according to media reports on Sunday. Efforts have begun by the state to establish a drone base in Noonu atoll Maafaru to operate the military drones brought from Turkey to conduct monitoring of Maldives' ocean territories, Editon.mv news portal reported. Turkey was the first foreign country visited by Mohamed Muizzu after he was sworn in as president in November. During his visit, he had seen the various military vehicles produced by the country and formed an agreement with a Turkish company to import military drones into his country, the report said. However, the Maldives government has not disclosed the details of the agreement so far. The surveillance drones from the Turkish company Baykar TB2 drones were delivered on March 3, reports said. Pro-Beijing President Muizzu, upon his return from China in January, had indicated that the government was looking to acquire surveillance drones.—APP

UAE
foundation
organizes
'cataract
caravans' in
Philippines

MANILA : A UAE-based charity foundation organized free eye treatment initiatives in one of the Philippines' largest islands, as it seeks to support the local community and improve accessibility to quality eye care. More than 2 million Filipinos are affected by some form of visual impairment, including over 1 million people who are affected by cataracts. Noor Dubai Foundation, which focuses on the global prevention of blindness and visual impairment, set up specialized caravans in Samar Island in November and February, where doctors carried out various eye care services, including hundreds of cataract surgeries. "Over 1,969 persons benefited through the program's activities, which included screening and providing diagnosis and eye care," the UAE Embassy in Manila said in a statement. Under the program, doctors conducted 586 cataract surgeries and distributed 454 spectacles and medicines.—DNA

Portugal votes with centre-right poised to oust Socialists

Analysts warned the results of the election, Portugal's second in two years, remained wide open given the large number of undecided voters

NEWS DESK


LISBON : Voters in Portugal went to the polls Sunday in an early election that could see the country join a shift to the right across Europe after eight years of Socialist rule. Final opinion polls published Friday show the centre-right Democratic Alliance (AD) narrowly ahead of the Socialist Party (PS) but short of an outright majority in parliament, which could make the far-right party Chega a kingmaker for forming a governing coalition. But analysts warned the results of the election, Portugal's second in two years, remained wide open given the large number of undecided voters. Voting stations in the

nation of around 10 million people opened at 8:00 am (0800 GMT) with exit poll projections expected at 8:00 pm. "These elections represent a possible change, there would be little point in doing otherwise," Pedro Resende, a 56-year-old security officer, told AFP at a polling station in Telheiras, a modern upper middle class neighbourhood in northern Lisbon. The AD has campaigned on promises to boost economic growth by cutting taxes, and to improve the country's public services. "We really must turn the page," the party's leader, 51-year-old lawyer Luis Montenegro told a packed final rally at Lisbon's bullring on Friday night. He has ruled out any post-election agreement with Chega, but other top AD officials have been


more ambiguous. Analysts say a deal with the anti-establishment party may prove the only way for the AD to govern. Far right gains - Chega's leader Andre Ventura, a former trainee priest who went on to become a television football commentator, has said his party is "as legitimate as the others". Chega, which means "Enough", calls for tougher measures to fight corruption, stricter controls over immigration and chemical castration for some sex offenders. Just five years old, Chega picked up its first seat in Portugal's 230-seat parliament in 2019, becoming the first far-right party to win representation in the assembly since a military coup in 1974 toppled a decades-long right-wing dictatorship. It increased its seats to 12 seats

in 2022 and polls suggest it could more than double that number this time. That would mirror gains by far-right parties across Europe, where they already govern — often in coalition — in countries such as Italy, Hungary and Slovakia, or are steadily gaining, as in France and Germany. The election was called after Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa, 62, unexpectedly resigned in November following an influence-peddling probe that involved a search of his official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Though Costa himself was not accused of any crime, he decided not to run again. - "Time for a change" - On his watch unemployment has dropped, the economy expanded by 2.3 percent last year — one of the fastest rates

in the eurozone — and public finances have improved. But surveys indicate many voters feel Costa's government squandered the outright majority it won in 2022 by failing to improve unreliable public health services and education or address a housing crisis that has sparked large street protests in what remains one of Western Europe's poorest countries. "From my point of view things have worsened a bit. It's time for a change," Bernardo Guerra, a 28-year-old personal trainer, told AFP after casting his ballot at a high school in central Lisbon. "In Portugal there is a lot of corruption, Portugal has a bad image abroad... I hope a new government improves this situation."

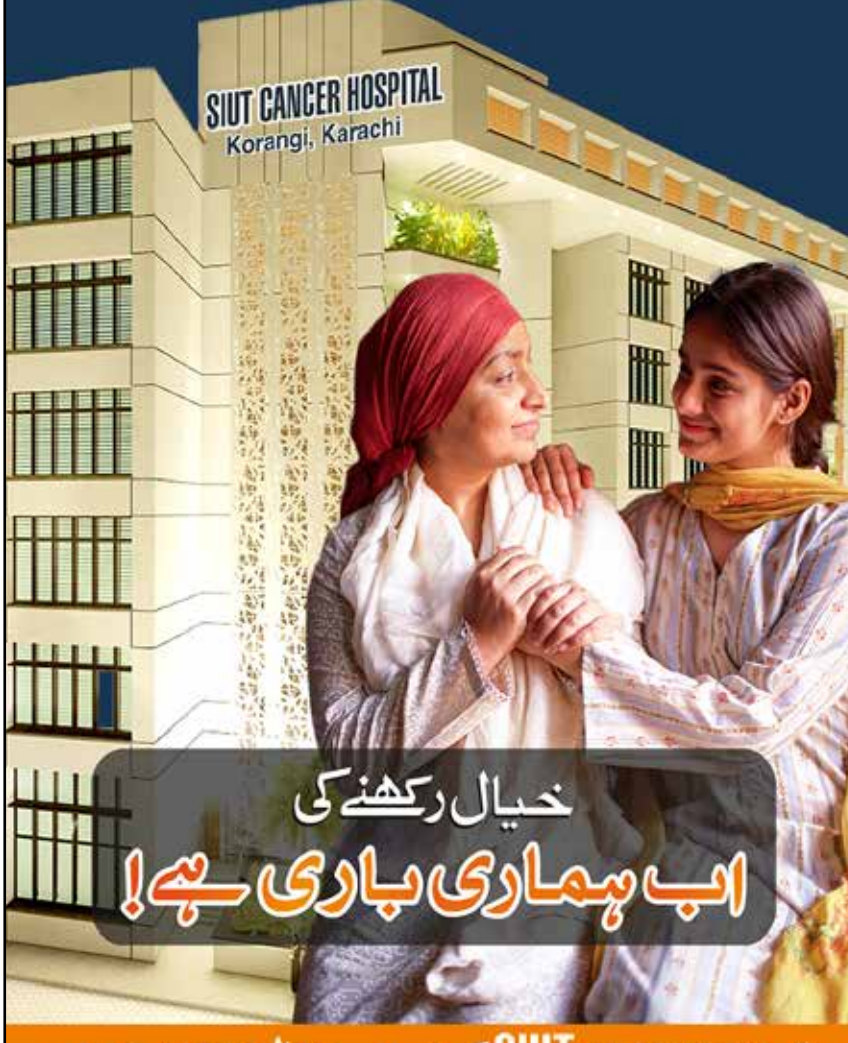


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Briefs

Maryam orders strict monitoring of Ramazan Package

DNA
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has directed strict monitoring of the distribution of Ramazan Nigehban Package hampers to deserving people at their doorsteps. She was talking during a visit of a model Provincial Ramazan Bazaar Control Room here on Sunday. Ms Maryam said that a district scoreboard will also be set up about the implementation of the Ramazan Package. The chief minister was apprised that deserving people in province would get the hampers at their doorsteps by Ramazan 10. She also reviewed the price app dashboard and was briefed on its working. She said she wanted to deliver the poor their right at their doorsteps. She warned that negligence would not be tolerated.

ECP appoints ROs for Senate elections

DNA
ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan on Sunday appointed returning officers in the Islamabad Capital Territory and four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan for the conduct of senate elections.

According to a notification issued by the Election Commission, ECP Director General Training Saeed Gul will be the Returning Officer in the federal capital, whereas provincial election commissioners Aijaz Anwar Chohan, Sharifullah, Shamshad Khan, and Muhammad Farid Afridi will be returning officers in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, respectively. Members of the National Assembly will elect one general seat and one seat for technocrats, including Ulema from the federal capital.

Sweden, Canada resume funding UNRWA

STOCKHOLM: Sweden and Canada will resume aid payments to UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA. Another top donor to the UN agency aiding Palestinians, UNRWA, said on Saturday that it would resume funding, weeks after more than a dozen countries halted hundreds of millions of dollars of support in response to Israeli allegations against the organisation. Sweden's reversal came as a ship bearing tons of humanitarian aid was preparing to leave Cyprus for Gaza after international donors launched a sea corridor to supply the besieged territory facing widespread hunger after five months of war. - Agencies

Saudi Arabia announces relief for calamity-hit Gwadar

"We'll help our Pakistani brothers in this difficult time," the ambassador said, after meeting the Balochistan chief minister Sarfraz Bugti

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Arabia has announced relief measures for calamity-hit Gwadar as hundreds of houses were damaged due to torrential rains in the port city. The ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al Malikiy visited Balochistan and announced relief measures for the people of Gwadar. "We'll help our Pakistani brothers in this difficult time," the ambassador said, after meeting the Balochistan chief minister Sarfraz Bugti. The ambassador announced 9,000 shelter camps and 9,000 ration bags for the calamity-hit people of Gwadar. He also spoke Urdu and chanted the slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad' while announcing relief items for Balochistan. Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti paid his



gratitude to Saudi Arabia for announcing relief items for Balochistan. "Climate Change is a huge challenge for all of us. Gwadar received record rain this year and we are trying hard to rehabilitate the victims," Bugti said. Earlier, the port city of Gwadar was declared a calamity-hit area following torrential rains last month. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also visited the areas of the coastal city which suffered damage due to torrential rains last week. As many as 3,100 houses in Gwadar, and 2,500 in Jiwan were damaged. Besides, 95 houses were completely destroyed and more than 200 cattle were killed. The officials claimed that 355 people were accommodated in government residences, 800 were rescued and shifted to their relatives' homes. Pakistan Army and Navy established medical camps to provide health facilities to the victims.

Ahsan blames Imran for economic woes

DNA

NAROWAL: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Ahsan Iqbal on Sunday, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder for the economic crunch. Expressing his thoughts in Narowal, Iqbal said: "It is time to foster the country's economy. We have been compelled to take loans." "The entire country is running on the loans," he added. He maintained: "It is not good judgement to take loans persistently." Few days back, PML-N leader Atta Tarar assailed the PTI over the events that transpired on May 9. Expressing his thoughts, Tarar said: "The PTI leaders and extremists had themselves posted the videos on social media. You [PTI] cannot change reality by changing the statements every now and then." "Everything was recorded on the camera that happened on May 9. It is an old habit of May 9 rioters to continue speaking lies," Tarar said. He said: "A group that has been involved in attacks on the state cannot be considered a political party."

US embassy empowers 150 women to launch entrepreneurial journeys

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The U.S. Embassy launched the fourth Pakistan cohort of its "Academy for Women Entrepreneurs" (AWE) program at the Lincoln Reading Lounge at the National Library of Pakistan. Bettina Malone, Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, launched this year's cohort of the AWE which is set to empower 150 participants from Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi.

The AWE program is an entrepreneurship program that includes peer-to-peer learning and local mentorship, to help participants build their own businesses and seek innovative scaling opportunities. This worldwide U.S. Department of State training program supports women across the globe in building their own businesses, harnessing the power of public-private sponsors, local partnerships, and U.S. Exchange Alumni networks to help their businesses grow. AWE is driving prosperity in communities in more than 100 countries. In Pakistan this program is empowering women to realize their economic potential and increase prosperity for all. During her remarks, Malone spoke about the need to support women entrepreneurs noting, "When women are successful, communities prosper, and countries thrive."

With mentoring and guidance from established Pakistani entrepreneurs, the 150 participants in AWE 2024 will undertake a rigorous three-month online training program developed by Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management and American natural resource company Freeport McMoran. Through AWE, participants learn core business skills and meet weekly to discuss what they

are learning with experienced local mentors and U.S. experts. AWE is designed to cultivate entrepreneurial know-how, help women entrepreneurs connect with funding opportunities, enhance opportunities for business expansion, and increase the likelihood of entrepreneurial success. Five of the U.S. Mission to Pakistan's Lincoln Corners in Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi will lead AWE Pakistan 2024 with support from the Pakistan American Cultural Center. Toward the end of their AWE journey, participants will have the opportunity to compete for seed funding from the U.S. Mission to Pakistan to further grow or establish their enterprises. Upon completion, participants will join the global AWE network, which offers further growth opportunities, as well as the community of U.S. exchange program alumni.

21 dead in Indonesia floods, landslides

JAKARTA: At least 21 people have been killed, while six more remain missing from flash flooding and landslides on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Torrential rains Thursday triggered the disaster in Pesisir Selatan regency in the West Sumatra province, with more than 75,000 people forced to evacuate. "As of Sunday, 21 people were found dead and six people remained missing," Fajar Sukma, an official from the West Sumatra disaster mitigation agency said. A village located on a hillside in the Sutura subdistrict was struck hard, with around 200 families in the area left isolated after a landslide followed by flash flooding, Fajar added. A local official earlier put the death toll at 18 with five missing. Rescuers were searching for the missing on Sunday as authorities focused their operation on three areas affected by the disasters, local search and rescue official Abdul Malik said. "Today's search involves

around 150 people from disaster organizations in West Sumatra," Abdul said in a statement. Doni Gusrizal, a senior official from the Pesisir Selatan disaster mitigation agency, said waters had started to recede after the flooding, but added that access to areas affected by the landslide remained difficult because of hilly terrain. In the Padang Pariaman regency, also in West Sumatra, heavy downpours earlier this week caused rivers to overflow and triggered floods and a landslide, killing at least three people, according to a statement from the local disaster agency. Indonesia is prone to landslides during the rainy season and the problem has been aggravated in some places by deforestation, with prolonged torrential rain causing flooding in some areas of the archipelago nation. A landslide and floods swept away dozens of houses and destroyed a hotel near Lake Toba on Sumatra in December, killing at least two people. - Agencies

PM increases Ramazan Package to Rs12.5 billion

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has increased the volume of Ramazan Package from Rs7.5 billion to Rs 12.5 billion, besides directed for enhancing its outreach in the country to facilitate the masses during the upcoming holy month. Along with Utility Stores and Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), mobile units would provide edible items at subsidized rates, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release on Sunday. In the initial phase, a total of 1200 mobile points and 300

permanent package relief centers were being established. The prime minister desired that maximum relief should be extended to the poor people. During the month of Ramazan, the masses would be provided different edible items at lesser rates compared to market rates. Besides, designated places, trucks would supply food stuff to different places and GPS technology would be used for this purpose. A video would be released for use of mobile app. A dashboard would be created to supervise sale of mobile flour with the help of digital technology. On March 7, the prime minister had announced Rs7.5 billion subsidized Ramazan package. A total of 39.6 million people would be provided food items during the holy month of Ramazan at subsidized 30 percent rates. The items under BISP included, flour, rice, pulses, ghee, sugar, syrup and milk. The subsidy on flour would be Rs77 per kg and on ghee Rs100 respectively. - DNA

SCBA demands release of Khosa, Raja

The statement highlighted that the SCBA always advocated for upholding the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. It also cited the relevant articles of the Constitution which "guarantee the right to peaceful protest and assembly"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Bar Association demanded the immediate release of PTI lawyers Sardar Latif Khosa, Barrister Salman Akram Raja, Mumtaz Mustafa and others who were arrested during a protest in Lahore against alleged rigging. In a press release today, SCBA President Shahzad Shaikat and Secretary Syed Ali Imran termed the arrests a matter of grave concern, highlighting that all the lawyers have "always represented the highest standards in the legal profession". The statement highlighted that the SCBA always advocated for upholding the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. It also cited the relevant articles of the Constitution which "guarantee the right to peaceful protest and assembly". SCBA urged the authorities to respect the legal and democratic rights of citizens including the law fraternity. "The recent trend of targeting and arresting members of the legal fraternity is alarming. It reflects a blatant disregard for constitutional rights, rampant lawlessness and abuse of power". The statement concluded that the SCBA has decided to summon an emergency meeting of its executive committee to chart a course of action.

Sudan General rules out Ramadan truce

DNA

KHARTOUM: There would be no truce in Sudan in Ramadan unless the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group leaves the homes and sites of civilians, senior Sudanese armed forces General Yasser al-Atta said on Sunday. The statement follows an appeal by the United Nations Security Council for a truce during Ramadan, which begins this week. The paramilitary RSF said it welcomed the ceasefire call. Atta's statement, issued on the army's official Telegram channel, cited recent military advances by the army in Omdurman, part of Sudan's wider capital. It said there could be no Ramadan ceasefire unless the RSF complied with a commitment made in May last year at Saudi and US-mediated talks in Jeddah to withdraw from civilian homes and public facilities. It also said there should be no role for Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the RSF leader commonly known as Hemedti, in Sudan's future politics or military. Sudan's UN ambassador told the Security Council on Thursday that the head of the army and ruling council Abdel Fattah al-Burhan commended UN chief Antonio Guterres' appeal for a Ramadan truce, but was wondering how it could be implemented. Sudan's foreign ministry, which is aligned with the armed forces, said that for any ceasefire appeal to be successful, the RSF would need to withdraw from areas including El Gezira and Sennar states and several cities in Darfur, the RSF's stronghold.

Will never surrender to Russia: Kyiv

DNA

KYIV: Ukraine on Sunday slammed Pope Francis's call to negotiate with Russia two years into its invasion, vowing "never" to surrender after the pontiff said Kyiv should "have the courage to raise the white flag." The Catholic leader had fueled anger in Kyiv after saying in an in-interview published Saturday that Ukraine should negotiate with Russia, which has seized large swathes of its territory during the war. "Our flag is a yellow and blue one. This is the flag by which we live, die, and prevail. We shall never raise any other flags," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on social media. While battling its bigger neighbor, Ukraine has vowed not to give up its territory. The Pope fueled anger by saying: "When you see that you are defeated, that things are not working out, to have the courage to negotiate." Kuleba called on the elderly pontiff to stand "on the side of good" and not put the opposing sides "on the same footing and call it 'negotiations'."

OIC delegation participates in the Int'l moot on Islamophobia

In this regard, he highlighted the efforts of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory in monitoring the phenomenon, its various trends, and the challenges associated with it, especially for Muslim communities and minorities in non-member States

FOREIGN DESK

JEDDAH: A high-level delegation from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) headed by H.E. the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ambassador Yousef Al-Dubaie, participated in the proceedings of the International Conference on Islamophobia, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 8-9 March 2024. In the speech delivered on behalf of H.E. the OIC Secretary-General, Mr. Hissein Ibrahim Taha, at the opening session of this international conference, H.E. the OIC Assistant Secretary-General touched on the various constructive efforts and initiatives undertaken by the OIC to firmly and decisively address the phenomenon of Islamophobia, whether at the level of the General Secretariat, Member States, partner countries and international and regional organizations. In this regard, he highlighted the efforts of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory in monitoring the phenomenon, its various trends, and the challenges associated with it, especially for Muslim communities and minorities in non-member States. He also

tackled the efforts and actions of the OIC and its Member States, which culminated in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. In the same context, he underscored the OIC firm commitment to continuing its efforts to combat the alarming escalation of this phenomenon at the international level, its constant keenness to raise this issue, and the importance of finding the necessary solutions within the framework of existing consultations with a number of non-Member States and international and regional organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union. In conclusion, he stressed the strong involvement of the OIC to continue and redouble efforts and organize a number of events in international capitals to raise awareness of the necessity of combating Islamophobia and promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, tolerance, co-existence, and mutual respect. He also pointed to the appreciated efforts of the OIC Member States, including Azerbaijan, in organizing international conferences and events to observe the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

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