



Islamabad POST

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Borrell: Israel using 'starvation as a war arm' in Gaza

Detailed News On Page-07

Pope Francis again condemns 'madness of war'

Detailed News On Page-07



Naqvi to attend crucial ICC board meeting

Detailed News On Page-06



'State belongs to all'

PTI, PML-N break ice as KP CM meets PM

PTI's Gandapur stresses need for political engagement with party founder Imran Khan in meeting with PM

ANSAR M BHATTI/DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a major political development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and hailed his first engagement with the chief executive belonging to rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) as "positive". He stated this while addressing a press conference flanked by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal and other PML-N leaders following a meeting with the premier. CM Gandapur, who belongs to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), said he stressed the need to hold political dialogue with party incarcerated founder Imran Khan who has been behind bars since August last year in different cases ranging from corruption to terrorism. "I have asked the prime minister to politically engage with Imran Khan. Political engagement will lead to a political solution," he added. Gandapur said PM Shehbaz had also assured him that he would be allowed to meet the party founder in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail where the authorities have beefed up security measures and barred ex-premier Imran from holding meetings owing to "threat alert". The KP CM said he told the premier that he had to hold a meeting with the party founder to discuss upcoming Senate polls. Gandapur said he held discussion with the premier to resolve issues of the masses. "The prime minister has assured that all dues of province will be cleared," he said describing his meeting as "good and positive". The meeting between the two top officials belonging to rival political parties is seen as an important development in bringing down the political temperature in the country as the major political parties have been at loggerheads, particularly after the removal of PTI-led government via opposition's no-trust motion in

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

'Rigged polls'

Imran warns of Sri Lanka-like situation
Hopes of people have been dashed after robbery of public mandate, says ex-PM

COURT REPORTER

RAWALPINDI: Slamming the 2024 nationwide general election once again, incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding chairman Imran Khan has predicted Sri Lanka-like situation in the country as the nation's hopes were shattered by "stealing the mandate". "My all predictions have proven true," the former prime minister said during an informal interaction with journalists in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, in which he reiterated that he was not engaging into talks with the current rulers to reach a "deal". "Each and everything is based on lies [...] like the election was a lie [...] the security threat was also a lie," the cricketer-turned-politico said, adding that the PTI was deliberately kept away from the 2024 polls. Khan, the deposed premier who was removed from

Continued on Page 06

Maryam seeks Punjab tourism plan

Sikh community and the followers of other religions will be provided a tourist package

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz has sought a comprehensive "Punjab Tourism Plan" in seven days and ordered to undertake mapping of tourists sites across Punjab. CM also directed to undertake mapping of sites available for religious tourism. CM chaired a high-level meeting in which Secretary Tourism gave a briefing about tourism and religious tourism. It was agreed on the proposal to celebrate the Baisakhi festival in Punjab and CM Maryam Nawaz granted an approval in this regard. Maryam Nawaz underscored that the task to make Punjab a tourism

Continued on Page 06

Punjab to have 18 smart cities

Contract between PSCA, NRTC was signed in the presence of Punjab CM

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) and the National Radio & Telecommunication Corporation (NRTC) have signed a contract to have 18 smart cities in Punjab. The Smart Safe City Project will be implemented in 18 cities of Punjab with the support of the NRTC. The contract between PSCA and NRTC was signed in the presence of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. PSCA MD Ahsan Yunus and NRTC representative Syed Amir Javed signed the contract for smart cities in Punjab.

Continued on Page 06

After 'meeting targets' Pakistan all set for IMF's 2nd review

Pakistan meets all structural benchmarks, indicative targets for successful completion of IMF review, says finance ministry

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: As the newly elected government hinted at acquiring a new loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global lender will visit Pakistan for the second review of the ongoing Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) - commencing from March 14-18 in Islamabad. "Pakistan has met all Structural Benchmarks, Qualitative Performance Criteria and Indicative Targets for successful completion of the IMF review. This would be final review of SBA, and staff level agreement is expected after this appraisal," a statement issued by finance ministry read. The ministry stated that once the agreement is reached the final tranche of \$1.1 billion under the SBA will be disbursed, following the approval from IMF's Executive Board. Islamabad secured the last-gasp rescue package last summer, averting a sovereign debt default, Reuters reported. The last review, if successful, will release a tranche of around \$1.1 billion, the ministry said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has already directed his finance team, headed by newly installed Finance Minister

Continued on Page 06

PTI spokesperson hits out at govt

Party had neither written any letter to the EU nor was there any plan to do so

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Spokesperson hit out at the fake Information Minister Attaullah Tarar for his absurd, slanderous, nonsensical and insane accusations, saying that neither the PTI had written any letter to European Union (EU) to revoke Pakistan's GSP+ status nor had any plan to do so. PTI Spokesperson strongly reacted the fake information minister's press conference and rejected his baseless and groundless accusations, which, he said, was nothing but a pack of lies, falsehoods, rubbish and nonsense. He made it clear that the party had neither written any letter to

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Doors of negotiations open to all

Laments the ban imposed by the Punjab government

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PTI leader Barrister Gohar says doors of negotiations are open to all. PTI leader termed terrorism a serious concern. He said that they were trying to melt the ice and move forward. He said that the government's actions are taking them to a crossroads. He also lamented the ban imposed by the Punjab government on meeting the PTI founder in Adiala jail. "It is difficult to run in such conditions but let's see what they do next" he questioned. The PTI leader also talked about the Al-Qadir Trust hearing in Adiala Jail. He said that people like the caretaker setup were included in the cabinet.

Rains in Balochistan claim 9 lives

Relief activities are going on in affected areas

DNA

QUETTA: Recent rains in Balochistan have killed at least nine people, besides damaging 259 houses in the province. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in its report has released figures of losses to life and property due to recent rains in the province. The intermittent rains have been falling for the last five days in several parts of Balochistan. According to the report, nine people including children lost their lives in the incidents of roofs and walls collapse. The deceased belonged to Kharan, Kech, Barkhan, Chaman and Pishin.

Putin warns West

Russia 'ready' for nuclear war

Putin also declared that "the nations that say they have no red lines regarding Russia should realize that Russia won't have any red lines regarding them either

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened, issuing another blunt warning to the West just days ahead of an election in which he's all but certain to win another six-year term. The Russian leader has repeatedly talked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons since invading Ukraine in February 2022. The most recent such threat came in his state-of-the-nation address last month, when he warned the West that deepening its involvement in the fighting in Ukraine would risk a nuclear war. Asked in an interview with Russian state television released early Wednesday if he has ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there has been no need for that. Still, the remarks appeared to be a message to the West that he is

Continued on Page 06

China, Iran, Russia launch joint Naval drills

DNA

TEHRAN: The naval forces of China, Iran and Russia on Monday launched an exercise near the Gulf of Oman in a joint effort to safeguard regional maritime security, without targeting any third country or current regional tensions, experts said on Tuesday. The Security Belt-2024 joint exercise kicked off on Monday local time after Chinese warships arrived in waters near Chabahar, Iran and rendezvoused with participating Iranian and Russian naval vessels, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Tuesday.

Continued on Page 06

Reserved seats: PHC asks whether SIC is a political party or not

'SIC not entitled to reserved seats', AGP tells PHC

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan on Wednesday told the Peshawar High Court (PHC) that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) is not entitled to reserved seats as the party did not submit a list to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) before the general elections 2024. A five-member bench led by PHC Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Arshad Ali took up the SIC's plea against the ECP's ruling wherein it had denied allocating the reserved seats to the party. The electoral body, on March 4, had accepted applications of the opposing parties and decided that the seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies would not remain vacant and would be allocated by a proportional representation process of political parties on the basis of seats won by political parties. During the hearing of the case today, the PHC expressed displeasure over the absence of PTI counsels Barrister Ali Zafar and Babar Awan. SIC counsel Advocate Qazi Anwar argued before the bench that the PTI-backed independent candidates joined the SIC after winning the election, hence the party is eligible for the reserved seats for women and minorities.

Continued on Page 06

ECP announces by-polls schedule for vacant seats

By-polls will be held on April 21

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Wednesday announced the schedule for the by-elections on the national and provincial assembly seats that had been left vacant following the February 8 general elections. According to the electoral authority, the by-polls on the vacant seats will be held across the country on April 21, 2024. The by-elections will be conducted on six National Assembly (NA) seats, 12 provincial assembly seats in Punjab, two each in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan assemblies and one in Sindh Assembly, the ECP stated. As per the schedule, candidates can file their nomination papers from March 16-18. The nominated candidates' names will be published on March 18. Meanwhile, the scrutiny of the papers by the returning officers (RO) will be held on March 21 while candidates, whose papers have been rejected, can file appeals on the

Continued on Page 06

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Pak-Russia fruit transport route lauded by PAJCCI

PAJCCI has highly hailed transportation of fruits from Pakistan to Russia through centuries old road link between Sub-Continent and Central Asian Republics via Afghanistan

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has highly hailed transportation of fruits from Pakistan to Russia through centuries old road link between Sub-Continent and Central Asian Republics (CARs) via Afghanistan. "The news about sending of citrus in 16 trucks of National Logistic Cell (NLC) from Pakistan to Russia is very good omen for businessmen of the country and would open new vistas of trade and commerce in the region," observed Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Coordinator PAJCCI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a press statement issued here on Wednesday, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said this trade route has great potential which if tapped would prove very valuable for country from commerce point of view and will create hundreds of thousands of livelihood opportunities in

the whole region.

Zia informed that these 16 trucks of NLC carried citrus from Sargodha district in Punjab and reached Russia while passing through three different countries, covering around 6000 kilometer distance. He said such initiatives needs continuation and apart from fruit, other items could also be sent to Russia by facilitating business community of the country. He said Pak-Afghan trade is on decline during the last several months due to different hurdles including a demand for visa for driver and cleaner of trucks carrying goods. Zia said government should take measures for removing all the hurdles in Pak-Afghan trade and provide facilities for expanding this commercial dealing to CARs and Russia. The recent transportation of fruit consignment to Russia is a testimony to the fact that we can utilize this potential market by providing ease of doing business to traders.

He said he has also presented a suggestion of issuing special passes after security clearance from concerned departments to truck drivers, allowing them to carry goods between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Obtaining visas for drivers and cleaners and its renewing after few months expiry is a very cumbersome procedure while keeping in view rush at passport offices in the country. Zia said promotion of commerce and trade is need of the hour while keeping in view high prices and economic recession in the country. Through promotion of commerce and trade, countless number of livelihood opportunities can be created benefitting large number of people hardly pressed under prevailing economic slump. He stressed upon Ministry of Commerce to hold consultation with business community for promotion of trade with Afghanistan, CARs and newly tapped Russian markets.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Ambassador Jiang Zaidong calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. — DNA

Punjab health minister vows sector improvement

LAHORE : Punjab Minister for Specialised Healthcare and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafique reiterated the government's commitment to enhancing the health sector. In a series of meetings held at his office on Wednesday, he emphasised the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process to ensure effective reforms. Under the directive of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Minister Rafique affirmed the government's dedication to providing better health facilities to the public. Improving the conditions of government hospitals across Punjab stands as a top priority on the agenda.

He pledged to present a comprehensive report to the chief minister after conducting thorough visits to government hospitals, aiming to address public concerns and enhance service delivery. Expressing gratitude for the trust bestowed upon them by the people, the minister vowed to uphold his faith and deliver on the government's promises of genuine public service. Furthermore, the minister highlighted the government's proactive approach towards addressing the issues faced by the medical community, promising swift action on priority matters. In a separate development, Minister Salman Rafique met a delegation from the Young Doctors Association (YDA), comprising Dr. Atif Majid, Dr. Shoaib Niazi, Dr. Jafar, Dr. Kashif, Dr. Hamza, Dr. Salman Hasib, and others. This collaboration underscores the government's commitment to leveraging international expertise in its efforts to enhance healthcare services.—APP

AJK PM urges entrepreneurs to invest in tourism

MIRPUR-AJK: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister, Anwar ul Haq has invited existing and intending entrepreneurs for investments in tourism and industrial sectors of the state to explore opportunities. He was talking to a delegation of eminent world-famous hoteliers the Hasho Group which called on him in the federal metropolis led by Deputy Chairman and CEO Hashu Group Murtaza Hashwani. During the meeting, Hashwani expressed his willingness to invest more in AJK. Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister

while referring huge investment opportunities in the liberated territory told the visiting delegation that there were vast opportunities for investment in tourism, hydropower generation, and other sectors in Azad Kashmir. He said that the agreement signed between TEVTA and Hashu Group would be instrumental in creating employment opportunities for youth. The AJK PM expressed optimism that the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Hasho Group and the government

would also encourage investment in education, tourism, and other sectors in the state. He said that the government was also ensuring the provision of interest-free loans to the youth. He further said that providing interest-free loans to skilled people would help control growing unemployment in the region. On this occasion, Senior Minister Col. (ret'd) Waqar Ahmed Noor, Minister for TEVTA Sardar Amir Altaf, Chief Secretary Dawood Muhammad Barich, Secretary Higher Education, and other officials were also present.—APP

Mushaal inaugurates Maari Petroleum Iftar table at PIMS

ISLAMABAD : Hurriyat Leader Mushaal Hussein Mullick Wednesday inaugurated the Maari Petroleum and CDRS Iftar table at PIMS hospital here and served the first iftar to the families of patients. On the arrival of Ramadan, various iftar tables (Dastarkhan) have been established in the capital city, said a press release issued here. Mushaal Mullick, wife of detained Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik, broke the fast with families of the patients, said a press release. Talking to media persons, she appreciated the administration of Maari Dastarkhan for advancing this good act in such an organized manner. Mushaal felicitating the Muslims of the whole world, especially the oppressed people of Kashmir and Palestine on Ramadan, said, "The world of Islam remember your oppressed brothers and sisters in these blessed days." She said the message of Ramadan was to include the deprived class in joy and serve them with dignity.—APP

SDPI reports Rs567B loss as cigarette makers influence policymakers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Cigarette consumption is increasing in developing countries and Pakistan is no exception and has witnessed an upsurge in recent years and instead of generating additional revenue from the cigarette industry, the country has incurred billions in losses, both in terms of revenue and increased health costs. Pakistan is one of the top tobacco-consuming countries standing at the 7th position globally and 1st in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) in terms of the number of tobacco product users. According to an estimate the country produces more than 60 billion sticks of cigarettes every year but when it comes to revenue the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) data shows all tax collection targets were missing during last seven years. The total loss, estimated by a number of research studies including one by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), during the last seven years has been estimated at Rs

567 billion. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the need to safeguard tobacco tax policies from vested interests of cigarette companies for effective development, implementation, and enforcement of public health initiatives. However, it did not happen in Pakistan. The study also highlighted how high and middle-income countries successfully imposed high taxes on cigarette products to decrease consumption and increase government revenues, but the fact remains that Pakistan still lacks a clear strategy on using cigarette taxation and prices as a public health tool. Pakistan has signed Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC), the multilateral treaty initiated by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004 to curb smoking. Two decades post FCTC, the cigarette industry is influencing decision making and the country stands at the losing end — loss of revenue and extra burden on the country's fragile healthcare system. World Bank has also revealed,

in a report titled "Pakistan: Overview of Tobacco Use, Tobacco Control Legislation, and Taxation," that the decline in government revenue in the 2016-2017 fiscal year was carefully planned by the powerful cigarette industry. According to details, the cigarette industry convinced the government to introduce third-tier (for taxation) in order to curb illicit trade. The industry cited exaggerated numbers of illicit trade and consequently, with the introduction of the third tier in the tobacco taxation regime, the revenues fell from Rs 114.27 billion in 2015-16 to Rs 83.76 billion in 2016-17. When it comes to burden on the health sector, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) provides insight into the overall costs linked to smoking-related diseases and deaths in Pakistan for the year 2019. The analysis points to an additional financial burden of Rs 615.07 billion (\$3.85 billion), with indirect costs such as morbidity and mortality constituting a significant 70% of the total expenses.

Commerce minister pledges business-friendly policies

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Commerce Jam Kamal Khan has said that the government is business friendly, will make all the policies with the consultation of the business community and will take all the chambers of the country along with it. The solution of the economic crisis is the first priority. We want the support of the business community for the stability of the business. We will provide facilities to the business community for ease of doing business. The mission of fully facilitating investment and local and foreign investors and under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has come with a strong determination to overcome the economic challenges facing the country. I would like to thank President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari and Secretary General UBG Zafar Bakhtawari for coming to congratulate. He expressed these views yesterday while talking to President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari and Secretary General UBG Zafar Bakhtawari, who con-

gratulated him on assuming the post of Federal Minister of Commerce, Federal Minister of Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, said will increase the volume of trade, especially in key sectors such as mining, livestock, and textiles. We urgently need to align with global standards and adopt modern methods, Jam Kamal said that there is a need to move beyond the traditional trade approach and adopt proactive measures to improve Pakistan's position in the global market. Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that people across the country, including the business community, have many expectations from the government. We know that there are difficult times and bad conditions. will fully cooperate with. The business community also expects that the government will consult the businessmen, especially the Chambers, in policy making, because the policy made with their consultation will benefit the country and the economy. We will lend our hand in the government's efforts for economic stability. We will work together with the government to deal with the problem of inflation, reduce

interest rates, improve exports, increase foreign exchange reserves and revive the economy. Pakistan has excellent potential to promote exports of IT, pharmaceuticals, textiles and other sectors, so the business community should work with the government to solve the problems of the export sector and create a favorable environment for export promotion. ICCI will fully cooperate with the Government in its efforts to improve business and economic activities in the country. The government should start working on the budget proposals in consultation with all chambers of commerce and associations in the country so that a comprehensive document of proposals based on the views of the business community can be presented to the government for the next budget. On this occasion, Secretary General UBG Zafar Bakhtawari said that the business community will provide its full support to the government for economic stability, the business community is playing the most important role in the development of the economy. Will work with the newly elected government to promote ease of doing business in the country and improve the economy.



LAHORE : Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz is presiding over a high-level meeting on the promotion of tourism.—DNA

KP IGP calls for fool-proof Ramadan security

The police authorities have been asked to make their intelligence network more active

DNA

PESHAWAR : Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan on Wednesday directed the top police officials to make fool-proof security arrangements to maintain peace and order in the holy month of Ramadan and prevent any untoward incident. He issued these instructions in a special order from Central Police Office Peshawar to all Regional Police Officers and District Police Officers across the province. The police authorities have been asked to make

their intelligence network more active, to keep a close watch on the activities of suspicious elements, banned outfits, and extremists to foil any terrorist incident. The order further directed effectively monitoring of entry and exit routes and strict checking without causing inconvenience to the public besides making special security arrangements for all important installations, places of worship, markets, hospitals, petrol pumps, banks, financial institutions, railway stations, airports and other sensitive places. The police chief directed all the SDPOs to be present on patrol dur-

ing peak hours, especially during Iftar, to take better security measures and protect lives and property of the people at public and recreational places. He directed provision of meal for traffic police and other officials on duty to break their fast at the duty spot. The IGP has also issued instructions to the police officials to take comprehensive action against those involved in street crimes, robberies, car lifting and other crimes. The police chief directed police personnel to take all safety measures including wearing helmets and bulletproof jackets while on duty.

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PID 077/2024

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

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



Enquiry

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PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
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MH.....5611116
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RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
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Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Ahsan reviews progress of Centers of emerging technologies

The minister urged for collaborative efforts between academia and industry to accelerate the commercialization of technological innovations. He emphasized the need for curriculum reforms, accreditation, and standardization processes to ensure the quality and relevance of educational programs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Newly-appointed Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives, P Wednesday visited the National Center of Artificial Intelligence (NCAI) at NUST to review its progress, along with other national centers focusing on robotics, cyber-security, big data, and cloud computing established by the minister. Ahsan Iqbal underscored the pivotal role of these centers in driving economic growth through product commercialization and digital exports, stressing the significance of technological advancement in the modern global economy. During his interaction with stakeholders, Professor Iqbal highlighted the importance of investing in AI and technology, noting its transformative potential across various sectors. He advocated for the integration of AI into governance processes, emphasizing its role in facilitating good governance and fostering economic development. The minister urged for collaborative efforts between academia and industry to accelerate the commercialization of technological innovations. He emphasized the need for curriculum reforms, accreditation, and standardization processes to ensure the quality and relevance of educational programs. Addressing issues of sustainability, Professor Iqbal directed the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to revisit existing decisions and expedite the approval of proposed policies aimed at sustaining the efforts of the national centers. He emphasized the importance of operational plans focused on commercialization and industry collaboration to enable the centers to thrive. Moreover,



Professor Iqbal instructed HEC to expedite the release of promised funds and address delays in salary revisions, demonstrating his commitment to supporting technological initiatives. He stressed the crucial role of technology in driving Pakistan's economic growth and urged for swift resolution of pending issues. Earlier, the minister was comprehensively briefed on NCAI progress and on collaborative initiatives with inter-

national partners, such as the Memorandum of Agreement with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), showcasing Pakistan's commitment to global collaboration in the field of technology. He was also briefed on the National Center of Robotics and Automation (NCRA) and showcased its achievements in agriculture, healthcare collaborations, and advanced robotics for industries. The National Center

of Cyber Security (NCCS) highlighted the launch of over 50 products, international partnerships with Saudi Arabia, and its role in improving Pakistan's global ranking. The center's initiatives include cyber audits for over 30 national bodies, launching degree programs, and contributing to the security evaluation of cyber and non-cyber products under the Common Criteria Lab framework.

Pakistan-Qatar sign agreements to boost employment opportunities

ISLAMABAD: The government of Pakistan and Qatar have signed several agreements and letter's of Intent (LOIs) with top Qatari companies the main purpose of this initiative was set to significantly enhance employment opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in Qatar. An official source told APP, the signing of these Agreements with renowned Qatari firms, including Qatari Diyar-Saudi Bin Laden Group Construction (QD-SBG), Hamad Bin Khaled Contracting Company W.L.L (HBK), Ali Bin Ali Holding W.L.L, Sheikh Jabor Bin Mansour Bin Jabor Bin Jassim Al Thani (JM) Holding, Tabeeb Care Medical Services, and Al Rawnaq International Commercial Projects, marks a crucial step in strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Qatar in the field of human resource development. In addition to these agreements, the Pakistani delegation held a significant meeting with Mr. Hamad Saleh Al Qamra, Chairman of Al Qamra Holding, focusing on the recruitment of Pakistani manpower for various company projects. The visit also included a tour of the View Hospital, a part of Elegancia Health Care, where the recruitment of Pakistani health professionals is underway following a recent MoU between Elegancia Health Care and the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) of Pakistan. The primary objective of these initiatives is to create enhanced employment avenues for Pakistani workers in Qatar. SAPM Malik highlighted the potential of Pakistan as a key manpower exporter and detailed the government's efforts to streamline this process through quality recruitment agencies, skill development, and addressing foreign employers' needs. The CEOs of the Qatari companies expressed satisfaction with the Pakistani workforce and their willingness to increase Pakistani manpower in their companies, adhering to the governmental regulations of Qatar. The meetings also shed light on the growing demand for skilled labor in sectors like services, maintenance, hospitality, and construction, following Qatar's significant infrastructural development. These agreements and discussions represent a significant stride in increasing the presence of the Pakistani workforce in Qatar, paving the way for mutual economic growth and stronger bilateral ties.

Parents' awareness helpful to control effects of e-cigarettes

ISLAMABAD: Health expert Wednesday while expressing his serious concern over the new trend of electronic nicotine delivery systems like e-cigarettes or vape pens' harmful effects on youngster' health stressed parents' major role for helping children' as every year around 7 million people die an early death due to smoking. Talking to PTV news channel, a renowned Consultant, Anti Drugs/Narcotics Campaign Syed Zulfiqar Hussain remains extremely troubled about the rapid increase in the number of youth using these products, and have repeatedly called upon the authorities concerned to increase their oversight and scrutiny in this regard. He stressed that the students should protect themselves and contribute to saving their surroundings from the curse of drugs. Parents and

teachers are encouraged to collaborate in preventing youth from falling victim to drugs, he said, adding, the younger generation is not paying heed to anti-smoking and anti-drug campaigns. He explained that many harmful chemicals, including nicotine, were being used in the composition of this harmful e-cigarette which was toxic to humans and could cause health issues. "Vaping definitely is a very big issue, and it is problem at secondary schools nationwide and statewide," he added. He said children with a nicotine dependency may have difficulties concentrating in class, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, irritability, restlessness, frustration, anger and strong cravings to relieve symptoms with repeat nicotine exposure. "Academics and policy-makers must gather data and should conduct research to

show a causal relationship between e-cigarette experimentation by the youth and later tobacco addiction in the context of Pakistan," he demanded. "There is not much awareness of teachers and Parents where we need for a massive campaign against e-cigarettes like the campaign against sheesha and vape pen use", he added. We have decided to involve the civil society in order to raise awareness," he added. Replying a question, he said chemicals in vaping fluid also can cause acute lung injuries and contribute to lung and cardiovascular disease down the line. He added more rigorous anti-tobacco campaigns that focused on tobacco cigarettes and on the rising trend of e-cigarettes among youth to create awareness about the harmful effects of smoking.

Wise choice to appoint Dar as foreign minister

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that the appointment of Ishaq Dar as Foreign Minister by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif is a good decision. He said that Ishaq Dar understands the economy well and that he will start very effective economic diplomacy. Mian Zahid Hussain said Mr. Dar would prioritize relations with all the countries, including India, and a favorable environment for foreign investment would be created in Pakistan. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that Ishaq Dar is a responsible politician who, instead of raising slogans, is committed to working hard and has a good reputation. He said the country's image will improve because of the efforts of Ishaq Dar, and economic relations with America, Europe, China, and Arab countries will take on a new dimension. The business leader said that the endless tension between Pakistan and India will decrease as the focus of PML-N has always remained on economic development and improving relations with neighboring countries, especially India. Mian Zahid Hussain said Ishaq Dar would follow that policy, unlike some failed politicians who consider increased tensions with India necessary for their popularity.—DNA

Man sentenced to life for killing girl

WAH CANTT: A local court in Taxila has sentenced a convicted criminal to life imprisonment for the abduction and killing of a teenage girl, on Wednesday. According to FIR registered Wah Saddar Police Station, A man identified as Ilyas Khan has been sentenced to life imprisonment and fined Rs one million for the abduction and killing of a teenage girl Liaba Bibi, in Taxila in 2021. The Additional district and session Judge in Taxila imposed the sentence after convict confessed to abducting the 15-year-old girl, who worked as a maid and subsequently setting her body on fire after a botched abortion in Kohat city, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

'Youm-e-Tahafuz-Namoos-e-Risalat' on march 15

ISLAMABAD: To prevent the spread of blasphemy content on social media and raise awareness about it, a non-governmental organization 'Legal Commission on Blasphemy Pakistan' has announced to observe "Youm-e-Tahafuz-Namoos-e-Rasalat" on March 15. The commission has appealed to the public to participate in this awareness campaign actively. According to a statement issued by the commission, there has been an increase in the spread of blasphemous content by some malicious elements on various social media platforms. Also, an increase in sharing of such content in specific groups on various websites has been reported. In this regard, the commission said, educational institutions, mosque imams, intelligentsia, lawyers, media representatives, social media activists, and religious, and political leaders can play an important role to sensitize the masses about the negative impacts of blasphemous content on social media. To control this phenomenon, the commission urged that all sections of society including governmental and non-governmental organizations, must play their part.—DNA



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PARC pioneered, climate resilient wheat Varieties

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: (PR&P, PARC) Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) hosted an international seminar titled "Sino-Pak Research Activities on Wheat Genomics" at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) as part of Sino-Pak collaboration for wheat genomics. The seminar aimed to improve wheat productivity through genomic research, focusing on improving regional and global food security. Renowned wheat scientist from CIMMYT-CAAS China, Prof. Dr. Zhonghu He, participated in the event as a guest speaker. Chairman PARC, Dr. Ghulam Muhammad Ali, technical members and more than 200 scientists and researchers participated in the seminar. While addressing the seminar Chairman PARC & briefed about PARC & salient achievements of the council in wheat research. Dr. Ali highlighted the importance of PARC's adoption of new breeding technologies to improve wheat productivity, in collaboration with CAAS, China, leading to the development of climate-resilient wheat varieties. He stressed the importance of germplasm exchange, training sessions, joint workshops, and seminars to facilitate the adoption of new breeding methods Professor Dr. Zhonghu He presented recent advancement and utilization of molecular markers in wheat breeding. During his briefing, Dr. Zhonghu elaborated on China's development of innovative molecular markers and their integration into wheat breeding programs aimed at enhancing quality, disease resistance, and yield to safeguard food and nutritional security. Subsequent to the seminar, Professor Dr. Zhonghu He from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and Dr. Shaikat, Director of the National Institute for Genomics and Advanced Biotechnology (NIGAB), formalized their commitment to enhancing collaboration between the two institutions by signing a Letter of Intention (LOI). Prof.

Briefs

Mushaal Mullick urges UN to fulfill obligations

ISLAMABAD: Hurriyat leader Mushaal Hussein Mullick Wednesday called upon the United Nations (UN) to uphold its commitment to the right of self-determination. Talking to a Private news channel, she said that India has violated all international laws and conventions in IIOJK, adding, that the actions of the Modi-led government are undemocratic and illegal and in direct violation of UN resolutions and the Geneva Convention.

She said Pakistan was gravely concerned over the escalation of systematic brutalities, killing of innocent civilians, and human rights violations by the Indian security forces with impunity in Indian-occupied Kashmir. "We are reminding the international community from time to time to ensure the peaceful implementation of UN resolutions which is the only way out to resolve the Kashmir dispute", she added.

Kashmiri people have rendered unparalleled sacrifices in their struggle to achieve their right in the last seven decades, she further mentioned. Pakistani government would speed up and continue its efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue at global forums, she added.—APP

ANF recovers 451 kg drugs in 11 operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in its crackdown against drug trafficking conducted 11 operations across the country and managed to recover 451 kg drugs and arrested 17 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 5.2 kg Ice was recovered from a parcel booked for Japan at a courier office in Lahore. 450 grams ice was recovered from the possession of a passenger going to Doha at Multan Airport.

66 grams weed was recovered from a parcel booked for the UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 220 kg hashish was recovered from Rughni Road, Chaman while 195.6 kg opium was recovered from the possession of four suspects including a woman netted from Shalimar Town Lahore. 15.6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of four accused rounded up in two operations near Turki Toll Plaza Sohawa. The spokesman informed that 7 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near Islamabad Toll Plaza. 6 suspects were arrested in Kasur, from whom 5 kg heroin and a drone were recovered while 2.4 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested from Murree Road Rawalpindi. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.—APP

Dar receives congratulatory messages from world FMs

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has received congratulatory messages from his counterparts of various countries on assuming his office. Foreign Minister of Czech Republic Jan Lipavsky, congratulating Ishaq Dar on his appointment as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan said Czechia and Pakistan had long enjoyed friendly and constructive relations. Foreign Minister of Maldives Moosa Zameer also extended congratulations saying he was confident that the bilateral relations will continue to grow stronger under his leadership. Likewise Ukrainian FM Dmytro Kuleba congratulating Ishaq Dar on his appointment as Pakistan's 39th Foreign Minister wished him every success in his most responsible mission. "I look forward to expanding mutually beneficial bilateral and international cooperation between Ukraine and Pakistan", he added. FM Dar in his post on X (formerly twitter) thanked the Czech FM Jan Lipavsky for his warm congratulatory message. "I look forward to further strengthen the bonds of friendship between Pakistan and Czechia for our mutual benefit," he said.—APP



ISLAMABAD : Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi chairing a meeting at Ministry of Interior.—DNA

New finance minister urged to ensure ease of doing business

The average annual economic growth between 2010 and 2023 has been lackluster, around 4 percent, and has been accompanied by a rise in Pakistan's total debt as a share of its GDP, from 55 percent to 76 percent. Bangladesh, in contrast, grew at an annual average of 6.2 percent over the same period, while its debt to GDP ratio rose from 30 percent to 39 percent

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) on Wednesday congratulated Muhammad Aurgazeb as new Finance Minister for Pakistan and expected in new IMF package no further burden shall be put on business community as competitive energy tariff is direly needed to deliver. PBF Vice President, Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad while talking to media expressed his dissatisfaction over 220% increase in gas tariffs within one year. PBF have appealed to the newly-elected government to take notice, review the situation, and primarily focus on research and development (R&D) aimed at ensuring alternative fuel sources for the local industry. He further said it is the need of an hour to devise regional trade agreement among South Asian countries to improve the economic well beings of billions of people; though Pakistan's regional trade is below the desired level which needs to be seen in whole prospective before SIFC. "He emphasized that in international relations

it is a common axiom that a state can change its friends but it cannot replace its neighbours due to geographical compulsions. If neighbours cannot be replaced, ideally a state should enjoy at least cordial relations with its surrounding states if not the best relations". The average annual economic growth between 2010 and 2023 has been lackluster, around 4 percent, and has been accompanied by a rise in Pakistan's total debt as a share of its GDP, from 55 percent to 76 percent. Bangladesh, in contrast, grew at an annual average of 6.2 percent over the same period, while its debt to GDP ratio rose from 30 percent to 39 percent, he added. Jawad viewed the big step Pakistan could take to reinvent growth that would be to embrace trade with its neighbours, which is currently almost nonexistent. "The World Bank research, reveals that Pakistan's exports could increase by 80 percent, with commensurate impacts on GDP and employment, if it had a normal trading relationship with its neighbours". The PBF official further said deeper economic engagement with neighbouring

countries could also help address other acute problems in Pakistan's economy, including rampant inflation, which has led to an increase in poverty over the last year; a rent-seeking private sector that constantly lobbies for protection and favorable tax treatment; and the long-standing energy crisis, exacerbated by the ongoing economic calamity. In this way, a vibrant trading relationship with neighbouring countries can help us understand to realize significant structural gains in an organic rather than mandated manner: by inducing productivity improvement and innovation, reducing price distortions, and enabling higher inflows of foreign direct investment; Jawad said and added such gains are likely to be quite important for the Pakistani economy. However to find the trade potential we may use the gravity model of trade. The gravity model uses variables GDP, distance, RTA (Regional Trade Agreements) imports and exports of the reporting and partner countries, common language, tariffs and non-tariff measures, and many other variables concerning trade. The value of trade is directly related to the

mass (GDP) of the economy and indirectly related to the distance between them. In short, trade is directly proportional to the product of the GDPs of economies and indirectly proportional to the distance between them. Statistically, a one percent change in the tariffs rate will decrease 0.3 percent in Pakistan's total trade. Moreover, a one percent increase in the GDP of the partner countries will increase Pakistan's total trade by 0.5 percent; PBF official stated. Similarly for Afghanistan, the Pakistan Business Forum stated that to realise the true potential of trade Pakistan and Afghanistan ought to improve trade facilitation, which at the moment is quite nebulous. The APTTA emphasises upon such facilitation. Trade facilitation could be enhanced through streamlined payments settlement and improved insurance mechanisms. For this, an integrated banking system needs to be developed. Moreover, use of bonded carriers, visa issuance, trade financing, tax collection, and documentation also need to be simplified.

Illegal hoarding of LPG

OGRA has communicated to the Provincial Chief Secretaries to direct the local governments for taking immediate necessary action against illegal hoarders

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has taken notice of the market reports regarding a surge in LPG prices even though ample stocks of LPG molecules are sufficiently available in the country. Apparently, an initial scrutiny of the matter reveals that hoarding of LPG stocks is the primary cause of the artificial increase in LPG prices and some unscrupulous elements are artificially restraining the stock from consumers approach and are selling the product beyond OGRA prescribed LPG prices. In this context, OGRA has communicated to the Provincial Chief Secretaries to direct the local governments for taking immediate necessary action against illegal hoarders and ensure the sale of LPG on OGRA prescribed prices to the end consumers. Further, Ministry of Energy, Petroleum Division has also issued letters to the Chief Secretaries for appropriate actions. Additionally, OGRA Enforcement teams are already in the field to monitor the stocks and ensure sale of LPG.

Mohsin Naqvi assumes charge of Interior Ministry

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday took charge of the Ministry of Interior as the 49th minister. Interior Secretary Aftab Akbar Durani and senior officials of the Ministry welcomed the Federal Interior Minister on his arrival. After a detailed introduction with the senior officials of the ministry, an important meeting was presided over by the Interior Minister. Mohsin Naqvi said that peace and security of the people will be ensured in the country.

Automobile sale rises 118% in Feb 2024

ISLAMABAD: Sale of cars in the country witnessed an increase of 118.36 per cent in February 2024 compared to the same month of the preceding year, a data released by the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA) said on Wednesday. Sale of cars rose to 7,953 units in February 2024 compared to 3,642 units during the same month of the previous year. Sale of cars during the first eight months (Jul-Feb) however decreased by 40.92 per cent when compared to the sale during the same period of the year 2022-23. According to the data, as many as 46,417 cars were sold during the period under review as opposed to 78,575 units in the same period of last year. The breakup figures showed that 6,520 units of Honda Civic and City were sold as compared to the sale of 11,770 units in eight

months of the previous year. Toyota Corolla and Yaris car sales also declined by 38.27 per cent as it went down to 9,181 units from 14,875 units in last year. Suzuki Swift's sales also decreased by 55.30 per cent as its sales went down to 3,445 units from 7,707 units last year. Sale of Suzuki Cultus declined to 2,501 units during the first eight months of the current year, whereas during the same months last year, the sale was recorded at 5,758 units while the sale of Suzuki WagonR also decreased to 2,285 units from 4,533 units last year. Suzuki Alto's sales also witnessed a sharp decline of 29.93 per cent from 28,202 units to 19,761 units during the current year, whereas the sales of Suzuki Bolan decreased to 1,497 units as opposed to sales of 3,083 units in the same month of last year.—APP

Lok Virsa to organize "Ramzaan Bazar"

ISLAMABAD: National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage- Lok Virsa would organize a Ramzan Bazaar on March 30, featuring iftar treats and other traditional activities to celebrate the Holy Month of Ramadan. The visitors would explore the vibrant marketplace filled with unique treasures, including

traditional attire, exquisite jewelry, handcrafted goods, iftar parties, food bazaar, clothing bazaar, crafts shopping, and live workshops, adding that join us in fostering a sense of community and compassion during this auspicious time, an official of Lok Virsa told APP. "We do have an amazing callig-

raphy exhibition lined up for all art lovers as well," he added. He said that there will be a kid's play area for those who want to bring their kids along. "Embrace the spirit of togetherness as our bazaar brings together diverse communities to celebrate the holy Month of Ramadan, he added.—APP

Pakistani companies showcase textile expertise at yarn expo

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Eighteen Pakistani textile companies made a strong impression at the Yarn Expo Spring 2024 and Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics-Spring Edition 2024, two of the world's most influential textile and apparel exhibitions, held here. The Pakistani contingent, representing a diverse range of textile manufacturers and suppliers, showcased their latest products and innovative technologies, attracting significant interest from global buyers, China Economic Net (CEN) reported.

Participating companies, spanning the yarn, fabric, finished goods segments and accessories, exhibited a wide array of high-quality products, including cotton, polyester, blended yarns, wool carpets and specialty fabrics. Pakistan's textile industry has long been renowned for its quality, competitiveness and ability to meet the evolving demands of the global market. Hussain Haider, Consul General of Pakistan in Shanghai, while talking to China Economic Net at the expo expressed his pride and optimism regarding the strong participation of Pakistani textile companies at the two

major exhibitions. Highlighting the significance of the presence of the Pakistani textile industry at the expo, he stated that it was a testimony to the rich textile heritage of the country and its commitment to innovation and quality. "Pakistan's textile industry has emerged as a leading exporter, generating US\$1.9 billion in annual exports, consolidating its position as the largest industry in the country," the Consul General pointed out. "Pakistani textiles are known for their competitive pricing, making them an attractive option for buyers seeking quality products at affordable prices.

Pakistan envoy calls on Vietnam President

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam, Samina Mehtab called on President of Vietnam Vo Van Thuong in Hanoi for a farewell meeting. During the call on, both sides reviewed the overall bilateral ties, with special emphasis on political relations and economic cooperation. Ambassador Samina Mehtab expressed the desire of the Government of Pakistan to further strengthen bilateral ties with Vietnam in all spheres of mutual interaction. According to a press release issued on Wednesday.—APP

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Berlin's genocide denial

At the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Nicaragua filed a case against Germany for abetting, facilitating, and enabling Israeli genocide in Gaza. The case also points at Berlin's unabashed blocking of funds to the UNRWA and brazen provision of weapons to the Netanyahu regime despite over 30,000 Palestinians losing their lives amid widespread famine, displacement, and destitution. Expectedly, Nicaragua's case resulted in a sharp rebuke from Germany, yet few can deny that Berlin's contemporary and historical denial of the Palestinian genocide is a product of its governmental and societal fabric and engineering. Such denial enables Germany to conveniently label anti-war activism, peaceniks, and critics of its foreign policy in the Middle East as 'anti-Semitic.' It runs deep. It also comes in many forms. Take the Anti-Afd (Alternative for Germany) protests calling out right-wing, far-right segments of German society who are also sympathetic to the Zionism cause. They were completely muzzled out harassed and attacked. The anti-Afd protests which took place in February 2024, were aimed at ensuring that Germany does not descend into crass populism and fascism which has otherwise haunted Europe in the form of Viktor Orban's authoritarianism in Hungary or Giorgia Meloni's fascism in Italy. Both leaders in Budapest and in Rome are unequivocally pro-Israeli and ironically, have been called out repeatedly by German leaders for their fascism. Since October 7th, 2023, however Germany finds itself in similar terrain on Palestine with historical guilt washing taking place under the garb of democracy. No more is this evident than in academia. German universities such as the University of Heidelberg are highly ranked and supposed to be bastions of freedom of thought, assembly and expression. They are being subjected to blatant racism. Take what happened at the Freie University in Berlin as an example. In December 2023, a group of students assembled in a lecture hall on campus to express solidarity with Palestine and were accompanied by counter protesters who had opposing views. Instead of the university administration encouraging students and counter protesters to debate, discuss and refrain from violence, they called the police over the premise that any act of 'anti-Semitism' on campus will not be tolerated. A criminal charge of trespassing was also imposed while Federal Minister for Education, Bettina Stark-Watzinger called for the public expulsion of severe cases of 'anti-Semitism.' The protesters subsequently encountered media harassment, demonization and silencing campaigns under the very watch of the Olaf Scholz government. Berlin is obsessed with 'atoning' for its crimes which translates into tactics supporting the crimes of an apartheid state. According to the June, 2023 European Legal Support Center report, Germany was one of the countries found to dismiss employees falsely accused of being 'anti-Israel' and also denied public places for Palestinian protests, events, and fundraisers. One such example is German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle which fired seven Arab and Palestinian journalists for allegedly making anti-Semitic comments, which was ultimately dismissed in court the moment two of the fired journalists, Maram Salem and Farah Maraga, challenged the defamation.



US 'reluctant to let go hegemony'

THE US' latest intelligence report is part of the country's cognitive warfare against designated "competitors" and "rivals," and exposes that Washington is anxious and reluctant to accept that US supremacy is waning, Chinese observers said on Tuesday. The 2024 edition of the annual threat assessment report of the US intelligence community was presented to Congress on Monday. Intelligence leaders warned lawmakers on Monday, US local time, that the country faces an "increasingly fragile world order," strained by great power competition, transnational challenges and regional conflicts, Reuters reported. Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times on Tuesday that when the assessment made the conclusion of an "increasingly fragile world order," it mirrors the US' own situation - that the US itself has become fragile and its leadership has been weakened, and therefore the international order has become fragile. It is a US-centric conclusion. Chinese analysts pointed out that this intelligence report is nothing to do with intelligence collecting, but all about politics. In other words, it serves the US' geopolitical and strategic purposes with partial claims, exaggerations and distortions. Lü Xiang, a US studies expert and research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Tuesday that the function of US intelligence is two-fold: to collect intelligence from others and to spread disinformation. Such published intelligence, infused with distortions about China, Russia and some others, aims to fight disinformation warfare. Lü pointed out the internal contradiction of the report that China is developing and "threatening the US," and at the same time China will ultimately fail. Such contradiction reflects the US' chaotic policy and mentality in dealing with China. US President Joe Biden is running his campaign on TikTok, but the US is also pushing a ban on the social media giant unless Chinese company ByteDance divests it, another example of US' hysteria. The Monday report claimed that "[China] may attempt to influence the US elections in 2024 at some level because of its desire to sideline critics of China and magnify US societal divisions," hinting on TikTok. It accused China of targeting candidates from both parties on TikTok in the 2022 midterms. The report also accused China of providing economic and security assistance to Russia by supporting Russia's defense industrial base. CIA chief William Burns told the Senate that if the US walks away from Ukraine, it will stoke the ambitions of China. Commenting on that, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a regular press briefing on Tuesday that what the US cares about is not Ukraine, but to realize its own geopolitical and strategic goal via the Ukraine crisis. On the Gaza war, the intelligence community assessed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "viability as a leader" to be "in jeopardy," and that the threat of a terrorist attack within the US "has gone to a whole [other] level," according to a hearing. Admitting US' mistakes is not an option, but the nuanced changes in rhetoric concerning Israel and Ukraine have exposed that the US' biggest challenges stem from its own mishandling of international affairs, Lü said.

The operation collateral freedom

Qamar Bashir



RSF underscores Pakistan's status as one of the most perilous environments for journalists, marked by extensive censorship and self-censorship. Urgently, RSF calls upon the new government to address this critical issue and honor commitments made by political parties during the electoral campaign. These include establishing a Safety and Security Commission for journalists, as pledged by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and revising the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, as promised by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

ON the occasion of the World Day Against Cyber Censorship, celebrated globally on March 12th, the Paris-based media watchdog, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), unveiled the launch of Operation Collateral Freedom (OCF). This initiative empowers over 100 media outlets in 32 countries to bypass censorship, marking a 20% increase from the previous year. Operation Collateral Freedom achieves this by creating mirror sites of blocked websites, ensuring constant synchronization with the originals and placing them in various online locations. OCF helps the journalists to adapt to the evolution in censorship techniques, provides the media with IT resources through the Collateral Freedom app since August 2023, which allows them to mirror sites hosted on the online infrastructure used by RSF. So far 480 mirror sites on RSF's servers are currently enabling access to 100 censored media outlets. Pakistani journalists grappling with censorship and social media restrictions have an opportunity to benefit from RSF's Operation Collateral Freedom. Through this initiative, RSF creates mirror sites of blocked media outlets, providing users access to content otherwise censored. Journalists can request their websites be mirrored and utilize the Collateral Freedom app for technical support, ensuring their content remains accessible despite censorship attempts. By staying informed about RSF's efforts, collaborating with international partners, and advocating for press freedom, Pakistani journalists can effectively combat online censorship and ensure their voices are heard. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has consistently voiced concerns regarding restrictions, both official and unofficial, on press and media freedom in Pakistan. In an open letter to Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif on March 4th, RSF urged the new government to take immediate steps to restore press freedom, significantly weakened in recent years. RSF highlighted that the 2024 electoral process witnessed a notable surge in violations against media freedom, emphasizing the critical need for prompt and effective measures to address these issues. RSF condemns the arbitrary shutdowns of the Internet and mobile services, as well as the blocking of social media platforms for political purposes, deeming such actions unacceptable in a democratic society and urged the government to provide an assurance that it will refrain from resorting to these authoritarian measures, which undermine freedom of expression and access to information. RSF's assessment underscores Pakistan's standing in media freedom, ranking 150th out of 180 coun-

tries. Shockingly, between 2012 and 2022, 53 journalists lost their lives in Pakistan, with convictions secured for only 4% of these cases. RSF highlights various forms of media coercion in Pakistan, including military interference, journalist abductions by intelligence agencies, legislative misuse to muzzle journalists, arbitrary Internet shutdowns, and draconian media laws. The lackluster investigations into these crimes perpetuate impunity, denying justice to victims. RSF emphasizes the urgent need for strengthened legislation to combat impunity and ensure respect for the rule of law, particularly concerning criminal activities by security services targeting journalists deemed "troublesome," such as abductions, secret detentions, and torture. RSF underscores Pakistan's status as one of the most perilous environments for journalists, marked by extensive censorship and self-censorship. Urgently, RSF calls upon the new government to address this critical issue and honor commitments made by political parties during the electoral campaign. These include establishing a Safety and Security Commission for journalists, as pledged by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and revising the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, as promised by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). RSF urges the government to combat harassment against women journalists, enforce laws protecting journalists, repeal restrictive legislation on information rights, ensure media independence, cease arbitrary Internet and social media shutdowns, and enable journalists to work safely while upholding the free flow of information. RSF emphasizes the urgency for the federal government to enact the 2021 federal law on the protection of journalists and media professionals without delay. Despite Prime Minister Sharif's public commitment in Islamabad on December 6, 2022, to establish the planned security commission, it has yet to be implemented, rendering the law ineffective. Additionally, RSF calls for the revision of Article 6 to eliminate the contentious reference to "bona fide journalism." These measures are crucial to safeguarding the rights and safety of journalists in Pakistan. RSF urges the information ministry to cease using advertising revenue as a tool to manipulate the editorial direction of privately-owned media outlets, whose financial stability relies heavily on legal notices and state sector advertising. Additionally, RSF condemns the military's persistent intervention in media affairs to suppress information. Journalists must have the freedom to cover all topics without fear, including those concerning the armed forces, terrorism, and the defense of civil liberties. This entails ensuring un-

biased reporting and protecting journalists from undue influence or intimidation. RSF challenges the government to review several laws that encroach upon press and media freedom, including certain clauses of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance 2023 (PEMRA Amendment Act). These amendments purportedly combat disinformation but risk enabling media censorship. RSF insists on precise definitions for terms like "authentic information" and "disinformation" to prevent license withdrawal or outlet suspension. The Official Secrets Amendment Act (2023) requires revision to prevent its misuse against journalists. Additionally, Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, known as "PECA," is currently utilized to censor social media criticism and must be revised to safeguard online freedom of expression. In his inaugural address to the newly sworn-in cabinet, the Prime Minister rightly underscored trade and investment as critical areas for uplifting the beleaguered state of the economy. However, while emphasizing hard work as the primary pathway to achieving economic progress, it's imperative to recognize that the perception of a country's brand value plays a pivotal role in attracting favorable trade and investment. Regrettably, the current brand image of Pakistan languishes at its lowest, trailing behind many regional counterparts and only marginally above war-torn nations. This dismal performance extends across various international indices and rankings, spanning from soft power and economic indicators to rule of law, legislative freedom, democracy, justice, and freedom of press and media. To effectively stimulate trade and investment, there must be a concerted effort to uplift Pakistan's brand image across all these fronts. This entails upholding the rule of law, adhering steadfastly to democratic principles, ensuring the freedom and independence of vital institutions, and safeguarding the fundamental rights of speech, assembly, and media. Without tangible improvements in these areas, mere lofty promises, impassioned speeches, or even diligent hard work will fall short in revitalizing the country's economic prospects. Investors and trade partners seek stability, transparency, and reliability, qualities that can only be fostered through genuine institutional reforms and unwavering commitment to democratic values which include freedom of press and media. Therefore, it's paramount for the government to prioritize these foundational pillars of governance to pave the way for sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

- **Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)**
Former Press Minister at Embassy
Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRBC

The fabric of reality

Alastair Crooke

The Ruling Strata, however, views giving up power as the height of irresponsibility. As betrayal, even! A mindset reflecting a breath-taking dogmatism; a kind of ideological solipsism, preventing these technocratic élites from seeing the world as it actually is. Holding onto power trumps upholding the old Order that brought them to power (or maintaining a Constitution, or respecting the Law). The masses - absent essential élite guidance - our rulers believe, risk being captured by the dark forces of 'Populism' and authoritarianism. The disorder of their slide towards 'otherness'...

THE celebrated French philosopher, Henri Corbin, who taught at Tehran University, once drew the attention of a Western friend to an ancient cupboard in a Tehran café, in which they were sitting. The old piece had several shelves - each enclosed by thin panelling - cut around the outline of different vases and urns, into which they would be slotted on the shelves. Only, as Corbin noted, the vases and urns were absent: they had long since vanished; broken or lost. The point Corbin was making was that nonetheless the space which once they physically occupied still persisted in clear outline. And so it is with ideas, with things said or written. They are not entirely gone. The space persists and somehow relentlessly reminds us of them. Corbin here was pointing at something important about Shi'a understanding of time and memory. He was hinting that memory resides not just in ourselves, but beyond the confine of individual brains; and that memories can and do surge up into consciousness, triggering a recall of something past. Corbin was a close friend of Carl Jung (they together attended the annual Eranos conferences), and Corbin's insights drawn from long study of Shi'a philosophy were, as Jung acknowledged, to influence his own work on the collective (transpersonal) unconsciousness. It is a significant point: Ideas, conceptualisations and history may be shut down and cancelled by the command of the 'masters of dogma', but the space these intellectual vessels once occupied is still ethereally there - to rise again in challenge to dogma. The massive polarization occurring today in the world is not simply geopolitical. It is not simply a competition over resources, or even simply a rivalry based on trade relationships. The conflict between Western élites and the rest of humanity, as Emmanuel Todd has suggested in *La Défaite*, is the result of the West "falling into nihilism and the deification of nothing". Todd defined this nihilism as "the desire for destruction, but also of the negation of reality. There are no longer any traces of religion, but the human being is still there." We are in for an extended period of revolution and of civil war. Ukraine and Gaza already have brought about the West's ideological self-isolation in the world. The world is not in the least invested in the notion that Ukraine and Washington somehow represent 'freedom and progress', and Moscow 'stands for tyranny'. The Washington-led West simply has no clue as to how much of the world rejects the value system of contemporary globalist neo-liberalism. The Ruling Strata, however, views giving up power as the height of irresponsibility. As betrayal, even! A mindset re-

flecting a breath-taking dogmatism; a kind of ideological solipsism, preventing these technocratic élites from seeing the world as it actually is. Holding onto power trumps upholding the old Order that brought them to power (or maintaining a Constitution, or respecting the Law). The masses - absent essential élite guidance - our rulers believe, risk being captured by the dark forces of 'Populism' and authoritarianism. The disorder of their slide towards 'otherness' threatens to disorder the new world of values - and makes them enemy to the new diversity of identity, now sacralised to the point of being non-negotiable. Diversity paradoxically inverts not at all to legitimize wider horizons, but rather, towards a new dogmatism: Rival minorities are 'gated' behind an array of dogma and impervious to rational discussion. The physical segregation of the population to self-enclosed, heterogenous identity enclaves has its counterpart in the balkanization of opinion. Each compartment is barricaded behind its own dogmas, emoting and shouting at each other; yet unable to settle any dispute. Therefore, all tools - Money, Institutions and Media - must be put to the enforcement of the New Order. The Ancient understanding of society and history - of the world - was that of an integrated totality. It offered a more holistic perspective - one which can account for, rather than annul or strike out, the contradictions within the fabric of reality. Contradictions and oppositions within history and understanding today are regarded as dangerous and signs of a threat to democratic order. The underlying reality, however, is that individual life stories of members of a community become enmeshed and intertwined. And the entanglement of our stories surges out to form the everyday weft and weave of communal life. The latter can and should never become funnelled into a single 'way of thinking' - generated abstractly and imposed by Central Command. Defending historical holism, however, implies ultimately, the defence of unique existence, in spite of any superficial contradictions within. To defend the existence of your people, their unique culture and way of life as an organic, integral, and holistic culmination of the people's historical existence, in itself is History viewed as a living organic thing. The tool of 'free money' facilitated enforcement of many things, but particularly has achieved a hold over the media. The rush 'free money' at zero interest, called Quantitative Monetary Easing or QE - was launched in Japan in 2001. The total credit created by central banks through quantitative easing, or QE, is now more than \$30 trillion.

QE quietly became the defining idea of our time. And as QE drove inequality, it polarised politics. For the past 15 years, every major development in the Western economy and the cultural superstructure has rested upon it: the explosive growth of social media and Big Tech, the property boom, the gig economy, Elon Musk, cryptocurrencies, fake news and woke capitalism. Trillions flooded into the financial system. It was magic to the financialised world, but it had another effect too - The rush of 'free money' gave Big Tech the power to buy up platforms that previously had relied on selling the news. They were replaced by entities beholden to advertisers that only cared about grabbing people's attention and selling it to the highest bidder. A new economy of attention arose - a machine for turning distraction and polarisation into investor returns. The Power Structures 'got it': Words no longer need to have objective meanings in this market. Everything is about 'attention', however achieved. True or false. That's what the advertisers wanted. Words could mean what those in power say they mean. The 'truth' behind the narrative became irrelevant. What mattered was the force of a narrative, now divorced from meaning, to compel a singularity of messaging, and to demand that belief in the new order be reflected, not just in compliance, but in assimilation of the messaging into personal conduct in life. Critical thinking was disallowed as denoting an enemy; a threat to be crushed. This revolution and civil war are likely to be extended over time. Enforcement will predominate initially, but ultimately the Ruling Strata will overreach itself. Emmanuel Todd has defined the West as a "post-imperial" entity; just a shell of military machinery deprived of an intelligence-driven culture, leading to "accentuated military expansion in a phase of massive contraction of its industrial base". As Todd stresses, "modern war without industry is an oxymoron". Each time that society just says 'No', enforcement by the Ruling Strata will become more problematic, more stupidly heavy-handed. And the Elites will duly undercut themselves. Julian Assange is a soldier seized by enemy forces - an undeserving victim in this 'war'. I mourn also Daryia Dugina who was burnt to death in a fireball, as her father watched on, helplessly - another battlefield to this war. I salute them both. Let us continue saying, 'No'; 'Just go'. This article is based on a talk given by Alastair Crooke on 9 March 2024 as part of the conference Night Falls in the Evening Lands: The Assange Epic, organised by the Julian Assange Campaign.

- Source: Al Mayadeen

Briefs

PTI, PML-N
break ice
as KP CM
meets PM

FROM PAGE 01
April 2022. The PTI has accused the PML-N and other allied parties part of the coalition government of coming into power via backdoor after manipulating the results of the February 8 elections. After becoming the KP CM, Gandapur had said that he would maintain a good working relationship with the Centre but would not compromise on the party's stance that the incumbent rulers "stole" the public's mandate. Responding to a question related to PM Shehbaz's recent visit to KP, Gandapur said he could not receive the premier as he was not present in Peshawar. "It's our tradition that we take special care of guests," the CM added. Speaking on the occasion, Planning Minister Iqbal welcomed the KP's CM meeting with the premier and stated that the federal government will take all possible steps for the development and maintenance of law and order in the province.

Imran
warns of Sri
Lanka-like...

FROM PAGE 01
power via a parliamentary vote in April 2022, said that the voters took revenge on the polling day but the "change via vote was not accepted". He added that the former ruling party would continue its peaceful protests against the rigging besides approaching the Supreme Court (SC). He also foresaw 'horse-trading' in forthcoming Senate elections, scheduled to be held on April 2. The deposed PM alleged that he was not being allowed to meet his lawyers as Pakistan going to seek final tranche of loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the PTI founder commented that the nation would look to streets after a new wave of inflation. In another development today, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan also arrived at Adiala Jail to meet the party founder.

Reserved
seats...

FROM PAGE 01
AGP Awan told the court that the reserved seats cannot be awarded to the SIC in any case because the party did not submit a list to the ECP for reserved seats. Moreover, the AGP said the SIC does not have a single seat in parliament and its chairman also contested the February 8 election as an independent candidate. Subsequently, the PHC adjourned the hearing on the case till tomorrow (Thursday) at 9am at the request of Advocate General Shah Faisal Utmanhkhel. The electoral body, on March 4, had accepted applications of the opposing parties and decided that the seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies would not remain vacant and would be allocated by a proportional representation process of political parties on the basis of seats won by political parties.

Russia
'ready' for...

FROM PAGE 01
prepared to use all means to protect his gains there. In an apparent reference to NATO allies, he also declared that "the nations that say they have no red lines regarding Russia should realize that Russia won't have any red lines regarding them either." In the interview, Putin described US President Joe Biden as a veteran politician who fully understands possible dangers of escalation, and said that he doesn't think that the world is heading to a nuclear war. At the same time, he emphasized that Russia's nuclear forces are in full readiness and "from the military-technical viewpoint, we're prepared." Putin said that in line with the country's security doctrine, Moscow is ready to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to "the existence of the Russian state, our sovereignty and independence." He also reaffirmed that Ukraine and its Western allies will eventually have to accept a deal on Russian terms.

PCB Chairman to attend
crucial ICC board meeting

Naqvi will travel to Dubai today to attend the first ICC meeting of 2024, where this year's T20 World Cup and 2025 Champions Trophy

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi will attend a crucial International Cricket Council (ICC) board meeting this week, according to sources. Naqvi will travel to Dubai tomorrow to attend the first ICC meeting of 2024, where this year's T20 World Cup and 2025 Champions Trophy, which will be hosted by Pakistan, will be on the agenda. PCB Chief Operating Officer Salman Naseer is already in Dubai for the chief executives meeting. Sources added that PCB officials will also meet members of other cricket boards during their trip to Dubai. The three-day ICC meetings will start today. Earlier, Naqvi was inducted into the federal cabinet as interior minister, Geo News reported on Monday. The President had been advised, in a sum-



mary moved by the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif today, to appoint Naqvi as one of the federal ministers in terms of clause 1

cabinet took oath today at the Awan-e-Sadr with President Asif Ali Zardari administering their swearing-in ceremony. Naqvi has also confirmed that he will be contesting in the Senate polls from Punjab next month. Speaking to The News on Saturday, Naqvi said that though he would be the Senate's "candidate of all", he hasn't decided on his future political identity. It must be noted that Naqvi was elected unopposed as the new chairman of the PCB last month. The election, which confirmed Naqvi's appointment for a period of three years, took place at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore. However, it is pertinent to know that Naqvi's appointment as PCB chairman has been challenged in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) with the court having reserved its verdict on the petition relying on the caretaker prime minister's powers to appoint the board's chief.

Indian Wells: Alcaraz, Sinner
qualify for quarter-finals

PARIS: Carlos Alcaraz registered a win over Fabian Marozsan and avenge his defeat to the Hungarian at the Italian Open last year on Tuesday and qualified for the quarter-finals at the Indian Wells. Meanwhile, Jannik Sinner notched up his 18th straight win as he made his way to the quarter-finals with straight-sets victory over Ben Shelton. Alcaraz was in control against Marozsan as he continues to defend his title in the California desert with a 6-3 6-3 win. The Spaniard sealed the win with a crosscourt forehand on match point and yelled "Vamos!" after the final shot of the encounter. Marozsan had registered an upset win over Alcaraz in straight sets in Rome last May as a qualifier. "Honestly I was nervous before the match, I'm not going to lie," Alcaraz said. "Playing against

someone who beat you easily - I remember I had no chances in the match in Rome. It was difficult for me today to approach the match, but I'm really happy with the way that I did. "I started pretty well, playing my style since the beginning. Today I knew what I had to do better than I did in Rome." Alcaraz has not lost a set at the tournament since dropping the first set in the first match he played. The result was his 50th match win at a Masters 1000 event. The two-time Grand Slam winner could face Australian Open champion Sinner in the semi-finals but before that he will have to find a way to down Alexander Zverev. The German sixth seed beat Alex de Minaur with his persistent power to bag a 5-7 6-2 6-3 victory. Sinner and American Shelton played

a tight first set but the former was comfortable in the second, securing a 7-6(4) 6-1 win to maintain his perfect record in 2024. "I just tried to stay positive," Sinner said. "There were tough moments, especially in the first set, and I'm really happy that I won that and started really positive in the second set, which gave me a lot of confidence." Third seed Sinner will be tipped to win the match when he locks horns with Jiri Lehecka in the quarters. Lehecka, seeded 32nd, followed up his upset win over Andrey Rublev, fifth seed, with another over 11th seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a convincing 6-2 6-4 win to qualify for his first ever quarter-final at a Masters 1000 event. The 22-year-old Czech notched up 25 winners against the Greek player and has not dropped serve in his last two matches. - Agencies

ECP announces
by-polls schedule
for vacant seats

FROM PAGE 01

RO's decision till March 25. The appellate tribunal must then decide on the appeals by March 28 and the revised list of candidates will be issued the same day. Candidates who wish to withdraw from the polls can do so by March 29 and the next day - March 30 - running candidates will be allotted election symbols. The polling will be held on April 21. The NA seats on which by-elections will take place include NA-8 Bajaur, NA-44 Dera Ismail Khan-I, NA-119 Lahore-III, NA-132 Kasur-II, NA-196 Kamber Shadadkot-I and NA-207 Shaheed Benazirabad-I. The elections on NA-8 Bajaur and PK-22 Bajaur-IV were suspended after a candidate contesting as an independent on these constituencies was shot dead. Meanwhile, NA-44 seat fell vacant after newly-elected KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur opted to retain his provincial seat from DI Khan. The NA-119 Lahore-III seat was vacated after Maryam went for the provincial seat which she had won, while NA-132 Kasur fell vacant after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif decided to retain his NA-123 Lahore-VII seat. PM Shehbaz had also won on Punjab Assembly seats - PP-158 and PP-164 - but since he opted his NA seat, the provincial assembly seats were left vacant. Moreover, the NA seats from Sindh's constituencies, NA-196 Kamber Shadadkot-I and NA-207 Shaheed Benazirabad-I, were vacated after Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto retained the seat he won in Larkana, while President Asif Ali Zardari gave up his seat following his election as the head of state. The other provincial assembly seats on which by-polls will be held include Punjab's PP-22 Chakwal-Cum-Talagang, PP-32 Gujrat-VI, PP-36 Wazirabad-II, PP-54 Narowal-I, PP-93 Bhakkar-V, PP-139 Sheikhupura-IV, PP-147 Lahore-III, PP-149 Lahore-V, PP-158 Lahore-XIV, PP-164 Lahore-XX, PP-266 Rahim Yar Khan-XII, PP-290 Dera Ghazi Khan-V; KP's PK-22 Bajaur-IV, PK-91 Kohat-II; Balochistan's PB-20 Khuzdar-III, PB-22 Lasbela; and Sindh's PS-80 Dadu-I.

PCB announces match officials
for PSL 9 playoffs and final

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) today announced umpire and match referee appointments for the three playoff matches as well as the final of the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 9. The final four games of the PSL 9 will be played from 14-18 March at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi. The first Qualifier will be played on 14 March involving table-toppers Multan Sultans and Peshawar Zalmi and will

be refereed by Roshan Mahanama. Aleem Dar and Richard Illingworth will be the on-field umpires, while Rashid Riaz and Faisal Afridi will be the third and fourth umpires, respectively. Match Referee Muhammad Javed will lead the playing control team for the 15 March Eliminator 1 between Islamabad United and Quetta Gladiators. Ahsan Raza and Chris Gaffaney will be the on-field umpires, while Asif Yaqoob and Rashid Riaz will be the third and fourth umpires, respectively. Meanwhile, Eliminator 2 will be played on

16 March featuring the loser of the 14 March match and the winner of the 15 March fixture will be refereed by Muhammad Javed. Richard Illingworth and Asif Yaqoob will perform on-field umpire responsibilities, while Ahsan Raza and Faisal Afridi will be the third and fourth umpires, respectively. For the final of the PSL 9, scheduled on 18 March, Richard Illingworth and Chris Gaffaney will perform the duties of on-field umpires, while Ahsan Raza and Asif Yaqoob will be third and fourth umpires, respectively.

Hartley reacts after
Usama Mir creates
PSL history

KARACHI: Multan Sultans' spin-bowling coach Alexandra Hartley was delighted after Usama Mir created history in Pakistan Super League (PSL) on Tuesday during match against Quetta Gladiators. Leg-spinner Usama has etched his name into the record books of PSL after emerging as the highest wicket-taker in a single edition among spin bowlers after he cleaned up Mohammad Wasim Jr. With an outstanding performance in PSL 9, Usama has claimed a staggering 21 wickets so far, surpassing the previous record held by Rashid Khan, who secured 20 wickets in the last season while playing for Lahore Qalandars. Talking to X, formerly Twitter, Hartley called Usama a "superstar". On the other hand, notable bowlers such as Hasan Ali, Abbas Afridi, and Ehsanullah have left their mark with impressive wicket-taking displays in the previous seasons. Hasan's haul of 25 wickets in 2019 is the highest followed by Afridi's 23 and Ehsanullah's 22 in 2023. Notably, the list of top wicket-takers features solely fast bowlers, with Faheem Ashraf at fourth where he took 21 wickets in the 2019 edition. It must be noted that the playoffs schedule of the PSL 9 has also been confirmed. Sultans will now play Peshawar Zalmi in Qualifier 1 on March 14 while Gladiators play Islamabad United in the Eliminator on March 15. Sultans and Zalmi have two chances of qualifying for the PSL 9 final after finishing at the top two of the points table since the loser of Qualifier 1 will take on the winner of Eliminator on March 16. - Agencies

Iftikhar Ahmed fined for using
'inappropriate language'

The incident took place during the Lahore Qalandars vs Quetta Gladiators game at National Bank Stadium, Karachi, on Sunday night

DNA

MULTAN: Sultans' all-rounder Iftikhar Ahmed was fined five per cent of his match-fee for using inappropriate language during the match against Quetta Gladiators at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on Tuesday. According to PCB, Iftikhar was guilty of a Level 1 breach

of Pakistan Super League (PSL) Code of conduct. Iftikhar violated Article 2.5 of the PSL Code of Conduct, which reads as: "Using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon his/her dismissal during a match". The incident took place in the third over of Quetta Gladiators' batting, when Iftikhar was seen using

inappropriate language towards the batter who was dismissed. "Since Iftikhar pleaded guilty to the charge and accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Ali Naqvi, there was no need of a formal hearing," the PCB said in a press release. "The charge was imposed by on-field umpires Rashid Riaz and Richard Illingworth." Earlier, Lahore Qalandars' Sikkandar Raza was fined on Monday for showing dissent at an

umpire's decision. The Zimbabwe all-rounder was fined 10 per cent of his match fee for a Level 1 breach of PSL's code of conduct. The incident took place during the Lahore Qalandars vs Quetta Gladiators game at National Bank Stadium, Karachi, on Sunday night. Meanwhile, Islamabad United's pacer Naseem Shah was fined 10 per cent of match fee by the PCB. The fine had been handed for a level 1 breach of the PSL Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel during the match between Multan Sultans and Islamabad United at the Pindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Sunday. Naseem had kicked the stumps after the end of Multan Sultans' innings.

China, Iran,
Russia...

FROM PAGE 01

It marks the fourth joint naval exercise by the three countries since 2019. According to an annual schedule and consensuses reached by the three countries, the joint exercise held near the Gulf of Oman started on Monday, and will last until Friday, CCTV reported. With the theme of jointly building peace and security, the exercise mainly features anti-piracy and search and rescue training courses, and is organized in three phases, namely the harbor phase, the sea phase and the summarize phase, the report said. China's Ministry of National Defense said in a press release on Monday that the aim of the exercise is to jointly safeguard regional maritime security. The Security Belt joint exercise is hosted by the Iranian Navy, with more than 10 vessels from the three countries participating, CCTV reported.

Pakistan all
set for...

FROM PAGE 01

Muhammad Aurangzeb, to initiate work on seeking an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) after the standby arrangement expires on April 11. The global lender has said it will formulate a medium-term programme if Islamabad applies for one. The government has not officially stated the size of the additional funding it is seeking through a successor programme from the fund. New Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb shared that the government would engage with the IMF for a "large and long programme" under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). In his first media briefing after assuming charge, the newly appointed minister laid out his plan for economic stabilisation. Aurangzeb also hinted at the reduction in the policy rate but added that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is the domain of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), which currently enjoys autonomy.

PTI spokes-
person...

FROM PAGE 01

the EU nor was there any plan to do so rather it was only after PTI Chairman-for-life Imran Khan's assurance, the IMF agreed to release the second tranche of its bailout package for Pakistan. PTI Spokesperson blasted that the courtiers of Jati Umra, who got ministries as a reward for their obedience and subjugation before their Sharif masters, had lost their sense and unleashed a new series of lies and absurd talks, insisting that the mandate thieves should bring back the plundered national wealth stationed abroad to the country to stabilize the crippling economy of Pakistan instead of lecturing on patriotism.

Maryam
seeks...

FROM PAGE 01

hub will be accomplished. She directed to formulate a short-term and a long-term strategy for the promotion of tourism in the province. The Sikh community and the followers of other religions coming to Punjab will be provided a tourist package. Maryam Nawaz directed to undertake a comprehensive planning so as to provide international level facilities to the each and every tourist visiting Punjab adding that provision of complete security to every tourist is the first and foremost responsibility of the government. CM directed to identify holy places for the Sikh pilgrims along with formulating a complete development plan.

Punjab to
have 18...

FROM PAGE 01

During the briefing, it was mentioned that the Air Quality Index Monitoring Environment Sensor would also be part of the project. The safe city project in Gujrat, Jhelum, Sheikhupura, Okara, and Taxila will be functional in May, it was stated in the meeting. The other projects in Multan, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Muzaffargarh, Jhang, Attock, Hasnabad, DG Khan, Sialkot, Murree, and Mianwali will be completed this year.

Barcelona beat Napoli to reach Champions League quarter-finals

It is the first time that five-time winners Barcelona have reached the last eight of the Champions League since 2020

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LONDON: Barcelona survived a nervy second half to beat Napoli 3-1 and reach the Champions League quarter-finals 4-2 on aggregate at Estadi Olimpik Lluís Companys. Xavi Hernandez's side came flying out of the blocks with goals from Fermin Lopez and Joao Cancelo but after Amir Rrahmani pulled one back, the Catalans started to sweat. Italian champions Napoli, who salvaged a 1-1 draw in the last-16

first leg, were finally beaten when Robert Lewandowski swept home from close range. It is the first time that five-time winners Barcelona have reached the last eight of the Champions League since 2020, and they did so without injured midfield trio Pedri, Gavi and Frankie de Jong. Xavi said he was leaving at the end of the season in January and his team have gone on a run of nine games without defeat after that decision. Teenage stars Lamine Yamal and Pau Cubarsi have been key to that form, and both excelled against Napoli on a night which offered some relief to Barcelona amid a bleak season. Barcelona became the first team in the competition's history to start two players 17 or under in a knockout stage game. Xavi demanded the fans turn their temporary Olympic Stadium home on the city's

hill into a cooker, and obliged. 5 0 , 0 0 0 spectators Montjuic pressure they duly Over the marked club's attendance this season. Franco Calzona's Napoli wilted as the Spanish champions came out of the blocks flying. Electric 16-year-old winger Yamal made strong inroads down the right before the bright Lopez opened the scoring after 15 minutes. Cancelo

fed Raphinha who cut the ball back into the area for Lopez, who tucked home. While he may lack the metronomic precision of Pedri, the midfielder provides thrust and an insatiable desire to shoot. Two minutes later the Catalans doubled their lead against the shellshocked visitors, with Yamal starting the move by breaking loose in his own half on the counter-attack. The played in Raphinha and although the Brazilian hit the post Cancelo was running in to roll home the rebound. Napoli battled their way back in when Matteo Politano slipped in down the right, with Ronald Araujo playing him inside. The Italy winger crossed for Rrahmani who slotted home cleanly to pull Napoli back into the tie. Napoli were almost level moments later but Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Ste-

gen made a superb save, tipping over Giovanni Di Lorenzo's header. The Italians started the second half strongly, with Barcelona forced back into their own half, aimlessly clearing the ball. Xavi took action by bringing on Sergi Roberto and Oriol Romeu for Lopez and Andreas Christensen, aiming to freshen up the midfield and give his team new impetus. Raphinha and Lewandowski drew saves from Alex Meret before Yamal struck from close range, but he was offside. Danish winger Jesper Lindstrom headed narrowly wide for Napoli before Lewandowski settled the tie after Ilkay Gundogan and Sergi Roberto combined to set him up. Second-half jitters showed Barcelona are far from their former glory but in the dynamic Yamal, Raphinha and Cancelo they have the quality going forward to trouble any prospective quarter-final opponent.



Briefs

US leads UN resolution for AI access

UNITED NATIONS: The United States is spearheading the first United Nations resolution on artificial intelligence, aimed at ensuring the new technology is "safe, secure and trustworthy" and that all countries, especially those in the developing world, have equal access. The draft General Assembly resolution aims to close the digital divide between countries and make sure they are all at the table in discussions on AI – and that they have the technology and capabilities to take advantage of its benefits, including detecting diseases, predicting floods and training the next generation of workers. The draft recognizes the rapid acceleration of AI development and use and stresses "the urgency of achieving global consensus on safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems." It also recognizes that "the governance of artificial intelligence systems is an evolving area" that needs further discussions on possible governance approaches.—DNA

Climate change threat to Australian security

CANBERRA :Rising global temperatures pose a significant threat to healthcare, security, infrastructure and finance, an Australian government report has warned. The federal government on Tuesday published its first National Climate Risk Assessment, identifying 56 nationally significant climate risks facing Australia including 11 priority risk areas ranging from water resources to economic resilience. It predicts that climate change could undermine Australia's economy, trade, and financial systems, stretch the resources of defense forces and emergency services and that hospitals and health professionals will be confronted by new communicable diseases. Under a plausible worst-case scenario, the report said, insurers and banks could withdraw services from communities vulnerable to extreme weather events, causing a cascading effect on infrastructure and the built environment. Releasing the report, Assistant Climate Change and Energy Minister Jenny McAllister said the government would undertake a more detailed analysis of the 11 priority risks that will be released by the end of 2024.—Agencies

7 feared dead on migrant boat

ARGUINEGUIN : Two people died and five are feared dead after they attempted to reach Spain's Canary Islands on a boat with migrants on board, authorities said on Tuesday. The pirogue – a type of dugout canoe – was sighted on Monday evening at around 8 p.m. (2000 GMT) by a merchant vessel which alerted authorities on the island of Gran Canaria. Rescue services deployed helicopters to evacuate the injured and a ship to tow the pirogue to the Gran Canaria port of Arguineguin, 76 nautical miles (140 km) to the north, where they were met by Red Cross staff and police. Spanish maritime rescue service said earlier the bodies of two deceased people were found on the boat during the rescue operations. Later on Tuesday, the Red Cross in the Canary Islands said some survivors reported that five others died en route but their bodies were thrown from the pirogue. The maritime rescue service has been unable to confirm the additional deaths. The five bodies have not been found yet so they are being treated as missing people, the Red Cross said, adding that 40 people were rescued from the boat, including the two dead. Those on board the boat were African men and women, a spokesperson for the rescue service told Reuters, without giving details of where the boat had started its voyage. The EU border agency Frontex says the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands is the busiest route for irregular migration from West Africa into the European Union.—APP

Borrell :Starvation being used as a weapon of war in Gaza

This humanitarian crisis (is) not a natural disaster, is not a flood, is not an earthquake, it is man-made: Josep Borrell

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK CITY: The EU's foreign affairs chief on Tuesday condemned the lack of aid entering Gaza as "man-made" disaster in which starvation is being used as a weapon of war. "When we condemn this happening in Ukraine, we have to use the same words for what's happening in Gaza," Josep Borrell told the UN Security Council "This humanitarian crisis (is) not a natural disaster, is not a flood, is not an earthquake, it is man-made." More than 31,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed during the war in Gaza, and more than 100,000 injured. Many more bodies are believed to be buried under the rubble of buildings destroyed by the Israeli military onslaught. "The situation in Gaza is unbearable," said Borrell. "The very survival of the Palestinian population is at stake. It is a wide-scale destruction. Everything that makes society has been destroyed, systematically." As Israeli authorities continue to severely control and

restrict deliveries of humanitarian aid that are allowed to enter Gaza, the territory is in the grip of a catastrophic-level food crisis. Senior UN officials have warned of the imminent threat of famine if urgent action is not taken to avert a humanitarian disaster. More than 25 Palestinians have already died of starvation, most of them children. Given the difficulties of delivering aid by road, some foreign governments have resorted to airdrops in an attempt to ensure life-saving humanitarian supplies reach people in Gaza. A mechanism for the delivery of aid by sea is also being set up. "I don't want to teach any one of you about what is happening in Gaza," Borrell told council members. "When we look for alternative ways of providing support, by sea or by air, we have to remember that we have to do it because the natural way of providing support, through roads, is being closed, artificially closed, and starvation is being used as a war arm." Asked by news media to comment on whether some EU

member states are enabling the war in Gaza, including Germany, which has increased approvals of arms exports to Israel almost tenfold since the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas, Borrell said: "I am representing the European Union as a whole. And sometime (this) is difficult because there are different sensitivities and different positions. "And there are some members on stage who are completely reluctant to take any position that could represent the slightest criticism toward Israel, and others are very much pushing in order to get a ceasefire." In light of the escalating humanitarian crisis during the war in Gaza, EU members Ireland and Spain have asked the European Commission to "undertake an urgent review" of the cooperation agreement between the EU and Israel, which regulates trade relations and is bound by the condition that human rights are respected. Borrell told Arab News "an orientation debate on this important issue" will take place on Monday during a meeting of the EU's Foreign

Affairs Council. Borrell was at the UN headquarters in New York on Tuesday to take part in a Security Council meeting on cooperation between the UN and the EU. "We live in a very, very, very complex, difficult and challenging world," he told reporters. "But without the United Nations, the world will be still more challenging, more dangerous. "The world is becoming darker and darker. The UN is a light in the darkness, (a) landmark in the middle of the turmoil, (a) lantern in the thick fog through which we search our way, every day, trying to look for a solution. It is a ray of light, a sign of hope." He expressed "strong support" for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in light of "the unjustified attacks that he has been suffering." In the latest example of such attacks by the Israeli government, Foreign Minister Israel Katz on Monday sent Guterres a letter accusing him of turning the UN into an "epicenter of antisemitism and anti-Israelic incitement." Stephane Dujaire, spokesperson for the secretary-general, told Arab News:

"We will not be responding to this letter, which in my mind is not a reflection of reality and is not a reflection of who Antonio Guterres is or everything he's done as secretary-general on this issue," Borrell described UN agencies, such as the Relief and Works Agency, the main mechanism for providing assistance to Palestinians, as the "last lifelines" for many people. "Yes, UNRWA is facing allegations but allegations have to be proved. That is why they are allegations," he said. Israeli authorities have alleged that several UNRWA workers participated in the Oct. 7 attacks. Borrell said the EU is awaiting the findings of an investigation into the allegations. "But let me remind (you of) something: UNRWA exists because there are Palestinian refugees," he said. "It is not a present to the Palestinians, it is an answer to their needs." Nobody can make the refugees disappear by making UNRWA disappear, he said. A two-state solution is the only way the UNRWA will disappear, he added, by making those refugees citizens of a Palestinian state that coexists with Israel.

Childhood deaths at historic low, inequality persists

LONDON :According to the estimate, 4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2022, a 51 percent decrease since 2000 and a 62 percent drop since 1990, according to the report, which still warned such progress is "precarious" and unequal. "There is a lot of good news, and the major one is that we have come to a historic level of under-five mortality, which... reached under 5 million for the first time, so it is 4.9 million per year," Helga Fogstad, director of health at the UN children's agency UNICEF, told AFP. While progress has been made, the battle to end preventable child deaths continues - with 4.9 million children lost in 2022 and millions more at risk without urgent action.

According to the report, prepared by UNICEF in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, progress was particularly notable in developing countries such as Malawi, Rwanda and Mongolia, where early childhood mortality has fallen by more than 75 percent since 2000. "Behind these numbers lie the stories of midwives and skilled health personnel helping mothers safely deliver their newborns... vaccinating... children against deadly diseases, and (making) home visits to support families," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said in a statement. But "this is a precarious achievement," the report warned. "Progress is at risk of stagnation or reversal unless efforts are taken to neutralize the numerous threats to newborn and child health and survival." Researchers pointed to already worrying signs, saying that reduction in under-five deaths has slowed at the global level and notably in the sub-Saharan Africa region. Preventable deaths in total, 162 million children under the age of five have died since 2000, 72 million of whom perished in the first month of life, as complications related to birth are among the main causes of early childhood mortality.—Agencies

Google limits AI Chatbot on elections

CALIFORNIA: Google is restricting AI chatbot Gemini from answering questions about the global elections set to happen this year, the Alphabet-owned firm said on Tuesday, as it looks to avoid potential missteps in the deployment of the technology.

The update comes at a time when advancements in generative AI, including image and video generation, have fanned concerns of misinformation and fake news among the public, prompting governments to regulate the technology.

When asked about elections such as the upcoming US presidential match-up between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, Gemini responds with "I'm still learning how to answer this question. In the meantime, try Google Search." Google had announced restrictions within the US in December, saying they would come into effect ahead of the election.

"In preparation for the many elections happening around the world in 2024 and out of an abundance of caution, we are restricting the types of election-related queries for which Gemini will return responses," a company spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Aside from the United States, national elections are set to be held in several large countries including South Africa and India, the world's largest democracy.

India has asked tech firms to seek government approval before the public release of AI tools that are "unreliable" or under trial, and to label them for the potential to return wrong answers. Google's AI products are under the scanner after inaccuracies in some historical depictions of people created by Gemini forced it to pause the chatbot's image-generation feature late last month. CEO Sundar Pichai had said the company was working to fix those issues and called the chatbot's responses "biased" and "completely unacceptable."—APP

Pope Francis again condemns 'madness of war'

Francis had told media reporter that Ukraine should "show the courage of the white flag" and open talks with Russia

FOREIGN DESK

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Wednesday issued a fresh condemnation of all wars, days after irking Kyiv and Western capitals for appearing to suggest that Ukraine should surrender and negotiate peace with its Russian invader. Francis had told that Ukraine should "show the courage of the white flag" and open talks with Russia, but his deputy Cardinal Pietro Parolin clarified in a Tuesday interview that Russia should first halt its aggression. "Many young people, many young people go to die (in war). Let's pray the Lord to give us the grace to overcome this madness of war, which is always a defeat," the pope said during his weekly audience in St Peter's Square. He did not specifically mention Ukraine or any other conflict zones, but said he had earlier received a rosary and a copy of the Gospels that belonged to a man killed on an unspecified war front. Advertisement • Scroll to continue Francis, who is 87 and hampered by mobility and respiratory issues, for the third week in a row limited his speaking at the weekly audience, leaving

it to an aide to read most of his prepared texts. He told the faithful he still had "a bit of a cold". Meanwhile, Pope Francis's suggestion of negotiations with Russia to bring an end to the war – his use of the words "white flag" drawing particular scorn – reiterating that the country would never surrender. In a recent interview, Francis used the term "white flag," repeating the words of a journalist, which some read as a call to surrender. President Volodymyr Zelensky responded to the pope without naming him in his nightly address Sunday. Praising Ukrainian chaplains on the front line, Zelensky said: "This is what the church is – it is together with people, not two and a half thousand kilometers away somewhere, virtually mediating between someone who wants to live and someone who wants to destroy you." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Pope Francis's suggestion of negotiations with Russia as virtual mediation in his nightly address March 10. (Video: Reuters) Zelensky says "peace plan must be Ukrainian" after meeting Pope Francis Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged the Vatican to support the Ukrainian people "in their just struggle for their lives," writing: "Our flag is blue and yellow. Under it, we live, die,

and triumph. We will not raise any other flags." He thanked Francis for his prayers for peace and urged him to visit Ukraine.

The pope's remarks were made in an interview with Swiss broadcaster Radio Télévision Suisse, recorded in February, part of which was released Saturday. The full interview is set to air March 20. According to a transcript translated and shared by the Vatican news agency, interviewer Lorenzo Buccella asked Francis: "In Ukraine, some call for the courage of surrender, of the white flag. But others say that this would legitimize the stronger party. What do you think?" Francis responded by saying that, in his opinion, the stronger side is the one "who has the courage of the white flag, to negotiate." The controversy prompted a clarification from the Vatican. "The Pope uses the term white flag, and responds by picking up the image proposed by the interviewer, to indicate a cessation of hostilities, a truce reached with the courage of negotiation," spokesman Matteo Brunni said in a statement, adding that the Pope stated that negotiations are never a "surrender."

Gunmen seize dozens in Nigeria's Kaduna state

Gunmen in Nigeria have kidnapped 61 people from a village in northern Kaduna state, days after nearly 300 students went missing in an attack by an armed gang, residents said. Gunmen attacked the Buda community around midnight on Monday, firing sporadically, a tactic used to scare, residents said. The kidnappings of ten happened in remote communities, leaving residents helpless. Resident Lawal Abdullahi said on Tuesday he was away when the gunmen struck, but his wife was among those taken. "My wife is among the 61 people those bandits kidnapped. We are still expecting them to call for ransom as usual," Abdullahi told the Reuters news agency by phone. State lawmaker Usman Danlami Stingo told Arise News that 32 women and 29 men had been snatched. Buda is 160 km from Kuriga town, where schoolchildren were seized last week. Kaduna's internal security commissioner and police spokesperson did not respond to requests for comment. "We have been experiencing these attacks for a long time. The situation has become worse, forcing many residents and farmers from villages to flee to less dangerous places," another resident, Danjuma Sale, said.—APP

11 Indonesians survive capsized boat, 22 missing

JAKARTA :Eleven Indonesian fishermen survived after three days at sea clinging to their capsized boat, rescuers said Wednesday as they searched for at least 22 crew still missing after the weekend incident that left two dead. The boat with at least 35 crew capsized on Saturday in waters off the remote Selayar Islands in South Sulawesi Province before the 11 were found stranded on two separate atolls after days floating in the sea. Their boat capsized in bad weather during Indonesia's rainy season, according to the local search and rescue agency. "They had been floating in the sea for three days, they were carried away by the current to Selayar waters," local government official Andi Caco Amras told AFP Wednesday. The two victims were found on separate islands. The fishing boat departed from a North Jakarta port on March 3 to Lombok Island in West Nusa Tenggara Province. The navy and rescue volunteers were helping with the search efforts. "The joint team will conduct a search and rescue operation and they have departed... this morning," local search and rescue official Andi Raswan told AFP. He said it would take rescuers five hours to reach the location. The survivors were found after local fishermen spotted them and alerted authorities, state news agency Antara reported. Amras told AFP survivors said they held out for three days at sea by wearing life jackets and tying themselves to the boat. "They were carried away along with the boat to the Selayar islands. The boat was turned over, the bottom was at the top," said the official. The vessel of 93 gross tons was carrying "equipment to catch fish such as fish traps, nets, rocks, ropes, coconut leaves and fishing rods," he said. Amras said 35 people were on the boat with 22 missing while the rescue agency gave a higher toll of 37 and 24 missing. It is common in Indonesia for the number of actual passengers on a boat to differ from the manifest. Authorities received reports about the incident early Tuesday but said bad weather had hampered their efforts. Marine accidents are a regular occurrence in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago of around 17,000 islands, due to lax safety standards.—APP

Right-wing extremism crimes surged in Austria

AUSTRIA witnessed a sharp rise in right-wing extremist crimes last year, according to a response to a question from Interior Minister Gerhard Karner to the Social Democratic Party (SPO) in parliament. The party said there were 1,208 such crimes in 2023, Austrian public broadcaster ORF reported Tuesday. In 2022, there were 928 right-wing extremist crimes, said the party. Sabine Schatz, a member of parliament from the SPO, has been asking the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior about right-wing extremist, racist crimes every year since 2018 because these figures are not specifically mentioned in reports by Austrian domestic intelligence. At 1,208, the figure for 2023 is the highest since 2018. "The federal government has failed to take proper measures against this anti-democratic ideology," Schatz wrote in a press release. She called for "a national action plan against right-wing extremism." Austria's first report on right-wing extremism is not due until the fall. The Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance (DOW) was commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior to compile it. It will cover the years 2020 to 2023. —Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Traffic continue during the rain on Srinagar Highway in the Federal Capital.—ONLINE

UN Chief urges action against women's rights backsliding

Guterres emphasized the appalling situation in Gaza, where over two-thirds of those killed and injured during Israel's offensive are reportedly women and girls

WEB DESK

UNITED NATIONS : UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highlighted the urgent need to defend women's rights which are under threat, citing a reversal in hard-won progress, increasing violence against women and a growing digital gender divide. Addressing the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on Monday, the pivotal forum dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the rights of women and girls worldwide, the UN chief stressed the disproportionate impact of wars on women. "In conflict zones around the globe, women and girls are suffering most from wars waged by men," he said, urging immediate ceasefires and humanitarian aid. Guterres emphasized the appalling situation in Gaza, where over two-thirds of those killed and injured during Israel's offensive are re-

portedly women and girls. He also noted shocking testimonies of sexual violence against Palestinian women in detention settings, house raids and checkpoints in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In Israel, he added, last week's report released by UN Special Representative Pramila Patten highlights sexual violence against women and girls. Guterres also voiced concern over the situation faced by women in other countries, including Afghanistan and Sudan. "In Afghanistan, the Taliban has issued more than 50 edicts suppressing women's and girls' rights. In Sudan, scores of women have reportedly been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence in the ongoing conflict," he said. The secretary-general stressed that despite evidence that women's full participation makes peacebuilding much more effective, the number of women in decision-making roles is falling. "The facts are clear: Women

lead to peace," he said, calling for more funding and new policies to boost women's participation and investment in women peacebuilders. The UN chief also emphasized a growing digital gender divide, noting the dominance of men in digital technologies, particularly in Artificial Intelligence. He warned that male-dominated algorithms could perpetuate inequalities into various aspects of life, noting that women's needs, bodies and fundamental rights are often overlooked in the design of systems by male leaders and technologists. "It's time for governments, civil society and the Silicon Valleys of the world to join a massive effort to bridge the digital gender divide and ensure women have decision-making roles in digital technology at all levels," he urged. Guterres also drew attention to the pressing need for women to hold leadership roles, particularly in financial institutions. He highlighted the stark gender

disparity in finance, with over eight of ten finance ministers and more than nine out of ten central bank governors being men. The Secretary-General emphasized that dismantling structural barriers is crucial for achieving gender parity in leadership roles. "Overwhelmingly male-dominated financial institutions need to dismantle the structural barriers that are blocking women from leadership roles," he said. Drawing parallels with the UN's successful achievement of full gender parity among senior management and leaders worldwide, he urged governments, banks and businesses to replicate these efforts, emphasizing that change does not happen by accident. The Secretary-General concluded his address by urging the international community to unite in the fight for gender equality, emphasizing that the CSW serves as a catalyst for transformative change. He called for collaborative efforts to

end poverty in all its dimensions. "Let's do it by investing in women and girls, betting on women and girls, and pushing for peace and dignity for women and girls everywhere," Guterres said. The President of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis, continued the call to action, highlighting the urgency of intensifying efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With the world currently lagging attaining the Goals, particularly the Goal to eradicate extreme poverty (SDG1), Francis revealed a stark reality: "Currently, one in every ten women lives in extreme poverty – I repeat – one in every ten women," he said. Underscoring the need for a multidimensional approach, the Assembly President urged equal access to resources, gender-responsive social protection policies, and measures to end gender-based discrimination inhibiting women's leadership and decision-making roles.

Briefs

Elahi seeks details of criminal cases

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Chaudhry Pervez Elahi has filed a plea in the Lahore High Court (LHC) seeking details of criminal cases, first information reports (FIR), and pending inquiries against him. Justice Shehbaz Rizvi of LHC has recused himself from hearing the plea and has referred the case to Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan to conduct further proceedings. The former CM Punjab has filed a plea through his advocate, Amir Saeed Rawan, in the LHC. The petitioner has requested the court to direct the concerned authorities to provide all the details of cases in certain categories that have not been closed yet. Additionally, Elahi has also demanded copies of those cases to be handed over to him. Elahi complained during the hearing that although the court declared his arrest illegal and unlawful, he remains in custody. The prominent PTI leader, who was initially arrested in the case of illegal recruitment to the Punjab Assembly on June 3 requested the court to order his release. During the court hearing, Elahi implored the court to enforce his fundamental rights. He requested the authorities not to arrest him in any criminal case that is unknown to him. He urged the court that he should be provided with copies of FIRs lodged against him - and a reasonable opportunity of at least ten days to apply for anticipatory protective bail before the relevant forum of law.

Committee formed to reduce govt expenditures

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formed a committee to reduce federal government expenditures. The cabinet division issued a notification on Wednesday. The committee formed by the prime minister will consist of seven members. Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission will head the committee. The other committee members include the Cabinet Division Secretary, Finance Division Secretary, Secretary I&P Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Dr Qaiser Bengali, Dr Farukh Saleem, and Dr Muhammad Naveed Iftikhar. The purpose of the committee will be to institute institutional reforms and reduce the size of the federal government. The committee will devise a TOR (Terms of Reference) to reduce expenditures and present a practical plan to cut expenses. Additionally, the committee will review the National Fiscal Efficiency Report of the Finance Division.

IHC issues notice to Adiala Jail head

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has issued notice to the Adiala Jail superintendent on contempt of court charges for not allowing the PTI founder meeting with his relatives and counsel. Justice Saman Riffat Imtiaz heard the plea filed by Alama Nasir Abbas against restriction on PTI founder's meetings despite court order. The petitioner stated that the IHC allowed the meetings with the PTI founder in jail on March 8 but the superintendent didn't follow the court order and committed contempt of court. Read more: Three terrorists arrested from outside Adiala Jail with explosives, jail map. The petitioner requested the court to take strict action against the jail superintendent and allow the PTI founder meetings with relatives and counsel. The court issued notice to the superintendent for March 15 after hearing the arguments of the petitioner's counsel.

Commander Bahrain National Guard calls on PM

The situation in Gaza was also discussed and both sides called for an immediate ceasefire and ensuring urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the innocent Palestinians



ISLAMABAD: General Sheikh Mohammad Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain calls on PM Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: His Highness General Sheikh Mohammad Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to convey the greetings of His Majesty Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain and His Royal Highness Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain. The Prime Minister warmly welcomed His Highness General Sheikh Mohammad to Pakistan and thanked the

Bahrain leadership for their messages of felicitations on his re-election as Prime Minister. He said Pakistan and Bahrain enjoyed longstanding brotherly relations. The two countries had excellent defence cooperation, and the visit of His Highness would enhance these relations even further. On trade, the Prime Minister stated that once the Pakistan-GCC Free Trade Agreement would come into effect, the existing bilateral trade volume of USD 1 billion per annum had the potential to enhance manifold. The Prime Minister referred to the King Hamad Nursing Hospital that was under construction in Islamabad. He said this



RAWALPINDI: General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Commander Bahrain National Guard, calls on General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. - DNA

flagship project was His Majesty's gift to the people of Pakistan. Recalling the visit of His Majesty in 2014, the Prime Minister said Pakistan looked forward to hosting the King of Bahrain once again in the near future. In response, His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed extended an invitation to the Prime Minister to visit Bahrain at his earliest convenience. The situation in Gaza was also discussed and both sides called for an immediate ceasefire and ensuring urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the innocent Palestinians, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, H.R.H General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin

Salman Al Khalifa, Commander Bahrain National Guard, called on General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, at Joint Staff Headquarters, Rawalpindi. Matters of bilateral professional interest and further strengthening of security and defence cooperation between the two countries were discussed during the meeting. Both sides reiterated the resolve to further strengthen security and defence cooperation between the two brotherly countries. Earlier, upon arrival at Joint Staff Headquarters, a smartly turned-out tri-services contingent presented 'Guard of Honour' to the visiting dignitary.

Haleem demands 'lifting ban' on Imran visits

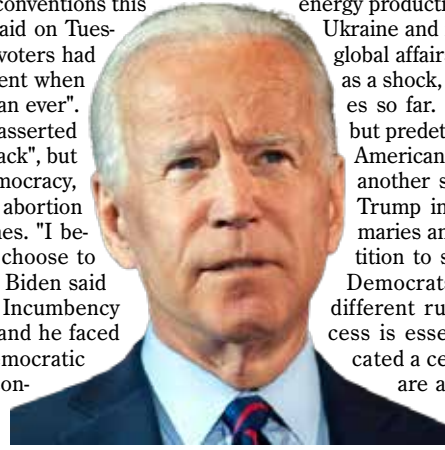
NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: PTI Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh demanded on Wednesday to lift the ban imposed on meeting party founder Imran Khan incarcerated in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail and highlighted the threats to the former premier's life. "Meetings with Imran have been banned after some terrorists were arrested a few days back. Party leaders and I have a meeting scheduled with Imran tomorrow and we must not be barred. Otherwise, the entire nation will gather outside the prison. We do not want to risk Imran's life as the country cannot undergo further tests," warned the PTI leader while speaking to the media outside the Sindh High Court (SHC). Referring to alleged rigging during the February 8 elections, the PTI leader said his counsel, Barrister Ali Tahir, filed a petition in the election tribunal regarding poll fraud in NA-238, claiming he won the seat with a lead of over 75,000 votes against his rival MQM-P candidate. "This issue is not just about obtaining a mandate but safeguarding the votes of the general public who came out to vote," said Adil and added that every "Pakistani citizen has the right to vote, and we are here to restore that right in the courts".

Biden and Trump set for election rematch

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump have both passed the delegate thresholds to clinch their parties' nominations. They each won several states in primary elections on Tuesday to propel them over the finish line. The 2020 contenders will provide the US with its first rematch in a presidential election for 70 years. Polling suggests it will be a tight race that will come down to narrow margins in a few key states. The nominations will be made official at party conventions this summer. The 81-year-old president said on Tuesday evening that he was "honoured" voters had backed his re-election bid "in a moment when the threat Trump poses is greater than ever". Citing positive economic trends, he asserted the US was "in the middle of a comeback", but faced challenges to its future as a democracy, as well as from those seeking to pass abortion restrictions and cut social programmes. "I believe that the American people will choose to keep us moving into the future," Mr Biden said in a statement from his campaign. Incumbency gave Mr Biden a natural advantage and he faced no serious challengers for the Democratic nomination. Despite persistent concerns from voters that his age limits his ability to perform the duties of

the presidency, the party apparatus rallied around him. Meanwhile, Mr Trump, 77, remains very popular with the Republican voter base, which has propelled him to victory in primary after primary over well-funded rivals. His campaign for a second term in the White House has zeroed in on stricter immigration laws, including a pledge to "seal the border" and implement "record-setting" deportations. Mr Trump has also vowed to fight crime, boost domestic energy production, tax foreign imports, end the war in Ukraine and resume an "America first" approach to global affairs. Tuesday night's results do not come as a shock, as both men have dominated their races so far. Both their re-nominations seemed all but predetermined, despite polling that indicates Americans are dissatisfied with the prospect of another showdown between Mr Biden and Mr Trump in November. The US presidential primaries and caucuses are a state-by-state competition to secure the most party delegates. The Democrats and the Republicans have slightly different rules for their primaries, but the process is essentially the same. Each state is allocated a certain share of party delegates, which are awarded either as a whole to the winning candidate or proportionally, based on the results. - Agencies



100 European academics sign petition against Israel

GENEVA: About a hundred leading European academics have condemned Israel's genocide against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, ongoing since 7 October 2023, and its physical and cultural liquidation of them, including the systematic destruction of the educational system in the Gaza Strip. In a Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor petition titled "Annihilation of Gaza Education: Israel is systematically erasing the entire educational system", the academics decry Israel's physical and cultural liquidation of Palestinian civilians in the Strip and express deep concern about the Israeli army's continued targeting of academics, educational institutions, and cultural heritage sites there. The scholars point to knowledge and education as fundamental to human civilization worldwide, but emphasize that for an occupied people like the Palestinians, education plays a distinctly vital role in society. Education preserves hope and freedom against oppressive, apartheid-era, and

depressing policies, plus fosters culture and is essential to the achievement of both individual and societal prosperity. The current Israeli military attacks on the Gaza Strip have caused the entire educational process there to be completely disrupted, assert the scholars. The petition warns of grave long-term ramifications due to the bombing of homes of academic, scientific, and intellectual figures without prior notice, which has already led to the killing of hundreds of teachers and thousands of students. The academics also cite estimates from the International Monetary Fund that 70% of the Strip's colleges and universities have been destroyed, costing the education sector \$720 million. Israeli military attacks have entirely or partially destroyed six universities in the Gaza Strip: Islamic University, Al-Israa University, Rabat University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University, and Al-Quds Open University. - Agencies

NA resolution demands overturning SC's verdict

"Conviction of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a gross miscarriage of justice," says resolution

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly passed a resolution Wednesday demanding the overturning of the death sentence given to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former prime minister and founder of PPP. The demand was made in light of a recent Supreme Court's opinion which ruled that former prime Bhutto, who was hanged 44 years ago after being convicted of murder, didn't get a fair trial. Bhutto was hanged in 1979 after a trial under the military regime of late General Zia-ul-Haq. "We didn't find that the fair trial and due process requirements were met," said incumbent Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa. The ruling came in response to a judicial

reference filed by President Asif Ali Zardari, during his tenure as the head of state in 2011. It sought an opinion by the top court on revisiting the death sentence awarded to the PPP founder. All three provincial assemblies except the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - where PTI is in power - and the Senate have passed resolutions declaring Bhutto a national hero and martyr. The resolution, adopted by the National Assembly in today's session and moved by PPP's Shazia Marri, recognised the trial and subsequent conviction of Bhutto as a "gross miscarriage of justice". "Salutes the struggles of Begum Nusrat Bhutto Sahiba, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, and the Pakistan Peoples Party workers who sacrificed their lives to establish this truth," the resolution added.

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