



# Islamabad POST

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**President Marcos tells Scholz: ICC can't probe Philippines**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Pervaiz Elahi to contest for by-poll on PP-32**

Detailed News On Page-08



**Messi fire Inter Miami into quarters**

Detailed News On Page-06



**In major blow**

## PHC rejects SIC's plea on reserved seats

PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan said that they would challenge the Peshawar High Court order regarding the reserved seats in Supreme Court

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court Thursday dismissed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) petition challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) ruling that denied reserved seats to the party. "Petitions are unanimously rejected," the court maintained. Earlier today, the PHC resumed the hearing being conducted by a five-member bench led by Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Arshad Ali. During his arguments, SIC's lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar said the Constitution does not mention when a party has to submit a list of names for reserved seats to the ECP. "It is not written anywhere that you cannot resubmit the list or when it has to be submitted," the barrister argued, adding that there is no restriction on providing a second list and that the ECP could have issued a second schedule, as it did for the general elections.

"As per the law, those who participate in elections will get seats," Justice Anwar remarked. The court then questioned Barrister Zafar if it wasn't clearly stated anywhere that the second schedule cannot be issued. "The law does not prevent the Election Commission from issuing another schedule," the lawyer responded. Justice Arshad remarked that Section 104 explains the mechanism for reserved seats as it states that when a list is submitted then another list can be given. "Section 104 says that if a political party participates in an election, it will give a list," the lawyer argued. He earlier argued that whoever wins the number of seats,

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**Senate by-polls**

## Ruling alliance bags five out of six seats

PPP gets four, PML-N and JUI-F win one seat each in by-polls held in National, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The ruling alliance at the Centre managed to win the by-polls on the five out of the six Senate seats with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) securing the majority of the seats. The polling for the six Senate seats in the National, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies began at 9am and ended at 4pm. These six seats had fallen vacant under Article 223 of the Constitution which prohibits lawmakers from holding dual membership. The sub-section 4 of the article states: "Subject to clause (2) if a member of either House or of a

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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Qatar to Pakistan, Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

## Pak ranks 161st on UN's HDI

The HDI is a composite of statistics measuring such factors as per capita income, educational attainment and life expectancy

AGENCIES

NEW YORK: ( app) Pakistan was ranked at 161st position among 191 countries on UN's 2022/23 Human Development Index (HDI)'s annual rankings - three steps up from the 2021/22 ranking, according to a new UN Development Programme (UNDP) report. The HDI is a composite of statistics measuring such factors as per capita income, educational attainment and life expectancy.

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**Qatari envoy meets PM**

## Pakistan proud of close relations with Qatar: PM

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lauded Qatar's contribution to peace efforts in Gaza

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khater, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Pakistan, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. The Prime Minister thanked the Amir of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Deputy Amir His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, for their warm messages of felicitations on his re-election as Prime Minister. He said Pakistan was proud of its close, fraternal relationship with Qatar, with bilateral ties having the potential to grow even stronger and meaningful, particularly in the areas of economy, trade and investment. He highlighted that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) that was established during his previous tenure as Prime Minister, was now functioning as an efficient and productive mechanism to ensure that foreign investors were

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## Zardari underscores Xi's support for CPEC's future

President Zardari reiterates resolve to further strengthen practical cooperation with China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a letter addressed to Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Asif Ali Zardari Thursday underscored the

Continued on Page 06

## Punjab CM Maryam initiates safety projects for workers

Establish a World-Class Lab to Identify Risk Areas to Ensure Workers' Safety, says CM Maryam Nawaz

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: "Compile a comprehensive data of laborers and workers across Punjab," said Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while chairing a special meeting on workers' safety in the Province. She added, "Safety measures will be implemented to protect workers in factories." Madam Chief Minister directed to start Occupational Safety and Health Mobile

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## Pakistan slams India's new citizenship law

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch pointed out that the rising wave of Hindutva under the BJP government has led to rapid political, economic and social victimization of Muslims and other minorities in India

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has taken strong exception to the implementation of controversial Citizenship Amendment Act by India. At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the legislation and the relevant rules are evidently discriminatory in nature as they differentiate

amongst the people on the basis of their faith. The spokesperson said the regulation and laws are premised on a false assumption that minorities are being persecuted in Muslim countries of the region and the facade of India being a safe haven for them. Mumtaz Zahra Baloch pointed out that the rising wave of Hindutva under the BJP government has led to rapid political,

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

### Court cancels Hasan, Hussain's arrest warrants

Accountability court issued notice to NAB

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court on Thursday approved bail of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's sons, Hassan and Hussain Nawaz, in exchange for Rs50,000 bond each in the three references pertaining to Al-Azizia Steel Mill, Avenfield apartments and Flagship. The court also cancelled the brother's perpetual arrest warrants and fugitive status in the said cases. Hasan and Hussain had to appear before the accountability court today to get their perpetual arrest warrants suspended, as they were given relief by the court till March 14.

### PTI to field Yasmin Rashid for Senate

ECP to hold election on 48 Senate seats on April 2

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) senior leader Dr Yasmin Rashid will be the party's candidate for the Senate seat from Punjab in the upcoming elections of the upper house set to be held on April 2. The announcement was made by PTI leader Mian Aslam Iqbal who took to social media platform X, formerly Twitter, to disclose that Rashid would be the party's candidate for the women's seat. Iqbal further said that the party would field Zulfi Bukhari and Hamid Khan on general seats, whereas Brigadier (retd) Musadiq will be the PTI candidate on a technocrat seat.

**Bahraini Commander meets CAS**

## Bahrain, Pak keen to expand tech coop

The visiting dignitary praised the exceptional professionalism of PAF personnel and the remarkable progress achieved by Pakistan Air Force



ISLAMABAD: His Highness General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa calling on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff. - DNA

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Commander Bahrain National Guard, His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed

Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, at Air Headquarters, Islamabad today. During the meeting, various areas of shared interest aimed at bolstering government-to-government cooperation in the realm of

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan, IMF 'discuss' new loan scheme

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb agrees to continue economic reforms for stability, sources say

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday "expressed its intention" for a fresh loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the two sides began the final review meeting on the \$3 billion stand-by arrangement (SBA), a private news channel reported citing sources. The four-day review began today, and if successful, will release a final tranche of around \$1.1 billion secured by Islamabad under a last-gasp rescue package last summer, averting a sovereign debt default. The IMF review mission, headed by Nathan Porter, would hold further talks with Pakistani authorities on the new loan programme, the sources said. During the meeting, the Fund delegation congratulated Muhammad Aurangzeb on assuming the office of the finance minister. Meanwhile, Aurangzeb expressed his commitment for making a positive progress with the lender, the sources said, adding that the

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## PM takes back IRSA chairman's appointment

PPP-led Sindh govt had termed Zafar Mahmood's appointment "violation" of constitutional procedures, water accord

DNA

KARACHI: Day after appointing Zafar Mahmood - a retired grade 22 federal government officer - as the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) chairman, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif withdrew the order following Sindh government's protest. Prime Minister's Office has issued a notification regarding the withdrawal of its previous order for Mahmood's appointment as the

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**MARCH 2024**

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# China donates \$100k for rain-hit Pakistan regions

The Chinese Government Provides Emergency Aids to Government of Pakistan for Rain-hit Areas in Balochistan and KP China hopes that this cash donation can provide timely and necessary assistance to the needy people

DNA

ISLAMABAD : On March 14, the donation ceremony for emergency aid provided by Chinese government to rain-hit areas in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held in the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. On behalf of the Chinese government, Ambassador Jiang Zaidong handed USD 100,000 emergency cash assistance over to the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Mohammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi.

China hopes that this cash donation can provide timely and necessary assistance to the needy people. The Chinese Embassy, Consulates and Chinese enterprises in Pakistan have also taken active action, distributed 30,000 bottles of mineral water and 3,000 cans of food and other supplies

to the people in Gwadar, and taken people into refuge at the Gwadar Faqur School built with China's aid. In the near future, an additional RMB 500,000 in material assistance will be provided through the Consulate General in Karachi.



ISLAMABAD : Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Housing and Works, chaired a meeting of Pakistan Public Works Department at Ministry. Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Secretary Housing and Works, Chief Engineers of all zones and other senior officers of the ministry and PWD were also present during the meeting. —DNA

## Commissioner inspects Ramadan bazaar arrangements

## Governor inaugurates foreign faculty hostel in Islamia College

SHAMIM SHAID

RAWALPINDI : Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak along with Deputy Commissioner (DC), Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema here on Thursday visited the wholesale Ramadan Bazaar established near Nawaz Sharif Park and reviewed the quality and prices of essential items and arrangements made to facilitate the customers. The Commissioner took notice on exorbitant tomato rates in the wholesale Ramadan bazaar. The wholesaler who took illegal profit was immediately removed and imposed Rs 50,000 fine. The Commissioner said that no one would be allowed to charge more profit than the fixed rates. The DC gave a detailed briefing regarding the supply of essential items at the wholesale rates. On the instructions of Chief Secretary Punjab, this wholesale Ramadan bazaar was established and activated in Rawalpindi within 24 hours. The space for the handcart market in the wholesale Ramadan bazaar had also been allotted, the Commissioner was briefed and informed that in the market, essential items were available at 25 percent lower rates. Later, Commissioner Aamir Khattak also visited Model Ramzan Bazaar near Chor Harpal Peshawar Road. A certificate must be taken from the Food Authority to ensure the quality of all the essential items, he directed the officers concerned. He ordered the authorities to establish a separate Rescue-1122 desk in model Ramzan Bazaar to help. —APP

directed to construct the entrance gate of the college keeping in view its historic importance and announced support to beautify garden of foreign faculty hostel. Vice Chancellor Islamia College also presented annual report of the institution and a souvenir to the governor Governor also chaired 136th Senate meeting of University of Peshawar (UoP) in Governor House. The meeting was also attended by Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan, Vice Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Salim and concerned officials of finance, higher education and establishment department. The meeting approved development budget of varsity, new candidates of planning committee, statutes for management solutions, upgrading of zoology department to Institute of Zoological Sciences and experience relaxation to appoint four professors. Participants of meeting also discussed promotion of employees from Grade 16 to 17 and appointments of deceased employees' children in light of Peshawar High Court decision. During meeting, Governor expressed annoyance over delayed preparing of last senate meetings minutes and advised that minute must be prepared on time with complete accuracy.

## Court Notice

In the court of Mrs. Saira Zia Civil Judge 1st Class Gujrat Title: Faran Ali... Versus Farkanda Shoukat etc. Notice to: Farkanda Soukat (widow), Faiza Shoukat, Noreen Soukat (Urf Mubeen Shoukat) (Daughters), Husnain Shoukat, Wasif Shoukat S/O Shoukat Ali (late) Kaste Gujrat R/O Mua Kamla Tehsil & Dist. Gujrat. Suit for Declaration With Consequential Relief, permanent Injunction etc. Whereas in the above mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above mentioned defendants are not served in ordinary way. It is therefore proclaimed under order 5 rule 20 CPC that if the said defendants will not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8 AM on 22-03-2024, otherwise case will be decided ex party.

In The Court of Miss Rabia Tareef Civil Judge 1st Class Gujrat Title: Muhammad Lateef Versus Province of Punjab Etc

Notice to: Ghulam Sarwar, Ghulam Nabi, Nasir Sons Fazal, Khalil Sarwar, Jameel Sarwar, Muhammad Kafeel Sons Ghulam Sarwar, Habib ur Rehman Tahir S/O Abdul Rehman, Muhammad Naeem, Faheem Sons Muhammad Bashir Caste Gujrat R/O Kotli Bajar Tehsil Kharian District Gujrat Suit for Declaration with Consequential Relief Whereas in the above mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above mentioned defendants are not served in ordinary way. It is therefore proclaimed under order 5 rule 20 CPC that if the said defendants will not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8 AM on 25-03-2024, otherwise case will be decided ex party.

## IG Punjab orders enhanced court security measures

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: According to the sources of Daily Notable, Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that foolproof security of courts across the province is among the top priorities in which any negligence or irresponsibility will be intolerable. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed to increase the security of courts across the province. He said that the day-to-day locking of the courts under the guise of unnecessary protest is not acceptable at all. IG Punjab said that the protection of judiciary is the first priority, ridicule of judges is not tolerated, courts will remain open in any case, normal courts proceedings and justice will be ensured in a peaceful environment. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed that the RPOs, DPOs and concerned officers conduct a security audit and reconfigure the security plan of the courts. IGP Punjab

directed that RPOs, CPOs and DPOs should maintain close coordination with the court administration and make ensure best security arrangements with mutual consultation. IG Punjab emphasized that the police personnel posted at the entry and exit points of the courts should remain on high alert. Ensure through checking, continuous monitoring of entrances and sides of courts with the help of CCTV cameras. IG Punjab further said that no one should be allowed to bring weapons in the court premises and those who are negligent in this regard should prepare themselves for departmental action. IGP Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar issued these directions while presiding over a high-level meeting on court security here at central police office today. All RPOs, CPOs, DPOs, senior police officers of the province participated in the meeting through video link. Additional IG Operations Punjab Shahzada Sultan, MD Punjab Safe Cities Authority Ahsan Younas were present in the meeting. DIG Headquarters, DIG Operations Punjab, DIG Security Lahore, SSP Operations Lahore, AIG Operations Punjab also attended the meeting. Meanwhile, Under the direction of Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Punjab Police's crackdown for the arrest of dangerous proclaimed offenders residing abroad is going on, in continuation of which, Punjab Police has arrested another dangerous proclaimed offender from Saudi Arabia who fled abroad after the murder. Proclaimed offender Muhammad Tariq shot and killed a citizen in Jalalpur area of Multan in 2020. After the incident, the accused had escaped abroad in hiding, the Punjab Police finally arrested the criminal through Interpol after 03 years. Red notice was issued and extradition from Saudi Arabia was carried out, while the proclaimed offender handed over to Multan Police for further legal action.

## KU seminar urges AI learning for future challenges

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI : The Seerat Chair of the University of Karachi (KU) in collaboration with the KU Arabic department arranged a seminar on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on job opportunities, entrepreneurship, and guidance of Seerah Tayyaba at the KU Audio Visual Center here on Thursday. "We have entered the era of artificial intelligence and we must learn technology to cope with the challenges of the future", the President of the Mohammad Ali Jinnah University, Professor Dr Zubair Ahmed Sheikh said this while addressing the conference. Though students have entered a new technological era, Professor Dr Zubair Sheikh observed social media now occupies more of students' time than interacting with teachers. Consequently, he stated that teachers must

understand today's digitally connected students and adapt their methods accordingly to prepare students for the future. He said that the West is far ahead in its development journey but lost social values. The KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi explained how developed nations worldwide have progressed beyond the dark ages by utilizing research originally done by Muslims. He emphasized that knowledge is readily gained and applied through modern technology, which makes practical implementation much easier. He further said that we should not run away from AI and it must be used for constructive purposes. Professor Dr Khalid Iraqi said, "Look at the history of developed nations, they have emerged by studying the research of Muslims". He stressed the need to realize responsibilities and take concerted steps to equip our young generation

with the technologies used around the world, especially in developed countries. "The responsibility of teachers is much greater in this regard", he maintained. Earlier, the head of Islamic Studies of NED University Professor Dr Abdul Hai Madani advised students to have firm belief and trust in Allah Almighty and continue hard work to achieve their goals. He said that nobody's job will be lost in the era of artificial intelligence. Another speaker, Director of the Seerat Chair at KU, Dr Aziz-ur-Rehman Saifee highlighted the seminar's objectives and purpose. He emphasized that universities and educational institutes should provide higher education and research opportunities. Dr Saifee shared that Islam is a progressive religion and emphasizes progressing with the times. He said that Islam has never denied scientific progress within certain restrictions and regulations.

## German envoy commends PRCS humanitarian efforts

Chairman PRCS expressed his appreciation for Ambassador Grannas's sincere concern for the people of Pakistan and his commitment to addressing humanitarian needs

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD :The Ambassador of Germany to Pakistan, His Excellency Alfred Grannas, reiterated the paramount importance of humanitarian service during his meeting with Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) at the PRCS National Headquarters here on Thursday. The discussion underscored a shared commitment to advancing humanitarian endeavors in Pakistan through collaborative efforts. Ambassador Grannas commended PRCS's pivotal role in alleviating the suffering of vulnerable communities and empha-

sized the enduring partnership between PRCS and the German Red Cross, spanning four decades. The meeting delved into various topics including bilateral relations and the imperative of enhancing cooperation for the betterment of humanity. Chairman Laghari provided insights into PRCS's initiatives, particularly its endeavors in rehabilitation and reconstruction following recent floods in Pakistan. He highlighted ongoing collaborative projects with the German Red Cross, such as Anticipatory Actions for Humanitarian Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and the Climate Advocacy and Coordination for Resilient Action (CACRA) project for Dis-

aster Risk Management (DRM). Following the meeting, Chairman Laghari lauded Ambassador Grannas for his genuine concern for the people of Pakistan and his dedication to addressing humanitarian needs. He emphasized the significance of the Ambassador's visit in strengthening ties between Pakistan and Germany and expanding avenues of cooperation for the benefit of vulnerable communities. Ambassador Grannas commended PRCS's progress under Chairman Laghari's leadership and reaffirmed Germany's support for its humanitarian endeavors. Discussions also revolved around exploring new areas of cooperation and implementing joint


programs to fulfill the mandate of the Red Crescent. "PRCS is making admirable strides in relief and disaster preparedness; we stand steadfast alongside the Red Crescent," he emphasized. Earlier, the German Ambassador received briefings on various sectors during his visit, alongside Secretary General Muhammad Abdullah Khan and other officials. In the end, Chairman Laghari presented Dr. Alfred Grannas with a commemorative shield and souvenir as tokens of appreciation, symbolizing the shared commitment to humanitarian causes and the enduring partnership between Germany and Pakistan in advancing these efforts.



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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

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

## Hotels & Restaurants

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

- Turkish Airlines.....8494949

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- Rescue (Police).....15
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- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
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- Shifa International 4603666

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- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3

## Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Inclusion of women in society important, says Swiss envoy

## Swiss Embassy screens Pakistan's documentary

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Switzerland in Pakistan and Fatima Jinnah Women University invited a vibrant audience for the screening of an award-winning documen-

tary, Barefoot with Godfather of Soccer, by the filmmaker, Khalid Hasan Khan. In a welcome speech, by the Dean FASS-FJWU, Dr Sarwet Rasul, appreciated the Swiss embassy's #Inspire-Inclusion initiative, for hosting the event at FJWU Auditorium, Rawalpindi. After the screening, the ambassador of Switzerland in Pakistan, H.E. Georg Steiner, in his keynote address, expressed his views, "we had the privilege to watch a wonderful, very inspiring film this morning, about inclusion. We believe that



inclusion of women in our society is of utmost importance and of course, for the great importance of our society." Khalid Hasan Khan, the filmmaker of Barefoot,

explained the premise of the interfaith soccer film, by mentioning, Carl Gustav Jung, 'no tree can grow to Heaven unless its roots reach down to Hell', Barefoot is a string of stories of such discouraged youth, from Khyber to Karachi, belonging to footballers of Christian, Hindu and Zoroastrian communities along with soccer players from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who play against the intolerable odds, in a discriminatory ordeal, he added, 'you have to be in the development hell, to get glory in life'.

He elaborated that "when sports organisations fail to nurture the talent, godfathers step in, to the rescue of dreams of young sportspersons. Khan cited the famous line, 'whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.' This 'kindness of strangers' is 'humanity' that helps young men and women to survive and thrive in the arena of their dreams." In the end, Dr Abida Sharif, Head of the Sociology Department of FJWU, thanked the guests and the audience for the "highly engaged session."

## Police carry out search operation in Dhoke Manga

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Division Police here on Thursday carried out search operation in 'Dhoke Manga' and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of Saddar Baroni Police Station. According to a police spokesman, the search operation was conducted in order to maintain law and order and flush out suspects following the directions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani. He informed, senior police officers and police personnel including women police took part in the search operation. Police checked as many as 40 houses, 18 shops, and 58 individuals during the search operation. The spokesman said that police were fully prepared to shield the lives and property of the public and combing and search operations were being done to flush out the suspects and hardcore criminals. He said that police were more vigilant to keep an eye on suspects and maintain law and order in Rawalpindi. —APP



ISLAMABAD: The initiative taken by the Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Leslie Scanlan, to host a brainstorming session with women parliamentarians in Islamabad presents a valuable opportunity to enhance political participation and empower women in the country.—DNA

## Efficacy of the small family has far-reaching consequences

DNA

ISLAMABAD. Director General Welfare Punjab and Chief Executive Officer PPIF Saman Rai has said in a meeting with various delegations in his office that we should take steps towards a better future by adopting the new idea of a balanced family because the importance and usefulness of a small family is now well known. She said that Pakistan is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of population and Punjab is the densest province of the country. She said that additional births have been recorded due to the gap in family planning needs, supply, and provision of related services. It has persisted for over a decade and closing this gap with traditional family planning methods is a challenging task. He said that to provide better quality services along with increasing the coverage of family planning, the Punjab Population Innovation Fund has been established by the Punjab government. is making All these innovative initiatives are aimed at enabling easy access to family planning services, especially for people living in rural areas, by adopting innovative communication. A 4-point agenda has been introduced by the Punjab Population Innovation Fund to achieve the goals.

## CTO commends officials for good duties during PSL matches

ISLAMABAD: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad on Thursday commended the dedication and hard work of officers and officials for maintaining smooth flow of traffic on capital roads during Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket matches. In response to the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (IC-CPO) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the recognition of exemplary performance continues, while stringent measures are taken against officials showing negligence and subpar performance. Recognizing excellence, commendations, certificates and cash rewards were awarded to police officers and officials of Traffic police for maintaining smooth flow of traffic on capital roads during PSL. On the occasion, the CTO said that "The ethos of rewarding excellence will persist, while those displaying incomplete or unsatisfactory performance will face stringent disciplinary actions".—APP

## New Minister welcomed, urged for taxing tobacco

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In the midst of Pakistan's deeply troubled economy, marked by plummeting reserves, a precarious balance of payments situation and high inflation, experts and anti-tobacco activists have stepped forward with a strategic recommendation of increasing tobacco taxation to bolster the economy. The Society for the Protection of Rights of the Child (SPARC) warmly welcomed

the appointment of Muhammad Aurangzeb as the country's new minister and urged him to consider tobacco taxation as a potential avenue for bolstering the economy. Such a measure could potentially offer a dual benefit of mitigating economic woes while simultaneously advancing the nation's health agenda, the SPARC said in a statement. SPARC shared the concerns of health activists who advocate for higher taxes on cigarettes rather than utilities. This strategic

approach not only aligns with public health goals but also addresses the broader economic implications associated with tobacco use, it added. "Pakistan can generate additional Rs 17 billion revenue though a 26 percent increase in taxes on cigarette," said Rabia Syed, Director IBC. "This proposal not only aims to address immediate fiscal pressures but also aligns with broader public health objectives by discouraging tobacco consumption as outlined by the WHO" she added.

## Kashf women entrepreneurship awards 2024

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Kashf Women Entrepreneurship Awards 2024, an event organized by the Kashf Foundation to acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable achievements of females who have demonstrated exceptional resilience and emerged as successful entrepreneurs, was held at a local hotel. The Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Leslie Scanlan, emphasized, "Today isn't just about awards; it's about acknowledging the resilience, innovation, and determination of women entrepreneurs driving our economies forward. Each story we hear reflects the extraordinary achievements of women who have dared to dream, overcome challenges, and become agents of change. At the core of this celebration is the impactful partnership between Kashf Foundation and the Government of Canada. Together, we've paved a path that not only breaks barriers but also empowers women to turn their dreams into reality." Kashf Foundation has collaborated with Global Affairs Canada for a transformative 5-Year project titled Promoting Gender Inclusive and Equitable Growth - Women's Economic Empowerment & Recovery. This initiative aims to foster the economic potential of women micro-entrepreneurs in Pakistan by addressing the multifaceted challenges they face within their households and communities through a series of interventions, including but not limited to, capacity building business and financial management trainings, maternal and reproductive health trainings, social advocacy, and public service campaigns.

## Dutch company to take of Pak bank

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved the acquisition of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited by a Dutch-based holding company, MNT-Halan Pak B.V. This transaction marks a significant development in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan. MNT - Halan Pak B.V. is a holding company incorporated in the Netherlands, with a presence in Pakistan through its subsidiaries, Halan Wallet (Private) Limited and Halan Finance Limited. On the other hand, Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited is a public limited company operating in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan. The acquisition involves the purchase of 100% shareholding of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited from Advans S.A SICAR, a Luxembourg-based financial services company.

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## Briefs

## PNCA's calligraphy exhibition unveiled

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Thursday unveiled a captivating Art Exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Islamabad. The exhibition features an array of exquisite calligraphic artworks from PNCA's Permanent Collection, Director PR Bilal Karim said while talking to APP. The art enthusiasts can immerse themselves in the mesmerizing world of calligraphy as they explore works by renowned Masters such as Sadequain, Ahmed Khan, Hanif Ramay, Rana Riaz, Aslam Kamal, and Amin Gulgee. The exhibition boasts a rich tapestry of traditional calligraphy by artists like Elahi Buksh Matee, Nasir Khan Seemab, Azeem Iqbal, Shabbir Zia, and Humayun Bangash, among others.—APP

## Railways announce ticket booking office hour in Ramadan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has announced the ticket booking office hours during the holy month of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak to facilitate the passengers. According to the spokesman of Pakistan Railways, the ticket booking offices would be open from 8 am to 1 pm Monday through Thursday during the first 15 days of the holy month. The spokesman said the travelers could book tickets for the afternoon shift Monday through Friday between 1 and 6 pm. He said there would be a Friday prayer break from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. To facilitate the passenger, he said after the 15th of Ramadan, the reservation office would be open till 9 pm with Iftar break.

## Green Karot initiative launched

ISLAMABAD: The Chinese Arbor Day, also known as National Tree Planting Day, was celebrated at the Karot Hydro Power Project (KHPP) with a tree plantation drive focusing on fruit trees, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. In celebration of Arbor Day, the CTGAAL and Karot Power Company (Pvt) Limited (KPCL) jointly launched the "Green Karot" initiative and planted 60 fruit trees at Karot HPP. "The activity is a joint commitment to environmental sustainability and community engagement," as per an official statement. CTGAAL is an investment holding company formed by China Three Gorges Corporation (CTG) and the China Three Gorges International Corporation (CTGI). The Arbor Day, which takes place every March 12 in China, is dedicated to promoting tree planting and environmental conservation. The China Three Gorges South Asia Investment Limited (C-SAIL), has been making noteworthy contributions to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Community Investment Programs (CIP) in Pakistan.—APP

## Ethiopia, Pakistan discusses aviation sector coop

On the other hand, Federal Secretary for Aviation H.E. Saif Anjum acknowledged the critical role being played by the Ethiopian Airlines in bringing Africa closer to Pakistan and assured the ambassador of his institution support in advancing the bilateral cooperation in the Aviation Sector

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: H.E. Jemal Beker Abdula, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was called on Federal Secretary for Aviation H.E. Saif Anjum and discussed the potential areas of future cooperation with Pakistan in Aviation Sector. Both sides had a detailed discussion on the matters of mutual interests including bilateral cooperation for knowledge sharing and technology transfer in the aviation sector.

On the occasion, H.E. Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula expressed his gratitude for crucial support extended by the Government of Pakistan in start of the Ethiopian Airlines' operations in



Karachi. The Ambassador briefed the Secretary on the pivotal role being played by the Ethiopian Airlines in effective implementation of the "Look Africa and Engage Africa" policies of Pakistan that were aimed at strengthening government-to-government, people-to-people and business-to-business relations between both Pakistan and African countries. He also highlighted the growing popularity of the Ethiopian Airlines among the people of Pakistan who have been fully appreciating the services offered by one of the largest airlines of the world. On the other hand, Federal Secretary for Aviation H.E. Saif Anjum acknowledged the critical role being played by the Ethiopian Airlines in bringing Africa closer to Pakistan and assured the ambassador of his institution support in advancing the bilateral cooperation in the Aviation Sector.

## Pakistan's seafood exports to China up 13% in 2023

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's seafood exports to China increased by 13% in 2023 compared to the previous year. The rise is due to the growing demand for seafood products in China, a trend that has been steadily increasing over the past few years, China Economic Net reported on Thursday quoting Ghulam Qadir, Investment and Trade Counsellor here at the Pakistan Embassy. Qadir noted that Pakistan's seafood exports to China reached \$247.3 million, marking a 13% increase for the January-December period in 2023 year-on-year. In 2022, exports were valued at \$219.3 million, while in 2021, they stood at \$139.29 million, as per

data from the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC). "This growth can be attributed to various factors, such as improved trade relations between the two countries, participation in the China Fisheries & Seafood Expo held in Qingdao last year by a large group of Pakistani fisheries companies, and the implementation of efficient supply chain management strategies in the Pakistani seafood industry. This positive development has contributed to the overall economic growth and strengthened the ties between Pakistan and China," the counsellor elaborated. Qadir informed China Economic Net (CEN) that, according to GACC, exports of frozen fish (commodity code

03038990) crossed \$60.63 million in 2023. Fresh/chilled crabs (commodity code 03063399) saw an increase to \$42.59 million, up from \$27.26 million in 2022. Moreover, exports of frozen cuttlefish (commodity code 03074310) reached \$34.93 million from Pakistan to China in 2023. He also highlighted that Pakistan organized the International Food and Agriculture Exhibition in Karachi last year, where a significant number of Chinese, particularly from the seafood association, participated to explore the Pakistani market. This event showcased Pakistan's potential as an exporter of quality seafood products and facilitated partnerships that have since boosted Pakistan's seafood exports to China.

## DGRE provide 1196 teachers in 598 Madaris

ISLAMABAD: Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has so far provided 1,196 teachers in 598 Madaris and books to 56,710 students studying in Madaris (seminarians) for supporting them in imparting contemporary education. According to official documents available with APP, the curriculum for grades 1 to 8 was notified in 2022 while the curriculum for grades 9 to 12 was notified on June 14, 2023, and shared with the DGRE. The implementation may start accordingly. As per document, DGRE has registered 16,646 Madaris all over the country so far, while 1,196 teachers provided to 598 Madaris (2 teachers per Madrasah) to support them in imparting contemporary education. The registration process was held here in head office and 16 regional offices all over Pakistan including GB & AJK. The DGRE has implemented National Curriculum of Pakistan in 85 Madaris, provided free Books to 56,710 students studying in Madaris, while Thirty-six (36) sessions of Paigham-e-Pakistan conducted in different provinces. It has also provided training to teachers of Madaris on contemporary education.—APP

## SPARC suggests more tax on cigarette

ISLAMABAD: The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) warmly welcomed the appointment of the new Finance Minister and urged him to consider tobacco taxation as a potential avenue for boosting the economy. Aligning with public health initiatives, the SPARC emphasized the importance of increasing taxes on cigarettes to reduce tobacco consumption, thus promoting better health outcomes for the population, said a press release issued here Thursday. The SPARC shared the concerns of health activists who advocate for higher taxes on cigarettes rather than utilities. This strategic approach not only aligns with public health goals but also addresses the broader economic implications associated with tobacco use. Malik Imran Ahmad, country head for Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK), appealed to the newly appointed Finance Minister, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, to recognize the significant challenge posed by tobacco consumption in Pakistan. With approximately 31.9 million adults consuming tobacco, accounting for 19.7% of the adult population, the impact on public health and the economy cannot be overstated. Ahmad emphasized the burden placed on healthcare resources to treat smoking-induced non-communicable diseases, underscoring the urgent need for measures such as increased tobacco taxation to mitigate the economic strain and protect public health.—APP

## AIUO reschedules postponed exams in Chitral region

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIUO) has rescheduled the postponed papers in Chitral region. Due to snowfall in Lower Chitral, schools and colleges were closed from 5 to 9 March and exams were postponed. According to the notification issued by the examination department, the exams of March 5 will be held on April 16, the papers of March 6 will be held on April 17, and the papers of March 7 to 9 will be held on April 18 to 20 respectively. The roll number slips, timings, and examination centres will remain the same and previously issued roll number slips will be valid for the exams.—DNA

## Hashoo foundation secures community impact award

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Hashoo Foundation, the sustainability arm of Hashoo Group, has won a CSR award in the "Community Impact" category for its pivotal role in empowering communities across Pakistan through multifaceted initiatives encompassing education, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, training, and support for over 35 years. Zulfiqar Malik, General Manager of the Pearl-Continental Hotel Karachi, collected the award at the 13th Annual CSR Awards ceremony organized in Karachi by The Professionals Network. Established in 2011, the CSR Awards stand as a significant recognition platform under The Professionals Network's stewardship, celebrating the impactful contributions of corporations and NGOs towards Pakistan's socio-economic uplift. The Corporate Social Responsibility Awards 2024 is the most Prestigious Recognition Awards program for Corporate Social Responsibility registered with the

IPO (Intellectual Property Rights Organization) and copyright protected. Sharing his thoughts on this prestigious accolade, Abdul Waheed, Director of Finance at Hashoo Foundation, expressed, "Our mission has always been to create lasting change within underserved communities and enable them to live empowered and sustainable lives. We are honoured with this recognition from The Professionals Network, and we will continue expanding our footprint to enlighten as many lives as possible." Hashoo Foundation serves underprivileged communities through humanitarian and capacity-building approaches across the country, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. The Foundation has been making concerted efforts to drive positive change in Climate Change, Entrepreneurship, Economic Growth, and Social Sector Development by engaging with the public sector, academia, national and international networks, and private sector entities.

## Punjab culture day observed with simplicity

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab Culture Day on Thursday was observed with simplicity in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi due to the holy month of Ramadan. Punjab Culture Day, also known as Punjabi Culture Day is celebrated on the 14th March. The culture of Punjab was known globally due to its prominent characteristics and rich history, folk singer Fazal Jatt told APP. Felicitating the people, Executive Director Lok Virsa, Uzair Khan said that happy Punjabi culture day to the people of Punjab. Punjabi language is closely associated with oral traditions and folklore. Folk songs, known as "Punjabi Lok Geet," narrate stories of love, nature, historical events, and societal issues, the ED Lok Virsa said. He said that Punjabi music, including Bhangra and Punjabi pop, had a wide audience both within the Punjabi community and globally. Punjabi language has a rich history, significant literary contributions, and serves as a medium for expressing emotions, stories and traditions.—APP

## Promotion of mother tongue stressed

ISLAMABAD: Renowned poet and writer Dr. Sugra Sadaf said on Thursday that the purpose of Punjabi Culture Day was to encourage the people of Punjab to promote their mother tongues to stay connected with our traditions and values. Talking to PTV News Channel on the occasion of Punjabi Culture Day, she urged people to actively participate in these events and play their role in promoting the culture of Punjab. While highlighting the rich culture and tradition of Punjab she said many scholars had enlightened the people with their thoughts on Punjabi language, culture, and literature. She said that Punjabi culture was the name of advancing the philanthropic traditions of Punjab, it reflects the culture of unity, love, and human respect. Punjab's culture, festivals, food, costumes, and ancient places were filled with thousands of colors, she said, and added that the blessed region had a history of thousands of years old civilization.—APP

## Famous TV actor Mehboob Alam remembered

ISLAMABAD: Famous television and film actor Mehboob Alam was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Thursday. Born on March 14, 1948, he was best known for his role in the Pakistan Television classic drama serial Waris in which he played the role of Chaudhry Hashmat Ali. He also appeared in the PTV drama Andhera Ujala (1984-1985) and Neelay Hath in 1989. Mehboob Alam also acted in 38 movies which included 12 Urdu, 15 Punjabi, and 11 Sindhi movies.—APP

## Pakistani nurses lose jobs in KSA

ISLAMABAD: Director General of Emigration and Overseas Employment has taken serious notice of loss of jobs of a considerable number of Pakistani nurses in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia due to functional irregularities surfaced by the foreign employers in the kingdom. In light of a preliminary fact finding report, the overseas employment promoter license of M/s Sahoo Manpower OEPL No 3295/RWP has been suspended with immediate effect until completion of investigation by the Bureau of Emigration.—APP

## China-Pakistan Friendship Merit-cum-Need Scholarship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chi-

nese Consul General, Zhao Shiren, announced the launch of the China-Paki-

stan Friendship Merit-cum-Need Scholarship project for students of the Universi-

ty of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF). This announcement was made during Mr. Zhao's meeting with UAF Vice Chancellor Dr. Iqar Ahmad Khan, along with Deans, Directors, and alumni of Chinese universities, on his visit to the University. Vice-Chancellor Dr. Iqar Ahmad Khan highlighted that 70 teachers from UAF have pursued higher education at universities in China.

The UAF has initiated a Sino-Pak dual diploma program in modern agricultural technology in collaboration with Baillie College, China. Under this program, students will spend the first two years studying at UAF and their third year in China, according to Gwadar Pro.



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## Demise of settler colonialism

THE connections between the indigenous people in Turtle Island and the indigenous people of Palestine run deep. Here on unceded territory in "Vancouver", the unflinching solidarity from indigenous brothers and sisters has been essential in maintaining support for the five-month (and counting) battle against Israeli genocide and settler colonialism. In January of this year, a Liberation Conference was held that focused on and strengthened these bonds. It was a unique and inspiring event that brought together inter-generational Palestinian and indigenous speakers and artists to share the experiences that unite them. Nowhere were the connections between the two struggles more evident than in the recent outrage over the comments and racist history of former BC Cabinet Minister Selina Robinson. Her final Zionist rant about Palestine being "a crappy piece of land" with "nothing on it" ... "didn't produce an economy" struck to the heart of settler colonialist logic. The centuries-old traditions and lifestyle of indigenous people constituted "nothing" until settlers came to civilize and develop them. In the case of Palestine, to "make the desert bloom". Robinson has now come full circle with the Zionist mantra, by finally leaving even her party caucus with (guess what!) a charge of "anti-Semitism" against her former colleagues. Ironically, Selina Robinson's comments even included the feeble Zionist attempt of claiming indigenous roots to Palestine. No one indigenous to a beloved land, no matter what state of "development" it was in, would ever label their home as "a crappy piece of land". Zionists were openly colonialist from the beginning. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, wrote in his book *The Jewish State* in 1896, "We should there form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism." The Assembly of First Nations, in a resolution in December 2023, has also grasped the obvious. According to media reports, "An emergency resolution advocating for a permanent ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, which recognizes the Palestinians as an Indigenous People under international law, passed unanimously." By now, any decent peace-loving individual or organization should have recognized that Zionism is a deeply flawed and vicious settler colonialist enterprise. It is way past time for all those who claim to support Palestine to disassociate from this stain on humanity. As Zionism enters its final death throes and inflicts even greater horrors on Palestinian civilians, we know that their end is within sight. For years, the chair of the Canada Palestine Association has noted that the brutal and arrogant behaviour of the Zionist regime will bring it to a miserable end... "their end will be ugly". Based on the inevitable resentment and hatred that "Israel", its military forces, and its backers have engendered in the Arab world, compounded a thousand times in the last five months, that sentiment rings truer than ever. This resentment is also evident in many areas of the global South, as multiple leaders in South America, South Africa and beyond have taken clear stands against the naked Israeli aggression.



## Franco-German rivalry and EU

TENSIONS between France and Germany, and clearly between President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, are starting to show a historical break from what was the pillar of the European construction: the Franco-German engine. We are now far from the closeness of President Charles de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer or President Francois Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl. In dangerous geopolitical and military times, these strains are putting at risk the entire stability and security of Europe. In fact, the war in Ukraine is only the tip of the iceberg of conflicting views over the future of Europe. When it comes to Ukraine, the disagreement over the supply of Taurus missiles and Macron's suggestion of sending Western troops to the front has strained Franco-German relations even more. This has led to accusations from France that Germany is not contributing enough to supporting Ukraine, while Germany is accusing Macron of taking unilateral decisions. The recent leak of a recording of four senior German military officers indicates that, despite Scholz's declarations, the prospect of supplying Ukraine with long-range cruise missiles is being considered. The officers were heard saying that the weapons could be used to hit the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia to the peninsula of Crimea. Moreover, a recent French press report indicated that Germany's increased arms supply to Ukraine has positioned Berlin as the second-largest supplier of arms to Kyiv after the US and this contrasts with or even defies the French accusations. In reality, France lags far behind in 14th place in terms of supplies to Ukraine. These open dissensions over Ukraine have been a long time coming and are all interlinked with a broader and deeper difference in vision, from the economy and energy to security and defense. Energy is a key element of this confrontation. Although Paris and Berlin finally reached an agreement on the method of setting the price paid per megawatt-hour of electricity at a summit in Hamburg last year, the two countries continue to advocate for two conflicting energy models. While France has a proven track record of efficiently using nuclear energy as a dependable source, Germany has shut down its nuclear power plants and advocates for an exclusively renewable energy mix. However, it is clear that the German model is not currently working. Indeed, as a result of the war in Ukraine, Berlin has lost its access to cheap natural gas from Moscow. This has been an unprecedented shock for energy-intensive German industries, which have long been the manufacturing powerhouse of Europe. While it continues to try and boost its renewable energy mix, Germany is now focusing on liquefied natural gas, transported by ship, which produces more greenhouse gas emissions and shows how the blind agenda on renewables has put Europe at risk. With this energy clash, the German model of economic excellence has come undone. This has validated the decade-old comments by French economists that, since the launch of the euro, Germany's industry has been indirectly subsidized due to the strength of the Deutsche Mark, which allowed it to push its exports and grow its economy at the expense of other members.

# Matching Shahbaz speed with Chinese speed

Qamar Bashir



Shahbaz Sharif's demonstrated administrative prowess positions him to secure the remaining \$40 billion investment in CPEC-1 and effectively operationalize the five growth corridors of CPEC-2: the Growth Corridor, Open Corridor, Livelihood Corridor, Innovation Corridor, and Green Corridor. Successful implementation of these initiatives could potentially lift the country out of its current economic challenges within the next five years. However, achieving this ambitious goal hinges on overcoming numerous ifs and buts. If Shahbaz Sharif can achieve political stability and consensus among the provinces regarding the distribution of CPEC-1...

SHAHBAZ Sharif, celebrated for his administrative prowess, confronts the formidable task of guiding the nation towards political stability and economic resilience. To achieve this, he must enact bold reforms, including the elimination of subsidies and the privatization of underperforming State-Owned Enterprises like PIA. Moreover, vital institutions such as the Federal Board of Revenue must undergo modernization to combat the pervasive corruption that plagues the system. Furthermore, urgent measures are needed to tackle issues like electricity theft and to broaden the tax base, encompassing sectors such as agriculture, retail, and real estate. Encouraging provinces to bolster their revenue streams and elevating the tax to GDP ratio from its current 9 to 10% to a sustainable 18% are imperative for long-term fiscal stability. These transformative reforms hold immense promise, potentially injecting Rs. 5,800 trillion into the national coffers. This enhanced liquidity will serve as a magnet for both foreign and domestic investors, fostering a climate of confidence in the business community. Ultimately, this revitalization will spur economic growth, job creation, and an increase in per capita income, thus easing the burden of escalating commodity and utility prices on the populace. Shahbaz Sharif can achieve these results by adopting a singular focus to match China's efficiency in implementing CPEC-1 and CPEC-2. China's method of executing projects starts with centralized planning and decision-making, facilitated by its political system. The government establishes long-term development goals and priorities, often through visionary initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Made in China 2025. This top-down approach ensures alignment with national objectives and promotes consensus-building within the ruling Communist Party, providing a solid foundation for ambitious projects. China utilizes state-led investment and coordination mechanisms to mobilize resources effectively. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) are pivotal in infrastructure development, benefiting from government financing and regulatory support. Additionally, China promotes public-private partnerships (PPPs) to leverage the strengths of both sectors, encouraging innovation, risk-sharing, and efficiency gains essential for successful projects, especially in infrastructure and technology sectors. China's success in project implementation is rooted in its focus on capacity building, technological advancement, and robust governance. Investments in human capital development, research, and skills training ensure the availability of skilled labor needed for intricate projects. Adaptive governance and flexible policy responses allow authorities to navigate challenges and adjust strategies during implementation. Moreover, effective project management, oversight, and accountability mechanisms ensure timely completion and high-quality outcomes, reinforcing China's reputation for efficient execution of high-value projects. Despite China's renowned efficiency and dedication, delays have persisted in the implementation of projects under CPEC-1, initially valued at \$65 billion and slated

for completion by 2025. Currently, only \$25 billion of the total investment has materialized, leaving approximately \$40 billion worth of projects still in the pipeline. The delay in CPEC projects are not due to Chinese lack of commitment but primarily stemming from Pakistan's volatile political and security landscape. Security threats, including terrorism and regional instability, have disrupted construction activities and discouraged investors, resulting in delays and increased costs. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, regulatory hurdles, and governance issues within Pakistan's administrative framework have further impeded project implementation. Inefficient decision-making processes, corruption allegations, and a lack of transparency in procurement and contracting have eroded investor confidence and contributed to the sluggish pace of project execution. Additional factors contributing to the delay in CPEC project completion encompass Pakistan's economic downturns, fiscal constraints, and geopolitical tensions, compounded by external pressures such as regional rivalries and strategic interests. Sovereignty concerns, territorial disputes, and geopolitical alignments also pose challenges. Ecological impacts and community resettlement issues further complicate CPEC projects, necessitating careful consideration and mitigation strategies. Shahbaz Sharif's demonstrated administrative prowess positions him to secure the remaining \$40 billion investment in CPEC-1 and effectively operationalize the five growth corridors of CPEC-2: the Growth Corridor, Open Corridor, Livelihood Corridor, Innovation Corridor, and Green Corridor. Successful implementation of these initiatives could potentially lift the country out of its current economic challenges within the next five years. However, achieving this ambitious goal hinges on overcoming numerous ifs and buts. If Shahbaz Sharif can achieve political stability and consensus among the provinces regarding the distribution of CPEC-1 and CPEC-2 projects, it could set a strong foundation for success. Maintaining a positive relationship with the establishment and enhancing bureaucratic competency are crucial steps in ensuring efficient project management. Additionally, surviving the political landscape over the next five years is essential for continuity and progress. Streamlining bureaucratic processes, addressing security concerns, and providing policy clarity will boost investor confidence and project continuity. Timely securing funding, developing necessary infrastructure, and addressing local stakeholder concerns are pivotal in overcoming obstacles to project implementation. Resolving legal disputes and regulatory inconsistencies will further facilitate smooth project execution. Success in these endeavors will be key to unlocking the full potential of CPEC and driving economic growth in Pakistan. Assuming Shahbaz Sharif successfully materializes the remaining \$40 billion investment in CPEC-1 and fully operationalizes CPEC-2 projects over the next five years, Pakistan's economic, financial, and developmental landscape will undergo a transformative change. Completion of CPEC-1 and CPEC-2 will result in the

construction of new roads, ports, railways, and energy projects, enhancing connectivity both within Pakistan and with China. This improved infrastructure will boost trade, transportation, and economic activity, paving the way for increased investment and development opportunities. The establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) along the CPEC route has the potential to attract domestic and foreign industries, leading to industrial growth, technology transfer, and skills development. This diversification of Pakistan's industrial base will contribute to increased productivity and economic resilience. Furthermore, the completion of energy projects such as power plants and renewable energy installations will address Pakistan's energy deficit and enhance energy security, laying a strong foundation for sustained economic growth. Improved infrastructure and connectivity facilitated by CPEC will facilitate trade not only between Pakistan and China but also with other countries in the region. This increased trade volume will drive exports, reduce trade costs, and stimulate overall economic growth, ultimately leading to a more prosperous and developed Pakistan. Shahbaz Sharif's efforts to achieve balanced regional development and attract further foreign investment can be significantly enhanced by prioritizing political stability in Pakistan. Political stability serves as the cornerstone for ensuring continuity in policies and government priorities, creating an environment conducive to long-term planning and execution of infrastructure projects like CPEC. By establishing political stability, Sharif can bolster investor confidence, both domestic and foreign, in the predictability and security of the operating environment. This confidence is crucial for attracting investment in large-scale projects like CPEC, as investors seek assurances that their investments will be protected and secure. Moreover, a stable political environment streamlines decision-making processes within the government, minimizing bureaucratic delays and bottlenecks in project implementation. Timely approvals, permits, and clearances are essential for keeping CPEC projects on track and ensuring their successful execution. Furthermore, political stability is essential for maintaining positive relations with China and other international partners involved in CPEC. Consistent diplomatic engagement and cooperation are necessary for resolving issues, negotiating agreements, and securing additional investment for CPEC projects. In essence, political stability provides the foundation for effective governance, investor confidence, and security, all of which are critical for the successful and timely completion of CPEC projects. Without political stability, the risk of delays, disruptions, and project failures increases, potentially undermining the transformative potential of CPEC for Pakistan's economy and development.

Former Press Secretary to the President  
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Former MD, SRBC

# US believes defeating Gaza is defeating Axis of resistance

Robert Inlakesh

The Zionist entity is only the proxy for this war, and the people of the Gaza Strip are to be made an example out of, under the US empire's vision

WITH the Zionist regime as its proxy, the US government is pursuing a policy of attempting to crush the entire population of Gaza with the belief that this will inflict a strategic defeat on the regional Axis of Resistance. This strategy represents what could be Washington's final bid to reassert American dominance over West Asia and dismantle governing forces indigenous to the region. When we talk of the collective West, we are really discussing a tyrannical empire with its headquarters in Washington DC. It should be clear by now that the European nations are not independent in any meaningful sense, and the interests of their governing officials are those of the corporate elites. The Israelis are also in this fold and, evidently, hold considerable power through their extensive multi-national lobbying campaigns, yet in this case have become the convenient proxy force and attack dog to prove a point to the Global South. If one is to look into mega-corporations in the West, the likes of Vanguard and Blackrock to name a few, it quickly becomes obvious that their interests are inherently intertwined as they quite literally own each other and are therefore working for their own collective success as mega-corporations. Why talk about mega-corporations when assessing US foreign policy in West Asia? Because "The West" as we know it is no more than a collection of mega-corporations to begin with. Its democratic elections

have been revealed to be shams, as all viable candidates work for the donor class and not the people who vote for them. Even the experts that Western politicians trust to shape policy for them are directly financed by the same corporate elites, with every major think tank that helps frame the opinions of advisors being on the same payroll. If we are to look at the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s new modus operandi, we will see that "Stakeholder Capitalism" is now the flavor of the day. Stakeholder Capitalism is in essence allowing corporations to openly influence social norms and shape both domestic and foreign policy. The Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), which serves as the US response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, depends on allowing corporations to take the driving seat as proposed by the WEF for instance. This is the natural evolution of the Western Empire, which has managed to pacify the populations living under the tyrannical control of the Capitalist elites. They entertain their rising desire for political engagement through divisive surface-level political issues; usually weaponizing identity politics that result in 'chicken or egg arguments,' effecting no tangible change in the political systems of Western nations. The Zionist project came as a result of European antisemitism and served as a perfect political movement to turn an inter-European conflict into an imperialist alliance. It was promoted in literature, then in the form of a settler-colonial movement, a specific kind of typical European colonial supremacy, in this case, the notion of White Jewish supremacy woven into a synthetic nationalism. Although this project ended up having issues with elements of the Western imperial system, namely the British during their Mandate of occupied Palestine, this began to change in 1956 with the tripartite invasion of Egypt; which saw the Israelis, British, and French launch a joint war. By 1967, the Zionist project had fully integrated itself as a loyal member of the Western imperial system and now serves as a vanguard to the US Blackrock. Instead of viewing the policies of Western nations as representing any kind of desire to serve the interests of the working people that reside there, we must remove the notion that any of these governments work on behalf of the

populations that reside in these countries. Instead, they must be viewed in the same manner that Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are, in that they may occasionally take their populations into consideration but ultimately serve an agenda that works to the benefit of the despotic ruling elites. In the case of the Western empire, they pursue global dominance and seek to undermine indigenous self-determination, because this represents the single greatest threat to their tyranny. When Hamas launched Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, it dealt a mighty blow to the heart of the US Empire, as it shattered the illusion of Western invincibility and smashed the regional agenda that was being promoted from Washington. The Zionist entity uses the most sophisticated and newest Western military equipment, works to divide the entire region, and forces it to bow to the demands of the Western empire. This equipment was proven useless in the face of an indigenous military force that had been under a comprehensive siege for 17 years. They dismantled the regional ambitions of the Western empire and their "New Middle East" vision that was outlined by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, at the United Nations General Assembly in September of last year. What Hamas has also done since is to destroy the propaganda surrounding the Western empire's global agenda, also awakening an anti-war movement throughout the collective West - with the exception of the Zionist entity - that has channeled the genuine rising anger at the betrayal of the working people. The racist assumptions about the Palestinian people have come back to bite the Western empire, and so too has the dehumanizing rhetoric that they believed would work on a younger generation who do not carry the same biases as the past generations when it comes to race/ethnicity/religion. Realizing the catastrophic defeat it suffered due to its miscalculations and arrogance, the US is now determined to crush the people of Gaza from which this act of defiance rose. The mere fact that a population of 2.3 million, most of whom are refugees, contained in a concentration camp only 141 square miles in size, refused to bow down and instead opted for freedom or martyrdom, has triggered what Washington has decided will be a genocidal attack on all of

them. This barbaric act of savagery is not just about Gaza, it is a message to the entire Axis of Resistance and the wider Global South. The US is saying, if you dare to challenge us, this is what we will do to you. The Zionist entity is only the proxy for this war, and the people of the Gaza Strip are to be made an example out of, under the US empire's vision. When the right-wing fascist Zionist militants were set on the people of Gaza, it was clear what they were sent there to do, and if the US didn't approve, none of this would have occurred. Unfortunately, there are no level-headed leaders in the West, because the government officials are simply willing actors in a game of chess and they simply represent its pieces on the board. This is why they are of the view that Gaza must be defeated, it must be starved, its children and women must be slaughtered, its intellectuals have to be purged, and it must be reduced to a wasteland. It is no coincidence that we hear World War II invoked frequently by Western leaders and Zionists because they are sending the message to the world that they are taking us back to an era where there was no international law or united nations, a world in which the Geneva conventions were not there to prevent or punish actions like the dropping of atomic bombs. Although they may not seek an immediate path to a direct war with Iran and its allies, constituting the Axis of Resistance, it appears as if they are willing to risk it in order to inflict a defeat on the Palestinian people in Gaza. The only wildcard now is what the Axis of Resistance will do in order to ensure the Western empire is defeated on the battleground of Gaza. The US may attempt to score a victory by proxy and impose its will in a post-war Gaza, by restricting the desperately needed reconstruction, political solution for the territory, and aid introduction, instead of imposing a normalization plan, but this will ultimately fail. We are on a path toward a decisive victory for one side or the other at this current moment, and the only thing that will stop this is if the US realizes that even if it was to reach "victory", it would be a pyrrhic victory and decide instead to back down. Yet, the arrogance of the West which led it to this position does not seem to have faded and reality may never set in.

— Source: Al Mayadeen English



## Briefs

PHC rejects  
SIC's plea...

FROM PAGE 01 they get reserved seats in the same proportion. "Their seats cannot be increased." "If these seats are not given, the parliament will not be complete," remarked the chief justice, responding to which the lawyer requested the court to interpret the Constitution in a way that there remains no gap in its interpretation. Barrister Zafar told the court that the ECP has the authority to [make] laws to maintain justice. He added that there is also an election for reserved seats, and that, too, should be transparent.

Ruling  
alliance  
bags five...

FROM PAGE 01 Provincial Assembly becomes a candidate for a second seat which, in accordance with clause (1), he may not hold concurrently with his first seat, then his first seat shall become vacant as soon as he is elected to the second seat. In the National Assembly, PPP's Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani managed to retain the seat he vacated after securing. Out of the 301 votes cast, Gilani, who was a joint candidate of the ruling coalition of six parties, secured 204 votes compared to his rival Suni Ittehad Council's (SIC) Ilyas Mehrban who could only get 88 votes. Nine votes were rejected during the vote count. The seat on which the elections were held today had fallen vacant after Gillani was elected as MNA in the Feb 8 elections.

Pakistan,  
IMF  
'discuss'...

FROM PAGE 01 IMF team appreciated the caretaker government's efforts in implementing the programme. The sources said that the finance minister agreed to continue the economic reforms. "Pakistan assured the IMF mission of implementing all priority points," the sources added. The government also presented a plan to the delegation seeking to increase the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)'s revenues and reduction in circular debt. Earlier, the finance ministry said that Pakistan has met all structural benchmarks, qualitative performance criteria and indicative targets for successful completion of the IMF review.

PM takes  
back IRSA  
chairman's...

FROM PAGE 01 IRSA chairman. The development came after Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah contacted PM Shehbaz over the matter. In a statement, Sindh Irrigation Minister Jam Khan Shoro said CM Shah apprised the premier about Council of Common Interests (CCI) decision that the appointment of IRSA chairman will be rotated amongst the provinces. Shoro added that PM Shehbaz accepted Sindh's stance and assured CM Shah of taking back the notification.

Bahrain,  
Pak keen...

FROM PAGE 01 emerging technologies emphasis on drone technology and collaboration within the Cyber and Networking domains were discussed. Air Chief stressed the deep-rooted brotherly relations between both nations. The visiting dignitary praised the exceptional professionalism of PAF personnel and the remarkable progress achieved by Pakistan Air Force. Commander Bahrain National Guard also visited PAF Cyber Command where he was briefed about the operational capabilities of Pakistan Air Force. Expressing profound interest in the strides made by PAF in the Cyber domain, the visiting dignitary conveyed his intention to dispatch a specialized team to PAF to assess and address any existing gaps within the emerging technologies architecture of the Bahrain Armed Forces.



LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is presiding over a meeting related to school education. – DNA

# Messi fire Inter Miami into CONCACAF quarters

Inter Miami coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino said Messi's withdrawal, when he did not appear to limp or be in discomfort

## SPORTS DESK

LONDON: Luis Suarez and Lionel Messi were on target as Inter Miami marched into the last eight of the CONCACAF Champions Cup with a 3-1 (5-3 aggregate) win over Nashville. Messi set up Suarez for the eighth-minute opener and then the Argentine found the target himself in the 23rd minute. But the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner was substituted in the 50th minute before his replacement Robert Taylor made sure of the victory with a 63rd-minute header. Inter Miami coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino said Messi's withdrawal, when he did not appear to limp or be in discomfort, was due to a concern about his hamstring. "He has an overload in his right hamstring. So we didn't want to take any risks. We tried to see if he could hold on a bit longer but it was bothering him and we preferred to take him out of the game," he said. "I imagine that for Saturday's game (at D.C. United) he is not going to be available," said Martino. Inter Miami, playing in the competition for the first time, will face the winner of Thursday's second leg between Mexico's Monterrey and MLS's FC Cincinnati in the quarter-



nals. The Liga MX team are at home and leads 1-0 from the first leg. The first leg in Tennessee had seen Nashville take a two-goal lead before goals from Messi and Suarez inspired a comeback for a 2-2 draw. And it was the former Barcelona pair that proved to be the difference again as Miami took control from the outset. Messi had an early opportunity when he was brought down on the

edge of the box, providing him with a free-kick from a central position but his shot struck the wall. Follow us on our Official WhatsApp channel But minutes later, Messi created the opener, splitting the Nashville defence with a perfect pass to Suarez whose exquisite finish, with the outside of his right foot, matched the precision of the assist. While the veteran quartet of Bar-

celona players in the Miami team, also including Spaniards Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets, grab the attention, the young midfielder workhouse Diego Gomez has become increasingly influential. It was the Paraguayan's aggressive running that created the second goal, in the 23rd minute, when Gomez drove aggressively into the box and then smartly slipped inside to Messi who bur-

ied the ball, first time, into the corner. It was Messi's fifth goal in five games in all competitions this season. Suarez has scored four in six games. Nashville had created little but they offered a wake-up call to Miami keeper Drake Callender when Daniel Lovitz blasted a left-foot volley against the post. Miami coach Gerardo Martino brought Messi off for Taylor five minutes after the interval, with no visible sign of an injury for the Argentine. The departure of the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner gave Nashville a lift and they began to attack with real intent. Callender had to pull off a fine save at point-blank range to deny Lukas MacNaughton. But any hint of a Nashville comeback was snuffed out when Suarez turned provider with a delightful chip into the box towards Taylor who angled home his header to make it 3-0. Nashville's Hany Mukhtar had an effort disallowed for offside before English striker Sam Surridge added a late consolation. Earlier Costa Rica's Herediano secured passage to the last eight with a 1-1 draw at Surinam's Robinhood enough to give them a 3-1 aggregate win. Wednesday's later game is an all-Mexican clash with Club America defending a 3-0 first-leg advantage at home to Chivas Guadalajara.

## PCB bows to Watson's demands for coaching job

Watson has been offered an annual salary of \$2 million, which equates to roughly PKR 4.6 crore per month



## OUR CORRESPONDENTS

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is keen on making Shane Watson the highest-paid coach in the country's cricket history. According to a report in local media, Watson has been offered an annual salary of \$2 million by the PCB. If the agreement is signed, Watson could potentially become the highest-paid coach in the history of Pakistan cricket. However, the report added that sources close to Watson claim that he may not accept the offer. Watson might not be interested in taking up the role as he does not want to stay away from his family for a long period of time. Mike Hesson and Daren Sammy are among the contenders for the coaching role of the Pakistan national men's cricket team. Hesson and Sammy are currently working as head coach for Islamabad United and Peshawar Zalmi, respectively. The Mohsin Naqvi-led PCB is interested in appointing a strong coaching staff for the cricket team. However, appointing well-known coaches would be a tall order since most of them are working with leagues all over the world. In order to fill the vacancy in time for the upcoming T20I series against New Zealand at home, the PCB is also considering the possibility of appointing local coaches along with foreign consultants. The five-match T20I series between Pakistan and New Zealand will begin from April 18. It must be noted Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn and Andrew Puttick, who were transferred to the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore after a change in their portfolios in November 2023, left their respective positions in January this year. In April 2023, Arthur was named Director of the Pakistan men's cricket team while Bradburn was roped in as head coach of the Pakistan national men's side earlier last year. Former South Africa cricketer Puttick worked as batting coach since April 2023. The decision was taken amicably between all the parties involved, according to PCB.

## Pak beat India to clinch third Thunder Nation Cup

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan clinched their third Thunder Nation Cup with a thrilling 14-run victory over India at Blacktown International Sports Park. Bilal Qureshi, Player of the Match, notched up an unbeaten 62 as he led his side to 130-6, before Pakistan's bowlers restricted the winners of the previous three seasons, India, to 116-9 in reply. "We've been playing this for a fair while and it's great to get another win," Qureshi said after the match. "I've been here since the inception of the cup and I'm much older than the other guys but it's great to be here. "We've had a fair few finals in the last 5/6 years which we've lost, most to India as well, so it's great to beat them. "There's been lots of different talent coming through so that's great for all the different communities and it's amazing that the Sydney Thunder run this tournament for all the teams.

## Navarro registers upset win over Sabalenka

LONDON: World number two Aryna Sabalenka suffered a shocking loss to American Emma Navarro 6-3 6-6 6-2 as the latter qualified for the Indian Wells quarter-finals for the first time. Navarro didn't crack under the pressure of Sabalenka's powerful serve and bagged four of her five break-points over the two-time Australian Open champion. Navarro made a fast start to clinch the first set before Sabalenka came back to win the second. However, Navarro held her nerves to win the third set in convincing manner. Navarro, seeded 23rd, sealed a quarter-final clash with ninth seed Maria Sakkari of Greece. Sakkari, the 2022 runner-up, defeated Frenchwoman Diane Parry 6-2 3-6 6-3. "It's a little bit unnatural for me to be in the spotlight and be playing on a court like that with a ton of fans and TVs and eyes on me. It's not my natural way," she told reporters. "But I feel I'm definitely getting more comfortable with it and just feeling like I can be myself even if there's however many people watching. "Also I think that was my second or third fist pump ever. If it was a little weird, cut me some slack," she said with a smile. With the win Navarro will make her way into the top 20 for the first time after the tournament. "Her [Navarro] potential is really great," Sabalenka told reporters. "I think she has the potential to be in the top 10." Meanwhile, Coco Gauff celebrated her birthday by progressing with an easy 6-0 6-2 win over Elise Mertens at Indian Wells. The dynamic American looked in sublime form as she overpowered the Belgian 24th seed. Mertens had defeated Naomi Osaka in the previous round but today she just hit four winners along with 21 unforced errors. – Agencies

## US Navy ship arrives Pakistan for sea exercise

The sea exercise was aimed to strengthen mutual professional skills through cooperation and learning from each other experience

## DNA

KARACHI: US Navy Ship USS INDIANAPOLIS, Freedom Class Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) here on Thursday visited Karachi Port and conducted a sea drill with the Pakistan Navy. According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), upon arrival at Karachi, US Navy Ship was received by senior officials of Pakistan Navy. During the stay at Karachi, activities included professional interaction with PN officials and Ship's crew in the form of table top discussions on contemporary issues besides planning and coordination meeting for conduct of joint sea exercise.

At sea Pakistan Navy Ship ALAMGIR with embarked helicopter carried out sea exercise with visiting US Navy ship to enhance interoperability between both navies. The sea exercise was aimed to strengthen mutual professional skills through cooperation and learning from each other experience. Pakistan Navy, in line with government policy, has always contributed significantly towards safety, security and freedom of navigation at high seas. In this regard Pakistan Navy's Regional Maritime Security Patrol and participation in Coalition Maritime Forces operations since 2004 is a manifestation of PN resolve for safe and secure seas for common cause of peace and stability in the region.



## Pakistan proud of close...

FROM PAGE 01 able to benefit from investment opportunities in Pakistan's key sectors i.e. agriculture, I.T., mining and minerals as well as renewable energy. The Prime Minister lauded Qatar's contribution to peace efforts in Gaza. He said it was disappointing that violence was continuing in Gaza even during the holy month of Ramadan. The Prime Minister fondly recalled his official visits to Qatar in August 2022 and March 2023. He extended an invitation to the Amir of Qatar to undertake an official visit to Pakistan and said the people of Pakistan looked forward to welcoming him in the near future. The Ambassador of Qatar thanked the Prime Minister and said he would do his best to foster stronger ties between the two countries.

## Zardari underscores Xi's...

FROM PAGE 01 Chinese head of state's "indispensable" support for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Expressing gratitude in response to Xi Jinping's felicitations for assuming charge of the president's office, Zardari reiterated Islamabad's commitment to further strengthen practical cooperation with China. Recalling that both countries have made significant progress in bilateral cooperation including the economic corridor, Zardari stressed that the bilateral relations between the two countries have strengthened over the years due to common ideals, mutual respect and understanding.

## Pakistan slams India's...

FROM PAGE 01 economic and social victimization of Muslims and other minorities in India. She said the discriminatory steps further expose the sinister agenda of transforming India into Hindu Rashtra. She advised the Indian authorities to stop pre-choseographed targeting and systematic marginalization of minorities. She said only a few days ago, a group UN special rapporteurs urged corrective actions to protect human rights and attacks against minorities in the run up to India's national elections. She urged India to take action to protect its own minorities especially Muslims who, she said, are in a very difficult situation because of rising Hindutva.

## Pak ranks 161st on...

FROM PAGE 01 In the last (2021/22) HDI ranking, Pakistan was placed at 164, amid global fall in development set off by the COVID-19 pandemic. The first UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) was prepared and launched in 1990 under the leadership of the late Dr Mahbubul Haq, a former Pakistan finance minister. The latest report, "Breaking the gridlock", revealed widening disparities between the haves and the have-nots, despite record high global human development scores in 2023. The 2023 HDI stands at a new high following steep decline during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the report said.

## Punjab CM Maryam...

FROM PAGE 01 Lab Project for the purpose. She also directed to enact effective legislation for the protection of motorcycle riding youth, employed by rider services. Earlier, the authorities concerned briefed the Chief Minister about the proposal to issue labour cards to daily wage earners to provide them social security benefits. It was also briefed that a labor complex and labor colonies will be built in Quaid-e-Azam Business Park Sheikhpura and Rawalpindi, where 1400 laborers and 800 labor families will be provided accommodation. Madam Chief Minister also directed to expedite the completion of labor colony projects in Sunder and Taxila.



## Briefs

## Marcos tells Scholz: ICC can't probe Philippines

MANILA : Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. told German Chancellor Olaf Scholz the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) has no authority to probe his predecessor's deadly war against drugs. Marcos discussed the ICC's probe during a bilateral meeting with Scholz on Tuesday in Germany where he was on a working visit, according to a readout from the Philippine presidential office published late on Wednesday. Former President Rodrigo Duterte officially withdrew from the international tribunal in 2019 after questioning its power to probe his anti-narcotics campaign, which had killed thousands. Marcos said Philippine courts continue to function and law enforcers are investigating the killings. "It is very difficult for the Philippines to accept that an outside court will, shall I say, dictate to our policemen who they will investigate, who they will arrest," Marcos said. The readout did not say how Scholz responded to Marcos' position. Germany is one of the biggest backers and contributors to the ICC. Marcos separately told reporters the drug campaign has "completely changed" to prevention and rehabilitation, a claim the Human Rights Watch has questioned, saying the killings have continued. "He cannot claim progress because the impunity persists," Human Rights Watch Asia Deputy Director Bryony Lau said in a statement.

## UN report: COVID-19 recovery uneven, poorest lag

LONDON : Many countries are bouncing back from the COVID-19 pandemic, but the poorest are not and a significant number are seeing conditions deteriorating, a report from the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) said. Achim Steiner, head of the agency, said that after two decades during which rich and poor countries were coming closer in terms of development, the finding is "a very strong warning signal" that nations are now drifting apart. The Human Development Index that the agency has produced since 1990 is projected to reach record highs in 2023 after steep declines during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. But development in half of the world's poorest countries remains below 2019 pre-pandemic levels, the report said. "It's a rich person's versus a poor person's world in which we are seeing development unfolding in very unequal, partially incomplete ways," Steiner said at a news conference. "Why does this matter? Not only because it creates more vulnerability, it creates also more misery and protracted poverty, growing inequality."—APP

## Pope says option of resigning is only 'a distant hypothesis'

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis has no intention of resigning as he feels that his health is good enough to allow him to carry on, he says in a new book. "This is a distant hypothesis, because I don't have reasons serious enough to make me think about giving up," Francis was quoted as saying in "Life: My Story Through History," a book due out in Italian and English on March 19. Francis is 87 and has been increasingly frail in recent years, using a wheelchair or a cane to move around and recently suffering from what have been described as bouts of bronchitis or colds that have led him to limit his public speaking. Nevertheless, in the book he reassures about his condition. "Thank the Lord, I enjoy good health and, God willing, there are many projects still to be realized," he said, repeating that he would consider quitting only in case of a "serious physical impediment."—DNA

## Israel has 'lost the war' in Gaza even if it enters Rafah

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said that the Israeli army has failed to win a single victory or achieve a single objective

## NEWS DESK

BEIRUT : Israel has "lost the war" in Gaza even if it enters the southern city of Rafah and the Israeli army is "exhausted" on all fronts, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. "Even experts in Israel acknowledge the losses inflicted by the Axis of Resistance. After six months of fighting, the Hebrew state has failed to win a single victory or achieve a single objective. In the face of massacres, destruction and martyrdom, the people of Gaza continue to resist with strength and courage," Nasrallah said in a televised speech amid the Muslim

holy month of Ramadan. "We say to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, even if you go to Rafah, you have lost the war, and you cannot eliminate Hamas or the resistance in Gaza despite all the massacres," he added. He said "the Israeli army today is tired and exhausted on all fronts, and the number of its casualties is very large and much larger than declared." Nasrallah noted that as a result of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and fighting on the northern front near Lebanon, there are not enough troops in the Israeli army to continue the war. He said "the economic losses in southern Lebanon cannot be compared to

the significant losses of the occupation in the southern front (of Gaza)." Nasrallah emphasized that "the resistance in Iraq and its drones and rockets against the (Israeli) entity is a continuous and ongoing matter, and the supporting fronts will continue their work during the month of Ramadan." "Does anyone believe that US President Joe Biden cannot stop the war on Gaza? He is able to stop the aggression on Gaza easily, whether in the (UN) Security Council or elsewhere," he said. He described the airdropping of humanitarian aid into Gaza as "hypocrisy" but also "American stupidity."

"What is required from the US administration is to stop the aggression on Gaza," he stressed. Nasrallah affirmed that the Palestinian group "Hamas negotiates on behalf of all resistance factions, and it negotiates not from a position of weakness but imposes conditions (on Israel)." Clashes between the Israeli army and Hezbollah since Oct. 8 last year have resulted in casualties, including 242 Hezbollah members, 49 Lebanese civilians, 11 Amal Movement members, 12 Hamas members, 12 Islamic Jihad members, six Israeli civilians and 11 soldiers. Tension has flared along the border between

Lebanon and Israel amid intermittent exchanges of weapons fire between Israeli forces and Hezbollah in the deadliest clashes since the two sides fought a full-scale war in 2006. Hostilities escalated as Israel continued its military offensive on the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians since Hamas launched a cross-border incursion into Israel last October. At least 300 people are estimated to have been killed in Lebanon, including 240 Hezbollah fighters, since then. Nearly 20 Israelis have also been killed, according to Israeli figures.

## EU commissioner urges Israel to ease Gaza aid

ANKARA: The European commissioner for cohesion and reforms called for pressure on Israel to allow the flow of more humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The tragic events in Gaza underscore the urgency of ending the war, increasing humanitarian aid and releasing the hostages, Elisa Ferreira told a session of the European Parliament on the immediate risk of mass starvation in Gaza and attacks on humanitarian aid deliveries. Reminding that civilians are dying from starvation in the besieged enclave, where the health system has collapsed, Ferreira also expressed concern over a planned Israeli military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which is packed with 1.5 million displaced Palestinians. Anyone concerned about the situation in Gaza should pressure the Israeli government to allow unimpeded land access for aid trucks, she added. Saying that the international community needs to take action to protect civilians from hunger and violence, she stressed that the European Union will continue to work with the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA).—DNA

## One dead, 29 rescued after Aust gold mine collapse

SYDNEY : Search teams pulled a body from the rubble of a collapsed Australian gold mine on Thursday, after a major rescue operation earlier freed 29 workers trapped underground. A crew of 30 miners was working deep inside the Ballarat Gold Mine in the state of Victoria when it caved in on Wednesday evening. While 29 of the workers were rescued within hours, a 37-year-old man was helplessly pinned by the tumbling rocks. Emergency services toiled through the night to dig the man from the debris, some three kilometres (1.9 miles) from the mine entrance. His body was eventually pulled from the mine on Thursday morning. Union officials have raised questions about the mine's safety record — there was a previous collapse in 2007 when another company owned the mine — and the site's owner now faces a major workplace safety probe. "It's devastating because we've lost yet another worker and no worker should be injured or die at work," said Australian Workers Union state secretary Ronnie Hayden.—APP

## Tokyo stocks close higher

TOKYO : Tokyo stocks shrugged off early losses and ended higher on Thursday, with the market supported by gains in value stocks and heavyweights including Uniqlo's parent company. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index advanced 0.29 percent, or 111.41 points, to close at 38,807.38, while the broader Topix index gained 0.49 percent, or 13.08 points, to 2,661.59. "The market was dragged down by Tokyo Electron and other chip shares following losses of semiconductor-related shares in the US, while traders speculate on policy changes at next week's BOJ meeting," IwaiCosmo Securities said. "But after the sell-off, the market gradually picked up, supported by value stocks such as natural resources and materials." The dollar stood at 147.89 yen, against 147.78 yen seen Wednesday in New York. Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing jumped 1.62 percent to 43,880 yen while SoftBank Group climbed 0.46 percent to 8,591 yen. Nissan added 2.23 percent to 564 yen after several media reported, citing sources, that the automaker is considering a tie-up with Honda in electric vehicles. Nissan declined to comment when contacted by AFP. Honda gained 1.12 percent to 1,752 yen. Nippon Steel fell 0.58 percent to 3,586 yen after reports said US President Joe Biden plans to intervene in the firm's proposed purchase of US Steel.—Agencies



JAKARTA: Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore met with Mr. Nararya Soeprapto Deputy Sec-Gen ASEAN. They exchanged views on the implementation of the ASEAN-Pakistan cooperation projects, with the view to further strengthen the ASEAN-Pakistan cooperation in the near future.—DNA

## SpaceX prepares for third starship launch

BOCA CHICA AND MEDFORD COLONIA: SpaceX plans on Thursday to attempt another launch of Starship, the world's most powerful rocket that is vital to NASA's plans for landing astronauts on the Moon later this decade — and Elon Musk's hopes of eventually colonizing Mars. Two previous attempts have ended in spectacular explosions, though that's not necessarily a bad thing: the company has adopted a rapid trial-and-error approach in order to accelerate development, and the strategy has brought success in the past. Blastoff from the company's launch site in southeast Texas can occur beginning at 7 a.m. local time (1200 GMT), after the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) gave its go-ahead on Wednesday. SpaceX will run a webcast on its website starting thirty minutes earlier. When the two stages of Starship are combined, the rocket stands 397 feet (121 meters) tall.—APP

## UK unveils new 'extremism' definition amid rise in hate crimes

LONDON : Britain has unveiled a new definition of extremism in response to an eruption of hate crimes against Jews and Muslims since the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel and the subsequent war on Gaza, although critics said the change risked infringing on freedom of speech. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned that Britain's multi-ethnic democracy was being deliberately undermined by both "Islamist" and far-right extremists, and more needed to be done to tackle the problem. Tell Mama, a group which monitors anti-Muslim incidents, said last month that anti-Muslim hate crimes had grown by 335 percent since the attacks. Antisemitic incidents also rose by 147 percent in 2023 to record levels, fuelled by Israel's war on Gaza, according to Community Security Trust, a Jewish safety watchdog. "Today's measures will ensure that government does not inadvertently provide a platform to those setting out to subvert democracy and deny other people's fundamental rights," said Michael Gove, the communities minister who heads the department that produced the new extremism definition. "This is the first in a series of measures to tackle extremism and protect our democracy," Gove said. The new definition states that extremism "is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance", that aims to destroy fundamental rights and freedoms; or undermine or replace the UK's liberal parliamentary democracy, or intentionally create an environment for others to achieve those results. Britain already bans groups which it says are involved in terrorism, and supporting or being a member of these organisations is a criminal offence. The Palestinian resistance group Hamas is among the 80 international organisations that are banned. Groups which will be identified as extremists following a "robust" assessment over the next few weeks will not be subject to any action under criminal laws and will still be permitted to hold demonstrations. However, the government will not provide them with any funding or any other form of engagement. Currently, no groups have been officially defined as extremist using the former definition which has been in place since 2011.—DNA

## Dutch far-right firebrand Wilders says won't be PM

Wilders posted on X that he wanted a "right-wing cabinet... less asylum and immigration. The Dutch come first"

## WEB DESK

The Hague: Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders said Wednesday that he would not be prime minister despite his stunning election win in November, due to a lack of support across the political spectrum. "I can only become Prime Minister if ALL parties in the coalition support it. That was not the case," Wilders said on X. "The love for my country and voters is bigger and more important than my own position." The announcement came on the eve of an eagerly awaited report on Dutch coalition talks, amid speculation of a breakthrough that could result in a technocratic government. The man overseeing the negotiations, Kim Putters, has said the bickering parties were ready to take the "next step" after two days of "good and intense" talks at a country estate. Wilders posted on X that he wanted a "right-wing

cabinet... less asylum and immigration. The Dutch come first." Party leaders have been tight-lipped during the process but public broadcaster NOS reported that the most likely outcome for Thursday's report was an "extra-parliamentary" or technocratic cabinet. It is unclear exactly what form this could take, but it is expected that four party leaders will serve as MPs. Parties would appoint the members of the cabinet but they could be drawn from "ordinary" party members or even from outside politics, according to media reports. Wilders stunned the Netherlands and Europe with a convincing victory in November elections that put him in pole position to lead coalition negotiations. Unlike Britain, France or the United States for example, the Netherlands has a very fractured political system that means no party is strong enough to govern on its own. The far-right leader's Freedom Party

(PVV) therefore started talks with the centre-right Liberal VVD party, the BBB farmers' party, and a new party, the New Social Contract (NSC). The NSC, led by anti-corruption champion Pieter Omtzigt, was the other new factor in the election, gaining 20 seats and making it indispensable in any coalition. Next referendum? But cracks began to show in the talks almost immediately, with sniping on social media and by the NSC in particular raising questions about the PVV's far-right manifesto. Among other things, the PVV manifesto calls for a ban on mosques, the Koran and Islamic headscarves. It also wants a binding referendum on a "Nexit" — the Netherlands leaving the European Union. In February, Omtzigt abruptly quit the coalition talks, plunging the process into chaos with the differences between his party and the PVV "too big" to bridge. At the time, the Algemeen Dagblad newspaper described

the talks as a "slow-motion disaster" with "poison, mutual sniping, gossiping". A new person, known in the Netherlands as an "informant", was appointed to oversee the talks and this appears to have unblocked the stalemate. The new informant, Putters, managed to get the four party leaders back to the negotiating table with talks reportedly moving towards a technocratic government. Time is ticking for the Netherlands to find a prime minister, as the man holding the fort, Mark Rutte, is widely expected to become the new NATO secretary general. Since the election, support for the PVV has only increased, surveys suggest, as voters voice frustration at the slow pace of talks. "Do not forget: I will become prime minister of the Netherlands one day. With the support of even more Dutch," Wilders posted. "If not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. Because the voices of millions of Dutch will be heard!"

## EU agrees \$5.5 billion package to fund arms for Ukraine

Belgium, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, said ambassadors from the bloc's 27 nations had agreed "in principle" on the plan to support arms supplies to Kyiv

## FOREIGN DESK

BRUSSELS : EU member states on Wednesday agreed to add five billion euros (\$5.5 billion) to a central fund to pay for weapons sent to Ukraine. The move provides a welcome boost for Kyiv as support from its other major backer, the United States, wavers and its outgunned forces struggle to hold back Russia. Belgium, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, said ambassadors from the bloc's 27 nations had agreed "in principle" on the plan to support arms supplies to Kyiv in 2024 with five billion euros. In the wake of Moscow's 2022 invasion, the European Union for the first time agreed to fund weapons deliveries to a country at war. Since then it has committed 6.1 billion euros from its central European Peace Facility mainly to reimburse part of the cost of arms sent by member states to Ukraine. The push to bolster the EU fund by an extra five billion eu-

ros was delayed for months amid wrangling from Germany and France. Berlin insisted its bilateral support for Ukraine should be offset against its contribution, and Paris demanded that only weapons produced in Europe should be reimbursed. Diplomats said Germany, the largest contributor to the fund, had struck a compromise with Brussels to offset a percentage of its own bilateral support against the fund. They said France was also satisfied by a commitment that countries would prioritize purchases from European defense firms, but could look outside the EU if certain ammunition or systems were not readily available. Overall since the Kremlin unleashed its war, Brussels says around 28 billion euros have been spent from member states and EU coffers to support Ukraine's military. Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmygal welcomed the additional money. "Thank you Josep Borrell for your unwavering support to Ukraine on the road to victory," he posted on X, referring to the EU's foreign af-

airs chief. The announcement of the latest funds for Ukraine comes as Kyiv's forces are under pressure along the front line in the face of ammunition shortages. The United States on Tuesday announced a fresh \$300 million weapons package for Ukraine, but a further \$60 billion in funding remains stalled by Republicans in Congress. Warnings have grown in Europe that a failure to keep up support for Kyiv could see it ultimately defeated and that an emboldened Kremlin might then attack other countries. The EU is pushing to bolster weapons and ammunition production by its defense industry, but two years into the war it is still struggling to ramp up output. The bloc is set to fall well short on a promise it made a year ago to supply Ukraine with a million artillery shells by this month. The Czech Republic has in the meantime spearheaded an 18-nation coalition to buy artillery shells from outside Europe and this month Prague said the first of 300,000 shells could reach Kyiv within weeks.

## French senate backs Macron's Ukraine strategy

PARIS : France's upper house of parliament voted Wednesday in favor of President Emmanuel Macron's strategy to support Ukraine. Senators held a debate and voting session on a bilateral security agreement signed between France and Ukraine on Feb. 16 and 293 members voted in support of the deal while 22 voted against it. Far-right senator Christopher Szcurek said during the debate that the agreement does not seem "vital" for his National Rally party. It even contains elements going against France's economic, agricultural and social interests, he added. Guillaume Gontard, president of the Ecologist group in the Senate, denounced the double standard conveyed by the agreement and called for holding a similar debate on the situation in Gaza, where more than 31,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks, with millions of them deliberately deprived of basic needs since the Israel-Hamas war began on Oct. 7 last year. Gontard expressed support for the agreement signed with Kyiv but criticized the French government for continuing to import energy resources from Russia and for the weakness of the European Union sanctions, which do not include gas and uranium imports. Left-wing senator Cecile Cukierman said the government was asking senators to endorse "warmonger propaganda." She also criticized Macron for his controversial remarks on "sending troops" to Ukraine and pointed out a lack of clarity. Cukierman stressed that some strategies must be excluded, particularly those of "escalation."—APP



## Briefs

### CEC Raja not seeking any overseas assignment

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has refuted the rumour suggesting that the chief election commissioner is being appointed as an ambassador in a foreign country. In a statement released on Thursday, the ECP dismissed the rumour as entirely baseless. The statement clarified that neither has the government extended any such offer to CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja nor does he have any intention to pursue such an opportunity. It further underscored that he intends to remain in his country even after completing his tenure and is not seeking any overseas assignment. The ECP warned against the dissemination of such rumors, stating that those responsible for creating or spreading them would face legal consequences if they fail to demonstrate responsibility. The statement underscored that the chief election commissioner is well-equipped to deal with such miscreants. The ECP emphasised the falsity of the rumour and warned against its propagation, signaling potential legal action against those involved in its spread.

### IHC orders to arrange meeting with Imran in jail

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court on Thursday ordered to form a mechanism for arranging meetings with the PTI founder in Adial Jail. Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir of the IHC heard a petition against the ban on meeting with PTI founder. Superintendent Adiala Jail Asad Waraich appearing before the court said 100 of applications for meeting with PTI founder were being filed with his office on daily basis. The superintendent showed his inability to manage the influx of visitors willing to meet the PTI founder. "I have 7,000 prisoners, the court allowed six people daily to visit PTI founder which is impossible for us," Waraich said. The judge talking to the superintendent jail said it seemed Waraich wanted to violate the court orders which might invoke contempt of court proceedings.

### Elahi to contest for by-poll on PP-32

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf President Chaudhry Parvez Elahi has decided to vie for by-election. Sources say former chief minister Parvez Elahi will contest from Punjab Assembly constituency PP-32, Gujrat, in the by-election. The Punjab Assembly seat was vacated by Chaudhry Salik Hussain after being sworn in as an MNA. The family has got Parvez Elahi's signature on the nomination papers to be submitted for the by-election. The stage for the by-elections on 12 constituencies of Punjab will be set on April 21.

# Hamas calls on Palestinians to break Israeli 'siege' on Al Aqsa

Israel's betting on striking the internal front in Gaza by committing more crimes against security personnel is a losing bet, Hamas said

NEWS DESK

GAZA: Hamas has called on Palestinians to rally up on Friday to break an Israeli "siege" on the flashpoint Al Aqsa Mosque in the occupied East Jerusalem. "We urge our people to urgently participate in defending Al-Aqsa Mosque against the Israeli aggression," the Palestinian group said in a statement on Thursday. It called on Palestinian residents of Jerusalem "to commit to only performing prayers in the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque." Israel has restricted access of Palestinian worshippers into the mosque amid growing tensions across the occupied West Bank due to Tel Aviv's ongoing offensive on Gaza following a Hamas attack, which has killed more than 31,300 people since last October. As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 160 on Thursday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes, shelter centers and aid convoys, and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, killing and injuring hundreds of citizens. According to media sources, the Israeli army bombed an aid distribution warehouse in al-Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, killing and injuring several people. 10 martyrs had been transported to the European Hospital since the early

## US expected to impose sanctions against WB outposts

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The Biden Administration is expected to impose new sanctions on two illegal outposts in the occupied West Bank that were used as a base for attacks by "extremist" Israeli settlers against Palestinians, Axios reported late on Wednesday, citing three US officials. The sanctions, expected to be imposed as soon as Thursday, are intended to send a message that the US is not only targeting individuals but also entities involved in providing logistical and financial support to attacks against Palestinians, Axios said citing one US official. New sanctions will also be imposed on three Israeli settlers, the US officials told Axios. The US State Department did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment on the Axios report. The Biden administration in February had imposed sanctions on four Israeli men it accused of being involved in settler violence in the West Bank, signalling growing US displeasure with the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The administration also said in February that Israel's expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank was inconsistent with international law, signalling a return to long-standing US policy on the issue that had been reversed by the previous administration of Donald Trump. Since the 1967 Middle East war, Israel has occupied the West Bank of the Jordan River, which Palestinians want as the core of an independent state. It has built Jewish settlements there that most countries deem illegal. Israel disputes this and cites historical and biblical ties to the land. Israel has stepped up raids in the West Bank since the Gaza war began in October. United Nations' records show at least 358 people in the Palestinian territory have been killed since Oct. 7, a quarter of them children. The death toll in Gaza has already passed 31,000 since Oct. 7, when Hamas fighters stormed into Israel, killing some 1,200 people by Israeli tallies.

morning hours, medical sources reported. Meanwhile, the Israeli army bombed a house belonging to al-Attar family in al-Bureij refugee camp and another house belonging to the family of Abu Saif in al-Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, killing and injuring many citizens. Three other civilians were injured in an Israeli airstrike on a house in as-Sika area to the east of Jabalia refugee, north of Gaza. Six civilians were martyred and dozens were injured when the Israeli army attacked them as they were waiting for aid delivery near al-Kuwait junction in Gaza City. In the morning, at least 22 martyrs had been evacuated from different areas of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza following Israeli attacks. Other casualties were reported in different areas of Gaza following Israeli aerial, artillery and shooting attacks last night and today. Meanwhile, "Israel's betting on striking the internal front in Gaza by committing more crimes against security personnel is a losing bet and will not succeed in creating a state of chaos and a security vacuum," the Hamas Movement said in a statement on Wednesday. The Movement decried the Israeli occupation army's assassination of the head of the Emergency Committee in Rafah, Nidal Sheikh Eid, and the deputy head of police operations, Mahmoud Abu Hasna, calling it a criminal act. "The Israeli assassination is aimed at disturbing the Palestinian internal front and creating a state of chaos that would prevent any attempt to provide relief to the displaced in Gaza," the statement added.

### Interior Minister Naqvi meets Sudi envoy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior & Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday arrived in diplomatic enclave to meet Nawaf Bin Saeed Ahmed Al Maliki, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. The ambassador congratulated Mohsin Naqvi on assuming the post of Minister for Interior. He expressed his best wishes for the minister for his new responsibilities. The ambassador appreciated the performance of Mohsin Naqvi for completing public projects in Punjab with exceptional speed and high quality in record time. Both sides discussed the matters of mutual interest in the meeting and resolved to promote bilateral relations and increasing cooperation in various fields. Mohsin Naqvi thanked the ambassador for his endless cooperation with the Punjab government and said that Saudi Arabia fully supported Pakistan in every test. He said that Pakistani nation took pride in relations with Saudi Arabia as it was the second home of Pakistanis. The minister said that Pakistan was proud of historic friendship with Saudi Arabia. He praised the ambassador's role for strengthening the relationship between two countries.

## Dr. Musadiq, French envoy discuss collaboration in energy sector



DNA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Energy, Dr. Musadiq Masood Malik and French Deputy Head of Mission in Pakistan, Guillaume Dabouis on Thursday discussed potential avenues of collaboration in Pakistan's energy sector. During the meeting, the Deputy Head Mission expressed France's keen interest in investing in various aspects of Pakistan's energy landscape, ranging from LNG cargo provision to energy

resource exploration, and projects aimed at enhancing energy trading, distribution, and transmission within the country, as per a news release. He also expressed interest in initiatives towards reducing line losses and revitalizing Pakistan's energy sector as a whole. The minister reiterated his commitment to dedicating significant time and effort towards addressing Pakistan's longstanding energy challenges comprehensively. Dr. Musadiq Masood Malik reaffirmed the Prime Minister's unwavering com-

mitment to further improving the performance of key sectors, including Energy, Finance, Commerce, Industries & Production, and Communication. He emphasized that agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, and the Prime Minister is committed to modernizing the agricultural sector by integrating AI and Machine Learning technologies. To achieve the vision of the Prime Minister, the entire cabinet is determined to bring about significant changes for Pakistan's long-term growth and prosperity.

## 'Putin did not threaten o use N. weapons'

DNA

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said on Thursday that comments on nuclear weapons that Russian President Vladimir Putin made in an interview with state media did not constitute a threat to use them and accused the US of deliberately taking the remarks out of context. Putin said in the interview published on Wednesday that Russia was technically ready for nuclear war and that if the US sent troops to Ukraine, it would be considered a significant escalation of the conflict. Commenting on Putin's words, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that Washington understood that the Russian leader was restating Moscow's nuclear doctrine, but accused Russia of deploying "reckless and irresponsible" nuclear rhetoric throughout the Ukraine conflict. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday that Putin had merely been answering a journalist's questions on the subject and restating the already well-known circumstances in which Russia would theoretically be forced to use nuclear weapons. Peskov also drew attention to the fact that Putin had said in the same interview that the idea of using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine had never crossed his mind. Asked about the White House comments, Peskov said: "This was deliberately taking something out of context. Putin made no threats about the use of nuclear weapons in this interview. The president was just talking about the reasons that could make the use of nuclear weapons inevitable. "These are the reasons that are stated in our relevant documents, which are well known throughout the world. Moreover, everyone in the West deliberately failed to notice his words that it had never occurred to him to use tactical nuclear weapons [in Ukraine], despite the various situations that have developed in the course of the fighting."

### TikTok ban: China attacks 'bandit logic'

DNA

BEIJING: China has attacked a bill going through Congress that could ultimately see TikTok banned in the US, accusing it of "unjustly" behaving like a "bandit". The bill passed by the House of Representatives would give TikTok's parent company six months to divest from the firm or face a ban on the app. It still faces an uphill battle in the Senate but President Joe Biden says he will sign it if it passes Congress. Beijing has vowed to take "necessary measures" to protect its interests. TikTok is owned by Chinese company ByteDance, a Beijing-based firm registered in the Cayman Islands, US lawmakers have expressed concern about the app, saying the data of Americans potentially in Chinese hands makes it a national security risk. TikTok's owners have rejected those accusations.

## UK MP warns of 'explosion' in unreported Islamophobia

LONDON: A senior politician has warned of an "explosion" of unreported Islamophobia in the UK. Shadow Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood said: "In my constituency, people report it to me but not the police. They kind of just put it down to the price you pay for being a Muslim in this country, (but) reporting is then what drives police policy, social policy and potential legislation. We all have a role to play." Mahmood was speaking at a panel discussion after a screening of the film "HIJABI" by award-winning documentary-maker Samir Mehanovic. The film, released to coincide with International Women's Day and International Day to Combat Islamophobia, documents the lives of five British women and their experiences with Islamophobia, including one forced to flee the UK after she was assaulted. Mahmood said: "Islamophobia has passed the dinner party test - it's seen as acceptable. This

is not just a Muslim problem, it should be addressed by all of society." The UK has witnessed a 365 percent surge in anti-Muslim hate incidents since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel. According to Tell Mama, an organization dedicated to fighting Islamophobia, 65 percent of all incidents target women, with those who wear a hijab or niqab especially vulnerable. Atfal Khan, an MP with the main opposition Labour Party, told the panel: "With Islamophobic hate crime having trebled since October and senior members of the Conservative Party spouting Islamophobia through the media in recent weeks, there has never been a more pressing time to listen to the testimonies of visibly Muslim women in Britain." MP Lee Anderson, former deputy chair of the Conservatives, was suspended by the party last month for refusing to apologize for claiming that Islamists had "got control" of London Mayor Sadiq Khan. A recent poll conducted by Hope Not Hate revealed that 58 percent of Conservative Party members believe Islam to be a threat to the British way of life. A government spokesperson told The Independent: "British Muslim women make a huge contribution to the United Kingdom and in strengthening the ties that bind our country together. "It is unacceptable for anyone to feel unsafe while practicing their religion and we take a zero-tolerance approach to anti-Muslim hatred. "We expect the police to fully investigate all hate crimes and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to make sure cowards who commit these abhorrent offences feel full force of the law." - Agencies

## ECP issues schedule for April 2 Senate polls

Electoral body set to hold polls for upper house after lawmakers' six-year term expired on March 11

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Thursday issued the schedule for upcoming Senate elections on 48 seats set to be held on April 2. As per the electoral body's schedule, returning officers (ROs) will issue a public notice today inviting prospective candidates to submit their nomination papers which will be followed by a scrutiny process, appeals. The development comes as the ECP, on Monday, announced holding the election for Senate seats which were vacated after the expiration of the six-year term of the incumbent senators on March 11. However, the elections would only be held on 48 seats as 4 reserved seats for the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) had been abolished after the 25th Consti-

tutional amendment. Members of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh and Punjab assemblies would vote to elect members against seven general seats, two women and two seats for technocrats, including Ulema. Punjab and Sindh assemblies would also vote for one seat each for non-Muslims. Meanwhile, members of the National Assembly will elect a senator for one general seat and one seat for technocrats, including Ulema from the federal capital, it added.

As per the ECP's schedule,

March 15 to 16 - Submission of nomination papers. March 17 - Publication of nominated candidates. March 19 - Last date for scrutiny of nomination papers. March 21 - Last date for filing of appeals against acceptance, rejection of nominations. March 25 - Last date for disposal of appeals by the tribunal. March 26 - Publication of revised

list of candidates. March 27 - Date for withdrawal of candidature. April 2 - Polling day. The polling for the Senate elections will be conducted in Islamabad's Parliament House, as well as all four provincial assemblies from 9am to 4pm. Last week, the electoral body appointed returning officers (ROs) in Islamabad and the four provinces for the conduct of the Senate election. ECP Director General Training Saeed Gul will be the Returning Officer (RO) in the federal capital, whereas provincial election commissioners Ajaz Anwar Chohan, Sharifullah, Shamsad Khan, and Muhammad Farid Afridi will be returning officers in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, respectively. The electoral body's schedule comes as by-polls for six Senate seats are underway for seats vacated from Sindh, Balochistan and Islamabad due to the prohibition of dual membership for lawmakers under Article 223 of the Constitution.

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