



Islamabad POST

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El-Sisi: Egypt is striving to secure a ceasefire in Gaza

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Paçaci points alarming rise of Islamophobia

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Alcaraz qualifies for Indian wells semi-final

Detailed News On Page-06



US envoy Blome meets PM

US expresses support for Pak economic reforms

Premier Shehbaz said that his government would focus on macro-economic reforms to stabilise the economy and attract foreign investment

MAHNOOR ANSAR / DNA

ISLAMABAD: As new government started efforts to get a new loan to end its economic woes, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome held a meeting in which they discussed the economic reforms through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) alongside other key issues. During the meeting, the premier expressed satisfaction on the present state of bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States, according to Prime Minister's Office (PMO). He emphasised the need to maintain the positive momentum by regular convening of existing dialogue mechanisms, focused on trade, investment, energy, health, defence, education, agriculture and climate change. Premier Shehbaz said that his government would focus on macro-economic reforms to stabilise the economy and attract foreign investment. In this regard, he also highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) that has been established to fast-track foreign investments in priority sectors in Pakistan. A number of issues of bilateral and regional significance were also discussed during the meeting, including the situation in Gaza and the Red Sea, developments in Afghanistan, as well as the case of Dr Aafia Siddiqui, which was raised forcefully by PM Shehbaz. While congratulating the prime minister on his re-election, Blome said that US considered Pakistan an important partner and hoped to work with the government to build stronger ties between the two countries, it concluded. Envoy Blome called on PM Shehbaz on Friday to discuss a broad range of bilateral issues, including partnering with the newly-formed government on regional security, Acting US Mission Spokesperson Thomas Montgomery said in a statement.

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Pakistan ready to transform ties with UAE: FM

The UAE is also Pakistan's largest trading partner in the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA) region

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar received a congratulatory telephone call from his United Arab Emirates (UAE) counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Friday. During the conversation, the two foreign ministers discussed the sustained momentum of multi-tiered cooperation between the two countries, FM Dar wrote on his X timeline. "I look forward to working closely with His Highness in transforming the bilateral relations with the UAE into a mutually beneficial economic partnership," he added. After the formation of new government, Ishaq Dar has been inducted into federal cabinet led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on March 11 in which the portfolio of the foreign affairs minister was given to the

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shabbaz Sharif, accompanied by key members of the Cabinet, visited the General Headquarters (GHQ) Rawalpindi today. The PM was received by Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, and was presented guard of honour. Floral wreath at Yadgar-e-Shuhada was laid by the Prime Minister, to pay tribute to the martyrs. - DNA

Air ambulance service soon in Punjab

Maryam directs to use her helicopter for emergency transfer of patients

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: "Our people lose their lives for not reaching hospitals in time, in case of an accident especially in the remote areas," said Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while chairing a meeting on the launch of Air Ambulance Project in Punjab. Madam Chief Minister recalled, "It was heartbreaking to see a heart attack patient helpless in Sargodha Hospital." She added, "It is essential to get the accident victims to the hospitals in time." Madam Chief Minister said, "Air ambulance service will be started in Punjab very soon." "Rescue 1122 service will also be started on the highways," she added.

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Prospects of Pak-India peace grim

The foreign office, in its assessment, gave its input to the government on foreign policy challenges including ties with India

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prospects of any rapprochement between Pakistan and India are grim but the situation can change after the Indian elections, according to the assessment of the foreign office shared with the new government. The government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has been getting briefings from different departments and ministries since it took charge. The foreign office, in its assessment, gave its

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Handful of miscreants

Ata Tarar slams protesters outside WB, IMF HQs

Slamming the PTI, Tarar said, They are demanding from the IMF to give Pakistan a grant after their leader is released"

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar on Friday slammed a "handful of miscreants" protesting outside the World Bank and International Monetary Fund headquarters in the United States. Addressing the media in Islamabad, the information minister said the country was not created for the agenda on which the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was acting. Slamming the PTI, Tarar said, "Their past behaviour was also anti-nationalist. They are demanding from the IMF to give Pakistan a grant after their leader is released." The minister claimed that the PTI would tell the nation that the US hatched a conspiracy to topple its

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PTI to adopt 'confrontation' as future strategy

I want to assure my workers that this is a long war. It's not short. We still have a long way to go," Qaiser said

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Asad Qaiser made it succinctly clear that his party would opt for "confrontation" in the face of the treatment meted out by government institutions. Speaking to the media

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No IAEA delegation visited Pakistan: FO

The posts questioned whether the government had closed a deal to hand over its nuclear arsenal

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Friday rubbished reports of the visit of a high-level delegation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the country as "fake news" and said there was no veracity to the matter. A day ago, a PTI official from its US chapter and several users, who appeared to be PTI supporters based on their past posts and account descriptions, shared a video clip from an Indian news segment by Zee News on a meeting between IAEA Director General (DG) Rafael Mariano Grossi and Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The posts questioned whether the government had closed a deal to hand over its nuclear arsenal. YouTuber Moeed Pirzada, who frequently posts pro-PTI content on his YouTube channel, also questioned the military's public relations wing about the agenda of the alleged visit and why it was not being reported in the media. The posts did not date the alleged meeting or the programme the clip was from. The clip claimed that a deal was struck between Pakistan and the IAEA to hand over nuclear weapons.

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Briefs

Pak 'rejects' IMF's demand for NFC Award revisit

Citing the shortage of federal funds, the IMF asked Islamabad to revisit the NFC Award with the provinces

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan government has rejected the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demand for National Finance Commission (NFC) Award revisit. Citing the shortage of federal funds, the IMF asked Islamabad to revisit the NFC Award with the provinces during the second review talks under the \$3 billion loan programme under SBA. The sources within the government said no any recommendation on the NFC Award against the constitution will not be approved.

Airports' outsourcing

Government extends bid deadline by 60 days

Talks with investors have yielded positive results

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Friday extended the deadline for bidding to outsource three main airports of the country by 60 days. According to details, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar chaired a meeting of the steering committee formed for outsourcing Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad airports.

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday.

- Editor

Haniyeh writes letter to PM

NA denounces Israeli aggression against Palestinians

In a letter addressed to PM Shehbaz, Ismail Haniyeh called upon Pakistan to take decisive action on political, diplomatic, and legal fronts

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Friday unanimously passed a unanimous resolution condemning the ongoing Israeli aggression against the people of Palestine. The resolution was moved by Pakistan Peoples Party Member of the National Assembly, Shazia Marri. She said that all political parties in the House had signed the resolution. The resolution recognized this day as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia and reiterated that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance, and acceptance. "The House recognizes this day as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. It reiterates that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and acceptance" the resolution said.

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Hamas proposes new six-week Gaza truce plan

Hamas would want this to lead to "a complete (Israeli) withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a permanent ceasefire

NEWS DESK

GAZA STRIP: Hamas has proposed a new six-week truce in Gaza and an exchange of several dozen Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners,

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'Allegations against Donald Lu are false'

Donald Lu's impending testimony on Pakistan elections not unusual, says US

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The US State Department has clarified that Assistant Secretary Donald Lu's upcoming appearance before a Congress panel is a routine testimony that aligns with the regular practice of US officials providing updates to Congress. The House Subcommittee on the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia will hold a hearing titled "Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan Relationship" on March 20. The hearing will also delve into the dynamics of US-Pakistan relations following the Feb 8 general elections. The PTI and its leader, Imran, claim that Lu threatened to destabilise the PTI government during a March 2022 meeting with then-Pakistan ambassador in Washington, Asad Majeed Khan. This matter is often raised during

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EU denies any communication with PTI on GSP+ status

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The European Union's mission in Islamabad has denied any communication with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) about the revocation of Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status of the country. The EU mission stated this after Information Minister Attaullah Tarar accused the PTI of approaching the EU for the withdrawal of Pakistan's GSP plus status over claims of lack of facilities for the former premier in Adiala jail. The GSP plus status is a special trade

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MARCH 2024

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IHC appoints amici curiae in Dr Aafia Siddiqui case

Court appointed two amici curiae, Ms. Zainab Janjua & Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, to assist the ministry of foreign affairs in legal communicating about this case

ADIL SHAHEN

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court (IHC) has appointed two amici curiae in the case of Dr Aafia Siddiqui to assist the court besides coordinating with the ministry of foreign affairs. A single bench of Islamabad High Court IHC comprising Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaque Khan here Friday heard the constitutional petition of Dr Fowzia Siddiqui. The court had asked the MoFA to provide the list of leading Pakistani lawyers living in the USA so as to seek help from them in this case. However, Additional Secretary (America) MoFA told the court that they have no such credible record about the leading Pakistani lawyers living in the USA. He said some people after getting the US nationality renounce the Pakistani nationality and hence they don't have a credible

record about the Pakistanis living in the USA. However, the court appointed two amici curiae, Ms. Zainab Janjua & Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, to assist the ministry of foreign affairs in legal communicating about this case with the US administration and the American lawyer of Aafia Siddiqui Clive Stafford Smith. The court order said that MOFA's responses are always undated & unnumbered despite clear orders in the last hearing. MOFA does not have any visibility on the diaspora of Pakistani lawyers in US law firms.

However, talking to media outside the court premises, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) leader former Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan said that we hope that the court would dole out justice in this case. He said due to struggle in courts; parliament, media and mass circles Dr Aafia Siddiqui would be hopefully backed home soon. He

said in the session of the Senate on March 7 he had raised this issue strongly and the foreign minister Ishaque Dar had asked him to tell the ways and means to further the case. He said that he has handed this letter to Dar and also handed him another letter for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in which mentioning four political options about the case of Dr Aafia. He said he has urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to take steps that Aafia Siddiqui be shifted from notorious FMC Carswell prison to some normal jail where her basic human rights could be respected. He appealed to the government to utilize legal and political options in this case so that Dr Aafia spends this Eid at her home along with her family. He also appealed to the nation to raise a strong voice for Dr Aafia Siddiqui so that her early release could be secured.

Chairman BoD KP Economic Zones visits Mohmand Zone

PESHAWAR: Chairman Board of Directors (BoD) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) and Secretary Industries, Commerce and Technical Education (IC&TE) Department Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah along with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Javed Iqbal Khattak, Chief Zone Management (CZM), and Chief Project Planning and Development (CPP&D), visited Mohmand Economic Zone on the other day. According to a press release issued here on Friday, during the visit, they examined the ongoing infrastructure development projects and also toured the operational industrial units within the zone. On this occasion, the Secretary Industries emphasized upon the significance of tree plantation in the Industrial Zone. Similarly, to kick start this initiative, he inaugurated the spring tree plantation drive in the Zone and personally planted a sapling in the zone office. It is merit to mention that KP-EZDMC is going to plant at least 14500 saplings in all the economic zones across the province. This plantation will take place in Peshawar, Jalozai, Hattar, Mohmand, Bannu, Ghazi and Gadoon Economic Zones. While inaugurating the company plantation drive, the Secretary Industries said that plantation is a major source of protection from the negative impacts of climate change and global warming. He stressed for plantation in the spring plantation drive. On this occasion, CEO Javed Khattak said that for the green environment in EZs a large plantation drive has been planned which will continue till 31 March of this month. —APP

Sec Agriculture South inaugurates early cotton sowing

MULTAN: Secretary Agriculture South Punjab, Saqib Ali Ateel, inaugurated the early cotton cultivation at Cotton Research Institute on Friday. Speaking on the opening ceremony, Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Saqib Ali Ateel said that the process of growing early cotton in Punjab will continue till March 31. He stated that early cotton would be cultivated on ten lac acres of land in Multan, Bahawalpur, DG Khan, Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Sargodha divisions this year. He advised the farmers to plant only certified seeds of approved triple-gene varieties of cotton for early cultivation. The seeds should be treated with the recommended poison or Moringa juice before sowing as the growth of the crop improves and is less effected by diseases or pests during the first one and a half months. Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Saqib Ali Ateel said that good preparation of the land was very important before the cotton cultivation, for which sub-soiler plow should plie to break the hard layer of the soil so that the water could be retained in the soil for a long time. The roots of the plant could go deep underground to obtain food. He said that the IPM model will be implemented in the field with full skill and hard work this year. —APP

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar chairs meeting on Tahaffuz Dargah

LAHORE: Inspector General Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that Tahaffuz Dargah is the first of its kind institution in South Asia for quality education and vocational training of transgender children, which will meet the educational needs of transgender children and will help them to transform into a better citizen of society. IGP Punjab said that the establishment of Tahaffuz Dargah is the right step for the bright future of transgender children, admission, appointments of hostel warden, principal and teachers should be completed at the earliest. IGP

Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed that Victim Support Officers of DPOs and District Protection Centers identify transgender children from their areas for education. Dr. Usman Anwar said that transgender children are being provided with a safe environment and opportunities to lead a better life through Tahaffuz Dargah. Dr. Usman Anwar said that Punjab Police is grateful for the support and cooperation of UK Curriculum & Accreditation Body, a British charitable organization, for establishing the Tahaffuz Dargah. IGP Punjab

Dr. Usman Anwar said that residence will also be provided to the children who are rejected by their families due to being transgender in the Tahaffuz Dargah. He expressed these views today while presiding over an important meeting on the professional affairs of Tahaffuz Dargah at the Central Police Office. In the meeting, the administrative issues of the protection school built for transgender children were discussed ASP Syeda Shaherbano Naqvi gave a briefing to IGP Punjab about the Tahaffuz Dargah project. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb meets Dr. Riina Kionka Ambassador of the European Union (EU) & discussed matters of mutual interest. — DNA

Anjum Aqeel Khan pushes for commercial centers' Upgradation

Anjum Aqeel said that Islamabad to be turned model city in collaboration with business community

MEHTAB PIRAZD

ISLAMABAD: Member National Assembly Anjum Aqeel Khan has said that upgradation of all the commercial centres is need of the hour and assured that for the development of the federal capital they will work in coordination with Islamabad Chambers of Commerce and Industry. He said this while addressing the oath taking ceremony of newly elected office bearers of the Traders Association of F/8 Markaz. President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari attended the ceremony as the Guest of Honour. The ceremony was largely attended by traders' community including Ajmal Baloch,



President All Pakistan Traders Association, Sardar Tariq Mahmood newly elected President Traders Welfare Association and Secretary

General Mahmood Khan. In his address Anjum Aqeel Khan said that in his success business community has played key role for which he

is grateful to it. He reiterated to pay back to the business community by addressing their vital issues concerning markets and federal capital



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif plants a sapling to launch the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign 2024.DNA

SBP to announce monetary policy on March 18

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) will announce monetary policy on Monday March 18, 2024. According to a statement issued here on Friday, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of SBP will meet on March 18 to decide about the Monetary Policy. The MPC will review the overall economic and financial situation, major indicators, data of different sectors, and major developments taken place since the announcement of the previous monetary policy. Later on, SBP will issue the Monetary Policy Statement through a press release on the same day. The MPC of the central bank, in its meeting held on January 29, 2024, decided to maintain the policy rate at 22 percent while emphasizing on continued tight monetary policy stance and fiscal consolidation. The MPC had anticipated continuity of the agriculture sector led to moderate economic recovery in fiscal year 2023-24 while momentum in the industrial sector was expected to pick up from the second half of FY24. The MPC expected that real GDP growth would remain in the range of 2 to 3 percent while average inflation might fall in the range of 23-25 percent by the end of the current financial year.

Online property transfer for overseas Pakistanis Soon: CM

Chief Minister directed to ensure adherence to timelines in the provision of these services

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: "Online property transfer service for overseas Pakistanis will offer them services like personalization, mutation, e-filing and registration," said Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while chairing a meeting on reforms in the Board of Revenue (BoR), and matters related to Punjab Land Record Authority (PLRA). She directed to take immediate steps to provide reliable online services to overseas Pakistanis, living in the US, UK, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Gulf and other countries. Madam Chief Minister directed to ensure adherence to timelines in the provision

of these services, especially in the transfer of property.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif also directed the authorities concerned to build parks and open air small gyms on government land. She also sought record of government land leases in Punjab. Earlier, it was briefed that Land Facilitation Centers, to provide people one stop solution for all land related issues, will start operation in 11 Divisional Headquarters by June 30. Madam Chief Minister directed the authorities concerned to expand the network of these Land Facilitation Centres to all districts of the Province. It was also briefed that the online land record

project will be launched in ten districts, where record of 5798 lands will be made available online till December, besides the land records of fifty cooperative housing societies. People will be able to access data of societies through digital transfer under PLRA. It was further briefed in the meeting that efforts are on to retrieve 2000 acres of government land from different housing societies. Moreover, 811044 hectares of government land will be used for corporate farming. Integration with FBR and e-registration of BOR will be also done soon. The business plan for the Management of State Land was also presented.

Inspector General of Police GB visits Safe City Islamabad

The IGP Gilgit Baltistan visited the command and control center, data hub unit, modern technology-equipped cameras, and the police operations center hall

ISLAMABAD: The Inspector General of Police (IGP) Gilgit Baltistan Afzal Mehmood Butt on Friday visited Safe City Islamabad. The Capital Police Officer (CPO) Safe City/Traffic gave an overview of the Safe City Islamabad operational duties to the IGP Gilgit Baltistan. At this occasion SSP Safe City was also present, a public relations officer said on Friday. The IGP Gilgit Baltistan visited the command and control center, data hub unit, modern technology-equipped cameras, and the police operations center

hall. He was briefed about the procedures and their effectiveness. Furthermore, the IGP Gilgit Baltistan was also briefed that Safe City Islamabad is playing a significant role in various sectors through modern techniques, including the Police Operations Center, Emergency Control Center, Data Hub, Dispatch Control Center, E-Challan System, and the "Pukar-15" helpline. Face recognition cameras have been installed at the entry and exit points of the city, which play an important role in identifying suspicious elements, the

officials informed IGP. The IGP Gilgit Baltistan was also apprised of the functionality and benefits of the Safe City cameras in the city and their crucial role in ensuring the safety of the city, preventing crimes, and safeguarding the lives and property of citizens. He acknowledged the modern technical system of the Islamabad Capital Police and its benefits. He expressed special gratitude to Islamabad Capital City Police Officer Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan and his team for this successful visit.

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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



Emergency

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



Enquiry

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



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Embracing Ramadan Traditions

CEO Aziz Boolani hosts Serena Hotels' annual Iftar dinner

Commenting on the iftar dinner Mr. Aziz Boolani said, "This iftar dinner encapsulates the essence of Ramadan—a time of reflection, generosity, and community

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Keeping with the tradition of hospitality and camaraderie, CEO Serena Hotels, Mr. Aziz Boolani, graciously hosted the Annual Iftar Dinner, welcoming esteemed guests including Ex Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Jalil Abbas Jilani, Foreign Secretary Mr. Syrus Qazi, Ex Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan, Finance Minister Muhammad Aungmye, government officials, Ambassadors, businessmen, heads of international agencies, High Commissioners and corporate executives. Commenting on the iftar dinner Mr. Aziz Boolani said, "This iftar dinner encapsulates the essence of Ramadan—a time of reflection, generosity, and community. It is a privilege to gather with our esteemed guests amidst the serene ambiance of Serena Hotels, where we celebrate not only our rich culinary heritage but also the values of compassion and unity. As we break bread together, let us renew our commitment to fostering understanding and harmony, not just within our walls but across borders and cultures. Ramadan Mubarak to all, and may this evening inspire us to continue spreading kindness and goodwill in all that we do." The evening at Serena Hotels celebrated the rich tapestry of flavors offered by its in-house restaurants. Guests enjoyed the cuisine from



Middle Eastern fusion food to Pakistani regional specialties, followed by a captivating exploration of Pan-Asian cuisine. They also experienced culinary



journey with the irresistible aromas and flavors of live barbecue stations, ensuring a memorable dining experience filled with gastronomic delights.

Consumer protection day observed

ISLAMABAD: A Consumer Right Activist Friday on World Consumer Rights Day expressed deep concern over the violation of consumer rights and stressed public awareness on the fundamental rights of all consumers as providing services according to rules will make people's life comfortable. Talking to PTV news channel Consumer Right Activist Nadeem Iqbal urged all traders and consumers to be aware of their rights, adding, consumers should now get awareness themselves so no one could cheat them as every consumer deserve quality products on reasonable prices. He explained that consumer rights mean that every person who buys various products, goods, and services has the right to have information on the quality, purity, price, and standard of those products. This day celebration was an opportunity to draw the attention of the people every year to the fundamental rights of all consumers, to respect their needs and to protect them. He said that the major concerns of consumers in Pakistan are non availability of genuine goods and services and public and private sector have failed to address these problems. There was lack of awareness among people about laws dealing with the protection of consumer rights, he added. He said I will expect that all the concerned institutions will faithfully perform the duties assigned to them side by side implementing the law to protect the rights of the people of the country. Every year, World Consumer Rights Day is observed with a theme that speaks to various issues that affect all consumers, he said. "Fair and Responsible AI For Consumers" is the theme for World Consumer Rights Day in 2024, he mentioned. Strict regulations along with the provision of penalties and punishments would act as a shield for the consumers against manipulative tactics, activist added.—APP

QAU announces PBM scholarships for MS, M.Phil students

ISLAMABAD: Quaid-i-Azam University(QAU) has announced Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Scholarships for Spring-2024 from the most deserving and needy BS, M.Phil students. According to the office of the Student's Financial Assistance QAU, the applications have been invited only from the BS 2nd, 4th, 6th & M.Phil.1st & 2nd semester regular students for the scholarships. Interested students are advised to obtain the Application Form from the Photocopy shops of Quaid-i-Azam Uni-

versity and submit it to the office of the student's financial assistance on or before 24th March 2024. According to PBM criteria, priority will be given to double orphans, single orphans, disabled, and poor students. The following attested documents must be attached to the application forms. PBM application form duly signed/stamped by the Chairman/Director and Hostel warden (in case of residents of University Hostels), copy of CNIC of the student & parents/guardian, copies of all

previous academic certificates, original fee challan Of Spring-2024 semester, while the students must keep photocopies of challan for their record. The documents will also be included, application on plain paper to Managing Director PBM (for the request of scholarship), complete DATA form Of the student's family, income certificate duly signed/verified by the Chairman Union Council, Chairman Zakat Committee of their local area, Numbardar, Tehsildar etc. It is worth mentioning here

that students with income exceeding Rs. 30,000/- and self-financed students are not eligible for this scholarship. All documents should be arranged as per above order. The documents further said that cutting and overwriting in any document/application will not be accepted. Incomplete applications will not be entertained. Giving wrong/incomplete information will disqualify the candidates for the scholarship. Meanwhile provision of fake information or any concealment of information gives the university authorities to take strict disciplinary action which may lead to striking off from the rolls of the university. The students are further advised, in their own interest, not to approach the PBM authorities regarding their stipends directly (without consulting this office).—APP

Weekly inflation up by 1.35 pc

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 1.35 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on March 14, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 327.21 points as compared to 322.86 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 32.89 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, increased by 0.91 per cent and went up to 320.06 points from last week's 317.18 points. The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517, Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, increased by 0.86 percent, 1.25 percent, 1.41 and 1.55 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 18 (35.29%) items increased, 10 (19.61%) items decreased and 23 (45.10%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included cooking oil 5 litre (1.08%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (1.07%), wheat flour (0.95%), sugar (0.64%), gur (0.57%), rice basmati broken (0.50%), pulse masoor (0.17%) and pulse mash (0.15%). The items that recorded an increase in their prices included tomatoes (21.96%), bananas (21.76%), eggs (7.15%), onions (5.57%), LPG (4.45%), garlic (3.62%), mutton (1.74%), beef (1.53%), chicken (1.40%), georgette (1.04%), shirting (1.01%) and long cloth (0.94%). On Year-on-Year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included cooking oil 5 litre (21.33%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (19.12%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (17.89%), mustard oil (15.26%), bananas (3.94%), diesel (1.88%) and cigarettes (0.05%). The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included gas charges for q1 (57.0%), tomatoes (185.68%), onions (90.27%), chillies powder (81.74%), garlic (60.13%), gents sponge chappal (58.05%), gents sandal (53.37%), wheat flour (51.91%), gur (41.32%), sugar (37.09%), salt powder (34.71%) and energy saver.—APP

Drum beating culture in Sehri

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The loud drum beater (Dhol-walas) culture in the wee hours heralding the beginning of Sehri time is still gripping citizen's attention in various cities of the country including Islamabad during the holy month of Ramadan. Drummers once again appearing in streets and still playing their role for waking residents in the time of modern technology, said a report aired by a private news channel. Although the drummers were not as popular they were in past, but in some cities this tradition was still being celebrated in the holy month, said a citizen of capital city. We are still beating the drum at Sehri and we feel very happy to wake the people up during Ramadan, said an old drum beater in Faisalabad. With advances in technology, there is less of a need for someone to wake people for Sheri however many people still want to enjoy this custom and believe that Ramadan festivity is not be completed without the traditional drum beaters, said another citizen of Gujranwala. A resident of Islamabad city commented that this Ramadan the sound of the drum has brings back memories of our childhood. Even today children are happy to hear the sound of the drum in the morning. "People of Peshawar city not only love old tradition of drumbeat wake up call but also get excited over the sound of drum beater in early morning", said a resident of KPK. "I dont perform this duty for the sake of cash but I do it only for the hereafter," said a drum beater.

ANF recovers 98 kg drugs in 13 operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 13 operations across the country managed to recover 98 kg drugs and arrested 16 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 9 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of two passengers going to Sharjah at Peshawar Airport. 2.9 kg Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Qatar at Islamabad Airport. In fourth operation, 1 kg Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Qatar at Sialkot Airport. 400 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel booked for Italy at the Lahore Courier Office. The spokesman informed that in two operations at Islamabad Airport, 116 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from two passengers going to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. 19 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Malaysia at Lahore Airport. In 9th operation, 164 grams weed was recovered from two parcels sent to Thailand from a courier office in Rawalpindi. 40.8 kg hashish was recovered from three suspects near Motorway Chowk Peshawar. The spokesman said that in 11th operation, 21.3 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near G.T Road Sohawa. 14 kg hashish was recovered from two women netted near M-1 Motorway Islamabad. 1.2 kg opium, 2 kg heroin and 3.3 kg hashish were recovered from two suspects arrested on Jaranwala Road, Faisalabad.—APP

ISLAMABAD ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY (IESCO)

IESCO TENDER NOTICE

IESCO seeks to invite sealed tenders for the year 2023-24 for supply of following vehicles on free delivery basis to IESCO Regional Stores Rawalpindi / Islamabad / Rajjar & Wah:

Tender #	Item Description	Unit	Qty (Nos.)
242	Crane Mounted Trucks 5-Ton	No.	05
243	Scissor Mounted Small Vehicles	No.	10

Date of Opening: Tender will be received on 02.04.2024 up to 10:30 am and will be opened at 11:00 am on the same date.

The tenders will be opened in the presence of authorized representatives (bearing authority letters) who care to attend O/O Chief Engineer (Material Management) IESCO Head Office G-7/4 Street No. 40, Islamabad.

Terms & Conditions

- Tender will be opened on "Single Stage Two envelop bidding procedure basis".
- Registered / Non-registered firm with DISCO/ NTDC/WAPDA can participate.
- The price should be firm and final on FCS basis and without involving any foreign exchange.
- The bid is valid for a period of 90 days and Tender must be accompanied with Bank Guarantee @ 2% in favour of Chief Executive Officer IESCO Islamabad of the offered quantity valid for 120 days (One hundred twenty days) in the form of Bank Guarantee/Call Deposit issued by any schedule Bank of Pakistan (having rating A+ or above).
- Tender forms including terms and conditions can be obtained from the office of the undersigned against non-refundable amount of Rs.3,000/- on any working day during office hours till a day earlier from the date of opening of tenders.
- In case of holiday announced by the Govt. of Pakistan, strike in IESCO or any other reasons whatsoever due to which this office remains closed on the above scheduled tender opening date, the tender will be opened on next working day at same time and place/venue.
- Written application on company's letter head along with copies of registration with sales tax department (STRN), NTN # etc. should be produced at the time of issuance of tender documents.
- The bid should be for full quantity of tender and bid for less quantity of tender will not be accepted.
- No tender will be issued on the date of opening of tenders.
- IESCO reserves its rights to reject all bids prior to the acceptance of bid.

Chief Engineer (MM)
IESCO Islamabad PID(1)5518/23

پجلی چوری دینی اور اخلاقی جرم ہے۔ پجلی چوری کی اطلاع 118 پر دیں
پجلی کی ریل وقت پر آ کر، ڈھاری کا ٹیوٹ دیں

Briefs

Carbon credits can reduce carbon emissions: Saqib Rafiq

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Carbon credits can reduce carbon emissions in industries and cities and can also help prevent dangerous climate change through effective mechanisms and regulation. A comprehensive carbon credit policy is essential to tackle climate change and rid cities of waste and litter. Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce President and Chairman Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) Saqib Rafiq said in a statement, that according to data, 50 million tons of solid waste is generated in Pakistan, and it increases by 2.4% every year. More than three hundred and fifty thousand (3,50,000) tons of waste is dumped annually from Rawalpindi city alone. He suggested that there is a need to establish an institution or authority at the national and provincial levels for the formation of the carbon credit market and its trading in Pakistan.

Saqib Rafiq said that carbon credits are obtained by protecting forests and removing the causes of environmental pollution. High carbon emitting countries invest in other countries for plantations and environmental protection. Saqib Rafiq further informed that credits are given according to the specific method of producing oxygen by controlling carbon emissions. Countries that emit carbon pay other countries to get credits. Carbon credits are sold and bought through the volunteer carbon market. RCCI President Saqib Rafiq said that carbon credit refers to the permission that a business gets to emit the amount of carbon dioxide.

Pakistan Railways breaks record with longest freight train run

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has shattered records with its latest freight train journey, marking a significant milestone in the nation's transportation sector. The historic freight train, spanning an impressive length of over 2,500 feet and comprising a whopping fifty coaches, embarked on its journey propelled by the formidable GE U40 locomotive engine, said Railway spokesperson on Friday. He said that this monumental train journey commenced from Karachi, the bustling metropolis of Pakistan, carrying a staggering load of over 3,000 tons of cargo destined for Kotri. This monumental initiative not only signifies a breakthrough for Pakistan Railways but also promises substantial benefits for the nation, he added. By transferring such massive quantities of cargo via rail, the spokesperson said the endeavor was poised to alleviate the burden on road traffic significantly, easing congestion and enhancing transportation efficiency across the country. Moreover, he said the shift towards rail transport for freight purposes aligns with global efforts towards environmental preservation, as it effectively reduces pollution and carbon emissions associated with traditional road transport methods. Remarkably, despite its colossal size, he said the freight train achieved remarkable speeds, attaining a top speed of 60 km/h.—APP

Five more MNAs take oath

ISLAMABAD: Five more Members of the National Assembly elected on reserved seats took the oath on Friday. Speaker of the National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, administered the oath to the women elected on reserved seats. MNAs who took the oath included Naima Kanwal, Asma Arbab Alamgir, Shaheen Shah, Ghazala Anjum and Naeema Kishwer Khan.—APP

Pak-Iran FTA will be finalised soon: Ambassador Moghaddam

The Ambassador said that after the FTA and bilateral agreements between the two governments for the promotion of mutual trade, there is a strong possibility of doubling the mutual trade between Pakistan and Iran to reach \$5 billion in the next few years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghaddam on Thursday said that there is a strong possibility that the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be finalized in the upcoming visit of the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi to Pakistan, which is likely to increase the mutual trade between the two countries.

From the upcoming visit of the Iranian president to Pakistan, there will be several bilateral economic and trade agreements between the two countries, which will further strengthen the mutual economic and trade relations and promote the bilateral business between the two countries, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghaddam said this in visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the invitation of President ICCL, Mr. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawri here in Chamber house. The Iranian ambassador said that the current bilateral trade volume between Pakistan and Iran is \$2.5 billion, which has increased by 11 percent in the last 11 months. The Ambassador said that after the FTA and bilateral agreements between the two governments for the promotion of mutual trade, there is a strong possibility of doubling the mutual trade between Pakistan and Iran to reach \$5 billion in the next few years. He said that the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline is a huge facility for the people of Pakistan on behalf of the government of Iran, which will benefit both the domestic and industrial sectors of Pakistan. He said that Iran is serious about resolving Pakistan's energy



problems and that is why Iran completed the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project in 2009 to the border of Pakistan, which cost Iran \$1 billion, so that Pakistan could meet its energy needs. It could be done, but it is still waiting for its completion from the Pakistan side. Iranian Envoy said that Iran is already trading with Turkey, Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan in the sector of energy and gas and Pakistan can also adopt the procedure adopted with these countries. Dr. Reza Amiri said that the banking channel in Pakistan and Iran is a big issue, but Iran has a banking channel with Turkey, Bahrain and Iraq, Pakistan can follow this procedure. He said that Pakistan and Iran need to have strong air, maritime and sea links, which will strengthen

the economic relations between the two countries and Pakistan will also be connected to regional and global trade. The Ambassador emphasized on the closeness of maritime links between the two countries, especially Karachi and Gwadar and Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports and said that Gwadar and Chabahar should be declared as sister ports. He said that this era is the era of economic and trade links and it will take time for Pakistan and Iran to connect with regional and global trade through these ports. He said that Pakistan-China Trade Corridor and BRI projects also have strong prospects for economic and trade integration between Pakistan and Iran, which both countries need to work on. He said that the world is currently

being connected to each other through various economic and trade corridors and Pakistan and Iran can make their place in the global trade market by connecting to the North-South and East-West trade corridors. He said that with this both countries can be connected not only to regional trade, especially Central Asia, but also connect to European markets. He said that Pakistan and Iran can fulfill 70 percent of each other's needs by engaging in mutual trade, just as Iran imports halal meat, Pakistan can do a lot of work in Iran in this sector. The Iranian ambassador said that Iran is issuing electronic visas to Pakistan businessmen while making visas easier. He said that the relations between the business community of Pakistan and Iran, especially Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Tehran Chamber of Commerce and Industry, should be further improved. Meanwhile addressing to the forum, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawri said that Pakistan and Iran's trade volume exceeds \$2.5 billion annually, with Pakistan selling rice and other products to its neighbor, while people living in the border area of Balochistan save money by buying Iranian food and goods from traders across the border. He said that as part of a five-year trade cooperation plan for 2023-2028, Pakistan and Iran aim to increase annual trade volume between the two countries to \$5 billion. President ICCL said that the two countries are also members of various regional and international fora such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

COMSTECH and Ida Rieu Schools Launch Training Program

DNA

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH and Ida Rieu Schools launched special education teachers training program for OIC countries at COMSTECH Auditorium on Thursday.

Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General COMSTECH extended a very warm welcome to the team of Ida Rieu Schools. He thanked Ms. Nadira Panjwani, leading philanthropist and President of Ida Rieu Schools for joining hands with COMSTECH to serve the special education community across the OIC region. Prof. Choudhary gave a comprehensive presentation on the aims, objectives, programs and the scope of COMSTECH. He said that this new joint training program will serve the special education community in the 57 OIC states. Prof. Choudhary said that Ida Rieu Schools, established in 1921, are

among the most prominent institutions in the special education of children with disabilities. This century old institution is now achieving new heights under the able, generous and passionate leadership of Nadira Panjwani sahiba, the President. We are grateful to Nadira Panjwani sahiba for her vision which made this joint program possible. The chief guest of the launching ceremony, Ms. Nadira Panjwani, H.L., S.L., President Ida Rieu Schools said that this joint program will train the special education teachers in Muslim countries. She appreciated the Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary for bringing the idea of starting joint training program to serve the community of special education teachers across OIC states. Ms. Panjwani said that Ida Rieu Schools and colleges are run by the Ida Rieu Welfare Association (IRWA). She informed that IRWA came into ex-

istence in 1922 in Karachi with the vision of imparting education and training to the blind and deaf children to make them useful citizens of community. She said that the mission is to nurture the intellectual and social skills of special children and enable them to cope with all challenges through education and training. Talking about the establishment of IRWA, she informed that Lady Ida Augusta Rieu lived in Sindh until her death on 1st May, 1921. During her stay in Karachi and in Sindh, she devoted her life to various activities for social welfare. She was the moving spirit in the Ladies Associations, Maternity Homes, Children's Nurseries, Widow's Homes and Industrial Work for the Crippled. She informed that a poor welfare association was her last scheme on which she was working before she passed away. She conceived the idea of amalgamating a school for Blind and Crip-

pled with the poor asylum which did useful work in Karachi since 1872. When she passed away a desire for suitable memorial was spontaneously expressed from all quarters in Sindh and it was decided to perpetuate her name by carrying out her scheme of a school for the blind and crippled combined with an industrial home for the poor. Thus the 'Ida Rieu Poor Welfare Association' came into existence on 25th November, 1921 in Karachi with a view of imparting education and training to the blind, deaf and mute children to make them useful citizens of community. The board member of Ida Rieu Schools, Ms. Rubica Raza gave a comprehensive presentation on the establishment, aims, objectives, activities of the Ida Rieu Schools. The ceremony was attended by the Ambassadors and the diplomats of Palestine, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Confucius Institute hosts a vibrant cultural event, Qissah

ISLAMABAD: The Confucius Institute at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (CIUAF), hosted a vibrant and engaging cultural event, Qissah - The Storyteller's Bazaar 2024. This unique festival brings together 150 students, faculty, and cultural enthusiasts from 8 universities across the country to celebrate and share stories from diverse cultures, with a special focus on Chinese traditions, Gwadar Pro reported. The participants expressed their profound understanding of Chinese culture around the theme of "Chinatown" through operas, dances, pantomime performances, traditional dress shows, and Tai Chi demonstrations. These performances not only highlighted China's rich cultural heritage, but also fostered a deeper appreciation of it among Pakistani audiences. Dr. Shoukat Ali, Senior Tutor/ Head of Co-curricular at UAF, delivered a welcoming speech, emphasizing the importance of cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and Pakistan. Zhou Changming, Chinese director of the Confucius Institute, also addressed the audience, praising the participants for their dedication and enthusiasm in promoting cross-cultural exchanges. A highlight of the festival was the storytelling sessions, where participants shared folk tales, legends and historical narratives. These stories, told through lively narratives and engaging performances, ranged from traditional folktales to modern interpretations of cultural themes, were told with passion and enthusiasm, reflecting the diverse cultural influences present in both Pakistan and China. The judges of the event were renowned Pakistani television writer Misbah Nosheen and actor Mehroz Gul. Their expertise and insight into the arts ensured a fair and objective evaluation of the performances. Judges praised the participants for their creativity and ability to bring these stories to life. They also stressed the importance of cross-cultural exchanges, noting that such events promote understanding and respect among different cultures and encouraged more similar events in the future. The eagerly awaited awards ceremony of the prestigious event took place at the venue, recognizing excellence in various categories including Best Director, Best Actor and Actress, Best Play, Best Dancer, Best Screenplay and Best Stage Design.—DNA

China's Meteorological satellite takes over Fengyun-4A missions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development, Fengyun-4B (FY-4B), one of China's meteorological satellites, has succeeded Fengyun-4A (FY-4A) and resumed its operations on March 5 after almost a month of drift and adjustment, China Economic Net (CEN) reported, quoting China Meteorological Administration (CMA). FY-4B started drifting from 133 degrees east longitude on February 1, and arrived at the geostationary orbit at 105 degrees east longitude on February 19. The scope monitored by FY-4B has moved further westward after its orbit was adjusted, benefiting more BRI countries. Zheng Xudong, an official with National Satellite Meteorological Centre, told the reporter that this adjustment was made as per the continuity of observations at the new orbital position. With FY-4B's superior technical capabilities, it is set to play a pivotal role in disaster weather monitoring and early warning, enhancing BRI countries' resilience against natural calamities. As FY-4B steps into its new role, FY-4A has begun its drift from 105 degrees east longitude to 86.5 degrees east. In the coming days, it will continue to serve in a reduced capacity, maximizing its remaining operational potential to support ongoing observations and services. Up to now, China's meteorological satellites have provided weather services to 129 countries and regions around the world.—APP

CEO Telenor calls on Minister of State for IT

ISLAMABAD: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Telenor Khurram Ashfaq on Friday called on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja and discussed issues regarding 5G rollout, innovation and youth development. The CEO congratulated the minister for assuming the charge, said a news release issued here. Shaza Fatima Khawaja said that youth were the asset of the country, adding it was vital to equip youth with digital skills. The government was committed for the development of youth, she added. Meanwhile, Director General Special Communication Organization (DCO) Major General Umar Ahmad Shah called on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja.—APP

74 Pakistani companies participated in LEAP

ISLAMABAD: As many as 74 Pakistani companies, with 800 delegates, participated in the LEAP 2014 event held in Riyadh. The Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), in collaboration with P@SHA, represented the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication of Pakistan (MoITT) at LEAP, said a news release received here on Friday. The Pakistan Pavilion, occupying 162 sqm, was inaugurated by PSEB CEO Ms. Aisha Hamera Moriani, P@SHA Chairman, and Ahmed Farooq, Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The forum, attended by various Saudi institution officials, focused on SDAIA's upcoming department, SCAL, and their new accelerator, GAIA. It underscored the importance of Pakistan-Saudi Arabia collaboration and facilitated B2B engagements for potential business opportunities. Several key agreements were inked, including a P@SHA-Bahrain MOU, an equity partnership by SuperNova Solutions, a data management transformation MoU between TenX and Jazz, and an MEA region services MoU between Abacus and ELM. Global participants had productive interactions with 34 Pakistani startups. The event also included discussions with MCIT and ELM about the LEAP 2025 pavilion location, training programs, student exchange programs, and potential joint ventures. SG DCO Her Excellency Ms. Deemah Al-Yahya deliberated on plans for ITCN Lahore, digital FDI, and B2B engagements. MOUs were signed by Abacus with Alif Technologies and Objects with Diamond Professional. On LEAP's final day, Mango Analytics, Exd, and DevGate held important meetings. The Director of BD&P - PSEB visited various country pavilions for collaboration and extended invitations for ITCN 2024 in Lahore. This series of events marked a significant stride towards strengthening tech ties between Pakistan and other countries, fostering B2B opportunities, and paving the way for future collaborations and mutual growth.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Dr. Maen KHREASAT Ambassador of Jordan received Mohammad Yahaya, the new UN Resident Coordinator, and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan. They had an interesting discussion on the way forward in collaboration with member states.—DNA



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Reason behind US 'port' in Gaza

RECENTLY, it was announced by US President Joe Biden that American forces would take the initiative to build a "temporary" port in the Gaza Strip. According to the White House, this port will serve the role of delivering humanitarian aid to the besieged and bombed population of the Strip, of which an estimated 30,000 or so have died amid "Israel's" relentless invasion of it. While of course, the purpose of such a port distracts from the reality that "Tel Aviv" has always subjected the region to a naval blockade, one should not buy the premise that America would go as far as building such infrastructure purely out of benevolence. Rather, there is another agenda at play. In offering "Israel" unconditional backing to effectively invade and occupy the entirety of the Gaza Strip, despite what officials may say, the United States has long eyed an opportunity to give "Tel Aviv" control over offshore natural gas resources, which, by legal rights, belong to the Palestinian state. This area, known as "The Gaza Marine," is home to 1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas resources. Although discovered in 2000, "Israel" has never permitted the Palestinian Authority to have access to it, and likewise, the Gaza Strip has long been under an effective maritime and economic blockade, which has prevented it from being developed outside of Israeli control. Certain world events in the past two years have considerably amplified the strategic value of natural gas. Namely, the war in Ukraine has led Western countries to scramble for alternative energy resources to reduce dependence on Moscow, particularly those controlled by "friendly" countries who compliment the strategic goals of the United States. To this end, broader political interest in the Gaza Marine increased, and in June 2023, "Israel's" government decided to "approve" the notion of developing it in cooperation with Palestinian authorities, which according to Hamas also gave the Gaza Strip "rights to it." However, the outbreak of the Israeli war on Gaza has clearly led to a change of plan. On this happening, Benjamin Netanyahu made the political decision to invade with the goal of completely occupying the Gaza Strip, calling bluff on western red lines and effectively affirming political control of it thereafter, which is coded as "being under Israel's full security control." This means, by extension, that "Israel" will also gain full control over the Strip's economy and resources, and therefore not have to treat the system set up in the Strip as a co-party in any negotiations to utilize its natural gas resources accordingly. After all, the Palestinian authority in the West Bank is set in a landlocked territory away from the sea and has no leverage to control the natural gas resources which are legally their own. Given this, it seems suspicious that the United States should determine to build a "temporary humanitarian" port in Gaza this time. The goal of course is not to deliver humanitarian aid, after all, who builds an entire port just for a short-term effort? Moreover, does such a pledge of maritime aid really make that much of a difference when the US continues to greenlight and enable indiscriminate Israeli bombing of the territory? Rather, the real long-term aim is to help strategically prepare the Strip for what they already envision to be the next stage of full Israeli military occupation, a premise which the Biden administration and others have claimed to oppose but never for that matter done anything about.

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Philippines provocations at South China Sea

CHINA urges the Philippines not to further walk down the wrong path, and to immediately stop any provocative actions that may escalate the disputes or complicate the situation at the South China Sea, Zhang Xiaogang, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, said on Friday, also suggesting some non-regional countries to stop supporting the provocative and risky acts of the Philippines and refrain from being a disruptor in the South China Sea. China has indisputable sovereignty over Nansha Qundao and the adjacent waters, including Ren'ai Jiao. China's resolution and will is unwavering in safeguarding our legitimate rights and interests, Zhang said. The Chinese side will take all necessary measures to resolutely defend our sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests and firmly safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea, said the spokesperson. On March 5, without permission from the Chinese government, Philippine vessels intruded into the adjacent waters of Ren'ai Jiao of China's Nansha Qundao, in an attempt to transport supplies, including construction materials, to the Philippine warship illegally grounded at Ren'ai Jiao, and deliberately collided with China Coast Guard vessels. In response to the provocation, China Coast Guard took necessary regulatory measures in accordance with the law. The actions taken at the scene were professional, restrained, justified and lawful, said Zhang, noting that China strongly deplores and firmly opposes the provocations and infringements made by the Philippine side. After the incident, the Chinese side released relevant videos in the first place showing the crystal clear facts to the public. It is the Philippine side that broke the law and infringed upon China's rights, said Zhang. Nansha Qundao, including Ren'ai Jiao, is beyond the limits of Philippine territory. The Philippine side has yet to tow away the warship illegally grounded at Ren'ai Jiao. Instead, it even attempted to repair and reinforce the warship for permanent occupation of Ren'ai Jiao. Such illegal and void acts severely violate China's sovereignty and are doomed to fail, according to the spokesperson. It is the Philippine side that broke its promises and took wanton acts; and it is the Philippine side that resorted to deception, said Zhang. It needs to be pointed out that some big powers outside the region, in disregard of the facts, try to back up the Philippines, stir up trouble and create turmoil in the region. Such moves of using the Philippines as a pawn for selfish gains will find no support, as they go against the common aspiration of regional countries for peace and development, the spokesperson said.

US engagement with Ukraine

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



There's also a need for better border policies. Many Americans don't understand why the U.S. military doesn't protect the country's borders.

Immigration policy is closely tied to foreign policy and the U.S. economy. A majority of Americans think the U.S. is doing a poor job managing its borders, and there's a surge in illegal border crossings. The military is restricted by the Posse Comitatus Act from acting as a domestic police force, but political leaders should invest in border security. This includes more funding for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency...

AS the conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues, people are getting tired of emotional appeals about Ukrainian bravery and Russian actions. Republicans have valid concerns: they want to cut government spending, make sure U.S. aid to Ukraine isn't misused by corrupt officials, and figure out where helping Ukraine fits in U.S. priorities. One thing most Americans agree on is the importance of a strong U.S. military. However, President Biden is providing enough aid for Ukraine to keep fighting but not enough to win. There's a strong argument from conservatives to increase U.S. assistance to Ukraine. For a relatively small cost, Americans can support Ukraine in a war that NATO was worried about. It's important to note that a significant portion of U.S. aid to Ukraine goes to American companies that produce weapons for Kyiv. Engaging with Ukraine is also revealing weaknesses in the U.S. defense system. To fund defense adequately, changes to entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare are necessary. Both Democrats and Republicans need to reconsider their stance on entitlement reform, as these programs make up a large portion of federal spending. If not addressed, the cost of entitlements will limit spending on defense and other domestic programs. There's also a need for better border policies. Many Americans don't understand why the U.S. military doesn't protect the country's borders. Immigration policy is closely tied to foreign policy and the U.S. economy. A majority of Americans think the U.S. is doing a poor job managing its borders, and there's a surge in illegal border crossings. The military is restricted by the Posse Comitatus Act from acting as a domestic police force, but political leaders should invest in border security. This includes more funding for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency, as well as technology to track migrant movements. Cooperation with Mexico and addressing the root causes of migration are also crucial. Failure to regulate immigration properly hinders the U.S. from maximizing its geopolitical opportunities, especially in North American cooperation. Clearer immigration policies could lead to stronger collaboration with neighboring countries, benefiting the U.S. economy. However, until Americans are

confident in border control, they may be hesitant to support these cooperation opportunities. According to experts at the Brennan Center, many Americans are confused about why the U.S. military doesn't protect the country's borders. Republicans could improve their policies on this issue. Immigration is crucial for foreign policy and the U.S. economy. A survey in January 2021 by Pew Research Institute showed that 68% of Americans believe the U.S. is not managing its borders well. Indeed, since January 2020, about 200,000 people try to enter the U.S. illegally every month through the Mexican border, the highest in 20 years. Contrary to what the media says, most of these people are adults, not kids. The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act stops the military from acting like a police force within the U.S. Generals, who are already busy, don't want to protect the borders, fearing it might harm people's respect for the military. To get more support for U.S. activities abroad, leaders need to show they can put more effort and resources into border security. A survey in January 2023 found that most Americans want to give more money to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency. It's not just about money and more people. Over 60% of recent migrants aren't from Mexico or Central America but start their journey in places like Colombia, Cuba, Peru, and Venezuela. The U.S. should invest in surveillance and technology to track migrants in Central America, speed up asylum claims in new immigration courts, work more with Mexico to stop migrants passing through, and engage with migrants' home countries to solve problems and help those who don't meet U.S. immigration rules return. Not handling immigration properly makes the U.S. miss its biggest opportunity for North American cooperation. Politicians should worry more about Mexico becoming unsafe and find creative ways to make Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. work together in energy, labor, and manufacturing. With better immigration policies, we can relocate supply chains to Mexico, strengthen energy grids in California and Texas by trading energy with Canada and Mexico, and create opportunities for neighbors to prosper, boosting the U.S. economy. But until Americans trust that the U.S. controls its borders, they may not support

these cooperation opportunities.

The world that the United States and its friends made after World War II made America safer and richer. But we must remember that if the U.S. doesn't make sure this global order is followed, someone else will, probably China. If China takes charge, the world could become dangerous. China, along with its authoritarian allies like Russia and Iran, might gather enough military and economic power to force a repressive vision on the world. To make things better, the U.S. should rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership, make and approve other trade agreements, spend more on defense while fixing entitlements and reducing national debt, secure the U.S.-Mexican border, and help countries fighting for their freedom. These are big goals. Fred Kagan, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, says people don't want to die for the international order because it's too vague. But convincing voters to support a foreign policy that helps other countries might not be as hard as politicians think. They should focus on concrete arguments based on U.S. national interest. The Biden administration and some Republican leaders are making misleading appeals that say internationalism makes the U.S. weaker or that caring about the U.S. national interest means ignoring the world. This is not true. The choices the U.S. makes internationally affect its own well-being. Right now, leaders are making confusing foreign policy decisions that make the country less safe and less prosperous, and fixing them will be difficult later on. The U.S. is divided politically, and many people are confused and disappointed. A Pew poll from June-July 2023 found that only 16% of Americans trust the federal government, the lowest in 70 years. Only 10% feel hopeful about politics. In an August Wall Street Journal poll, 93% of likely Republican voters thought the U.S. is headed in the wrong direction. These are not good results, but they also present an opportunity for good policies because people are clearly unhappy. The solution is not to adopt policies that give up on trade, weaken the military, leave the U.S.-Mexican border in chaos, and stop helping deserving allies. Americans still want the U.S. to be a leader in the world for the sake of the country and their own safety and prosperity. U.S. leaders need to prove they know how to do it.

A new era of Gulf-Central Asian cooperation

Arman Shakkaliyev

Additionally, the success of this cooperation hinges on an inherent appetite for global engagement and a coveted status as global conveners.

Functioning as bridges between the Global South and Global North, occasions like the GCC and C5 leaders' summit and the Kazakh-Saudi

Intergovernmental Joint Committee have enabled policymakers, including myself, to share ideas and uncover new areas of exchange. Later this year, Kazakhstan will provide yet another platform for high-level dialogue in the form of the Astana International Forum. Motivated by a fundamental belief in the power of diplomacy...

Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev last month visited Doha for two days of extensive discussions with the Qatari leadership. During the visit, President Tokayev highlighted Kazakhstan's readiness to increase exports to Qatar across 60 non-resource commodity items totaling \$250 million and proposed increasing mutual trade to \$500 million in the near future. This visit, which marked 30 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries, reflected Kazakhstan's commitment to expanding its relationship with the Gulf states, as well as its evolving position as an active and productive power on the world stage. Against a backdrop of global geopolitical tensions and economic challenges, the partnerships between these regions stand as beacons of resilience and opportunity, showcasing the potential for shared prosperity in a world undergoing transformative changes. In my role as minister of trade and integration, I have made it my mission to ensure that Kazakhstan embraces this responsibility and maintains its status as a competitive global partner for diplomacy, trade and foreign investment. Our country has become a crucial transport and logistics hub, creating new trade routes and collaborating with logistics companies. We plan to systematically increase the cargo flow through the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route and bring it to 500,000 containers annually by 2030. Kazakhstan has also committed itself to addressing global food shortages through agro-industrial projects. In this regard, we can effectively use the potential of Islamic Organization for Food Security. In pursuit of such goals, my office has worked closely with counterparts from countries and companies around the world, aiming to form partnerships that can foster growth and progress for all parties involved. Throughout these experiences, Kazakhstan has always viewed the Gulf region as a particularly fertile environment for shared prosperity and economic development. Today, we find ourselves on the cusp of unprecedented levels of collaboration between Kazakhstan and several Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. We have previously emphasized Astana's commitment to boosting bilateral trade with the UAE, focusing on agriculture, and aiming to achieve \$1 billion in annual bilateral trade. We have established a strong foundation to achieve this goal. In 2023, the volume of mutual trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the UAE amounted to \$329 million.

From 2005 to 2022, the gross inflow of direct investments from the UAE to Kazakhstan totaled \$3.2 billion, while investments from Kazakhstan to the UAE exceeded \$1 billion. Overall, the Gulf countries have invested approximately \$3.6 billion in Kazakhstan's economy. Eager to build on these investment ties, our country is undertaking large-scale reforms to diversify the economy and create favorable conditions for foreign investments. The Gulf Cooperation Council states and the Central Asian countries known as the C5 have dedicated substantial efforts to fostering bilateral and multilateral ties between the two regions. Last year's inaugural leaders' summit between the GCC and C5 in Jeddah served as a prime example of this flourishing relationship, leading to the unanimous approval of a joint action plan for strategic dialogue and cooperation. True to its nature as a cooperative and ambitious nation, Kazakhstan has taken full advantage of this comprehensive framework for enhanced cooperation across the fields of trade, security, culture and education. Notably, the GCC countries expressed interest in investing in the region's energy sector, including renewables. Central Asia boasts more than 30 billion tonnes of explored oil reserves and 20 trillion cubic meters of gas. Since the signing of the action plan last year, our domestic oil companies have formed exclusive joint ventures with leading Gulf transport conglomerates, including the Abu Dhabi Ports Group, to bolster connectivity and provide world-class shipping services to energy companies in the Caspian Sea. Meanwhile, the Development Bank of Kazakhstan and the Saudi Export-Import Bank signed a memorandum of understanding late last year to establish a joint innovation hub and facilitate access for Kazakh startup projects to markets in the Middle East and North Africa. This agreement was signed during the sixth meeting of the Kazakh-Saudi Intergovernmental Joint Committee on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation. In our increasingly polarized world, the close partnership between the Gulf and Central Asia emerges as a noteworthy case study, illustrating the value of recognizing and capitalizing on opportunities to work together. Significantly, Kazakhstan has provided visa-free access for all Gulf countries and has established direct air communication with their capitals. Among the primary drivers of success in Central Asia-Gulf cooperation is the regions' deliberate adoption of a multi-vector foreign policy. This strategic positioning

grants our countries the autonomy needed to navigate the complexities of a fragmented world, promoting peace and stability in the international system. Moreover, both Central Asia and the Gulf share a strategic focus on industries of the future. This joint commitment to technological advancement, innovation and sustainable development not only positions our countries as pioneers but also establishes a robust foundation for collaborative ventures. By aligning our priorities with the demands of the future, our regions can transcend traditional geopolitical boundaries and foster a forward-thinking approach. Additionally, the success of this cooperation hinges on an inherent appetite for global engagement and a coveted status as global conveners. Functioning as bridges between the Global South and Global North, occasions like the GCC and C5 leaders' summit and the Kazakh-Saudi Intergovernmental Joint Committee have enabled policymakers, including myself, to share ideas and uncover new areas of exchange. Later this year, Kazakhstan will provide yet another platform for high-level dialogue in the form of the Astana International Forum. Motivated by a fundamental belief in the power of diplomacy, Kazakhstan is proud to host this unique event on June 13-14. World leaders, business executives and expert academics will come together to address the challenges and opportunities emerging both in Kazakhstan and across the international landscape. With our flourishing relationship with the Gulf region as a compelling example, we hope that the forum will serve as a catalyst for continued cross-border diplomacy and economic cooperation. This is particularly significant for nations that continue to uphold an open stance within the international system. Guided by these values, Kazakhstan stands as a testament to the success of such collaboration, enjoying unprecedented levels of growth and development. The burgeoning partnership between the Gulf and Central Asia, particularly highlighted by Kazakhstan's role, sets a new standard in international cooperation. This alliance, driven by shared goals in economic diversification, trade enhancement and sustainable development, represents a bridge between diverse cultures and strategic regions. This collaboration stands as a model for regional growth and an emblem of global unity and understanding. Arman Shakkaliyev is Minister of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan

— Source: Arab News

Briefs

US expresses support for...

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Subsequently, they also discussed "US support for continued economic reforms with and through the IMF, trade and investment, education, climate change, and private sector-led economic growth, Montgomery added. The US envoy also expressed Washington's support for Pakistan's democracy and the key role of an independent press. Both sides also discussed how both countries can work together to accelerate projects addressing climate change under the US-Pakistan Green Alliance framework.

Pakistan ready to transform...

FROM PAGE 01
senior politician. Dar has been a member of the Senate from 2003 to 2022. He has earlier served as finance minister from 1998 to 1999, then from March to May 2008. Dar again led the finance ministry from 2013 to 2017 and then from 2022 to 2023. He was also the minister of industry and investment from February 1997 to July 1997 as well as commerce from December 1997 to October 1999. Previously, Dar was named as the Leader of Opposition in the Senate from March 2012 to June 2013.

NA denounces Israeli...

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The resolution, "categorically condemns Israel's war on Palestine, where the latest attack cost 21 lives of Palestinians standing in the line for aid during the holy month of Ramadan denounces the continued Israeli aggression, which has led to the loss of over 30,000 lives since October 7, 2023." It called upon the federal government to play a more proactive role in pushing the international community to enforce a ceasefire.

Hamis proposes new six...

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an official from the resistance group said on Friday. "The agreement is for a six-week ceasefire and a prisoner exchange," the official said after weeks of so far fruitless mediation efforts, adding that the group would want this to lead to "a complete (Israeli) withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a permanent ceasefire." During the proposed truce, Gaza resistance factions would release about 42 hostages seized during the October 7 operation that triggered the war in Gaza, the official said, requesting anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks.

'Allegations against Donald Lu...

FROM PAGE 01
US State Department news briefings by journalists from both Pakistan and the US. The department consistently refutes these allegations as baseless. Lu, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, is currently the only confirmed witness for the hearing, although additional witnesses may be included. "Any number of State Department officials testify all the time before Congress.

EU denies...

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arrangement offered to developing economies in return for their commitment to implement 27 international conventions on human rights, environmental protection and governance. EU Press and Information Officer in Islamabad, Samar Saeed Akhtar said the EU had not received any official communication from PTI regarding GSP+ status. Meanwhile, the former ruling party also denied writing any letter to the EU, rejecting the allegations levelled by the information minister on Pakistan's GSP+ status.

Indian Wells 2024

Alcaraz qualifies for semis after surviving 'bee invasion'

Alcaraz, who registered a 6-3 6-1 win to keep his hopes alive of defending the title

SPORTS DESK

INDIAN WELLS: Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz fought off swarming bees and Alexander Zverev on Thursday to set up a semi-final clash with Jannik Sinner at Indian Wells. World number two Alcaraz was stung on the forehead and temporarily forced from the court as a "bee invasion" halted his quarter-final against Germany's Zverev with just two games completed. He looked none the worse for wear when play resumed after a delay of almost two hours, polishing off a 6-3, 6-1 victory and avenging a quarter-final loss to Zverev at the Australian Open. Sinner powered into the semi-finals with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Czech Jiri Lehecka pushing his match win streak to 19. Sinner's run stretches back through last year's Davis

Cup finals and includes a perfect 16-0 record in 2024. In Saturday's semi-finals he'll be out to turn the tables on Alcaraz, who beat him at the same stage last year on the way to the title in the California desert. Alcaraz said he never imagined his title defense would find him ducking for cover amid a swarm of bees. He and Zverev were just two games into their match when the bees overwhelmed proceedings, Alcaraz swatting and swiping at the insects after being stung on the forehead. The bees swarmed the remote-controlled "spider cam" and Alcaraz and Zverev had already run for cover when chair umpire Mohamed Lahyani announced "Ladies and gentlemen, play is suspended due to bee invasion." "For sure the most unusual match I have ever played in my career," he said, recalling that he noticed the



bees after winning a point on serve in the third game. "I thought it was just a few of them, not too many," he said. "But I saw the sky and there were thousands, thousands flying, stuck in my hair, going to me. It was crazy. "I tried to stay away from them, but it was impossible." A bee expert was summoned and removed the bees clustered on the aerial camera with a

live-capture vacuum. The players were brought back on court to warm up, although Alcaraz insisted beekeeper Lance Davis get rid of some stragglers around the player chairs and equipment. "I'm not going to lie," Alcaraz said "I'm a little bit afraid of bees." But he had no more trouble - with the bees or Zverev. He said he was pleased with how he managed to stay focused during the delay, as well as with his superb return game against the big-serving Zverev. Alcaraz said he played "probably one of my best return matches that I've done in my tennis career. "I put every return in," said Alcaraz, who has gone from strength to strength as he chases his first title since he vanquished Novak Djokovic at Wimbledon last July. He can expect a tough challenge against Sinner, who captured his first Grand Slam title in Melbourne

and has since lifted the trophy in Rotterdam. In breezy conditions on court two, Sinner was in firm control, breaking Lehecka early in each set and saving the only break point he faced in the match. "Today was for sure a different situation," Sinner said. "In the beginning was windy, but I handled it very well." Fourth-ranked Daniil Medvedev, runner-up to Alcaraz last year, booked a return trip to the semi-finals with a 7-5, 6-4 victory over seventh-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark. Medvedev will play American Tommy Paul, who turned the tables on Casper Ruud with a 6-2, 1-6, 6-3 victory over the ninth-ranked Norwegian. Paul belted 35 winners, saving two break points when serving for the match before clinching it on his second match point. "It's awesome," said Paul, who had dropped four of his five prior meetings with Ruud. "I'm really pumped with how I'm playing."

Ata Tarar slams protesters outside...

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government in 2022 but were holding protests in the US. "The anti-national party embroiled in May 9 incidents is working against Pakistan's interests," he maintained. On the IMF mission's visit to Pakistan, the minister said that the talks with the delegation were moving in a positive direction and is hopeful of good results. He said the prime minister wanted to resolve the national issues at the earliest, hence, he had given a comprehensive economic reforms agenda. The PM is also contemplating increasing the tax net, cutting government expenditures and restructuring the Federal Board of Revenue, he said.

PTI to adopt 'confrontation'...

FROM PAGE 01
alongside PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan and Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan in Islamabad today, the former National Assembly speaker declared "fighting" the government in parliament and also on the roads. "Let me categorically say that we will have a confrontation now. I want to assure my workers that this is a long war. It's not short. We still have a long way to go," he said. "We will fight them in the parliament and also on the roads. We are preparing ourselves for a confrontation. We will not back down, be it any kind of pressure." Lambasting the ECP's actions, Qaiser claimed whoever wanted to become a parliamentarian should be on good terms with the electoral watchdog and "bribe" the officials working there.

No IAEA delegation visited...

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The video making the rounds on social media also showed a picture of DG Grossi shaking hands with PM Shehbaz. Addressing the matter in a post on X, FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said: "Stories regarding the visit of a high-level IAEA delegation to Pakistan are fake news! No IAEA official is currently visiting Pakistan; Nor are any policy talks planned in near future with IAEA." She said the IAEA DG had last visited the country in February 2023 and the FO had accordingly briefed the media on the occasion.

Air ambulance service...

FROM PAGE 01
Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Former Senator Pervaiz Rashid, Minister for Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafiq, Minister for Primary and Secondary Health Khawaja Imran Nazir, Chief Secretary, Chairman P&D, Secretary Finance, Dr. Adnan, Secretary Emergency Department and other senior officers concerned attended the meeting.

Prospects of Pak-India...

FROM PAGE 01
input to the government on foreign policy challenges including ties with India. Soon after the prime minister took charge, the outgoing caretaker foreign minister Jaiili Abbas Jilani along with Foreign Secretary Syrus Qazi briefed Shehbaz Sharif. Earlier, this week there was another briefing at the foreign office for the newly appointed Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. The assessment both by the outgoing foreign minister and the foreign secretary suggested that there were no or little chances of any breakthrough in the relationship between Pakistan and India in the foreseeable future. Dar was informed that India, under Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was pursuing a policy of "Hindutva." He was told that the Modi government was taking practical steps to convert India into a pure "Hindu State."

FIFA extends PFF NC's mandate

ISLAMABAD: Football's governing body, FIFA, has extended the mandate of the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) Normalisation Committee till December this year. The current mandate of the PFF NC was supposed to come to an end today, March 15. The extension has been given to ensure the completion of PFF elections which are facing delays at the district level. "The Council confirmed that the mandate of the Normalisation Committee for the Pakistan Football Federation will be extended until 15 December 2024 to allow for the completion of the existing mandate and electoral process," FIFA said in a press release on Thursday. According to FIFA, the mandate of the NC includes the managing of PFF's daily affairs, ensuring the proper registration and scrutiny of the football clubs in Pakistan, draft and ratify, with the assistance of FIFA and the AFC, an electoral code for the PFF, organise the elections at district followed by provincial levels and conduct the elections of a new PFF executive committee. The NC was appointed in September 2019 with Humza Khan as the chairman. Meanwhile, current head Haroon Malik and his NC were appointed in January 2021 after Humza's resignation. In June 2022, FIFA had decided to lift ban, which was imposed in April 2021, on the PFF due to undue third-party interference. FIFA has also extended the mandate of the NC by 12 months. Meanwhile, in June last year, another extension was given to the PFF NC till March 2024. The Pakistan football team is currently preparing in Lahore for the round two clash of the FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifiers, which will be held on March 21 at the Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad, against Jordan. The preliminary squad has already been announced but the final squad, which will also include overseas players, will be announced later. Captain Easah Suliman is also set to make a comeback in the squad after recovering from injury. Additionally, Stephen Constantine will continue as Pakistan coach for the upcoming matches. -Agencies

PCB mulls separate coaches for cricket formats

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) must be forced to appoint separate red-ball and white-ball coaches since Shane Watson is only interested in limited-overs cricket. According to local media, the former Australian all-rounder, Watson, is not willing to commit to a year-round presence in Pakistan which is why a separate coach for Test cricket could be appointed. Reportedly, 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. Watson is seriously considering the offer and could accept the role when he is formally approached by the PCB. The Mohsin Naqvi-led PCB is interested in appointing a strong coaching staff for the cricket team. 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 in case the contract with Watson is not signed before the series. The five-match T20I series between Pakistan and New Zealand will be

gin 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. Meanwhile, 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 na-

tional 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.

Stop clock set to be used at T20 World Cup 2024

DUABI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced that stop clocks will be used in between over during limited-overs international matches, ODIs and T20Is, from the T20 World Cup this year. The stop clock was introduced on a trial basis in men's limited-overs international matches in December last year. "The trial was supposed to run until April 2024, but the experiment has already yielded results in terms of timely completion of matches," the ICC stated in a press release. "Results presented to the Chief Executives' Committee (CEC) demonstrated that approximately 20 minutes had been saved per ODI match. "The feature has now been added as a mandatory playing condition in all Full Member ODI and T20I matches from 1 June 2024. "As per stop clock rule that was trialled in men's white-ball cricket, the fielding side is

expected to start a new over within 60 seconds of the completion of the previous over. "An electronic clock, counting down from 60 to zero, will be displayed on the ground, with the onus on the third umpire to determine the start of the clock." If the fielding side doesn't follow the 60-second clock, it will get two warnings. Meanwhile, subsequent violations would result in a five-run penalty per incident. "There are a few exceptions to this rule, and the clock, if already started, can be cancelled in certain situations. These include, when a new batter comes to the wicket between overs, an official drinks interval has been called, the umpires have approved the onfield treatment of an injury to a batter or fielder and the time lost is for any circumstances beyond the control of the fielding side," the ICC added. The ICC also

said that the T20 World Cup 2024 would have reserve days scheduled for the semi-finals and final. "Furthermore, a minimum of five overs will need to be bowled to the team batting second to constitute a game in the group stages and the Super Eight stages. However, in the knockout matches, a minimum of 10 overs need to be bowled in the second innings to constitute a match," the ICC stated. The ICC has also announced the qualification process for T20 World Cup 2026. "The 20-team tournament will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, and will have a total of 12 automatic qualifiers," the ICC said. "The top eight teams in the 2024 edition will join India and Sri Lanka as automatic qualifiers, with the remaining spots (between two and four, depending on host finishing positions) taken up by the next best-ranked sides in ICC Men's T20I rankings table as of 30 June, 2024. - DNA

Babar Azam reveals reason behind PSL Qualifier loss

KARACHI: Peshawar Zalmi captain Babar Azam opened up after his side lost to Multan Sultans in the Qualifier of the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine on Thursday in Karachi. Speaking after the match, Azam said that his side were around 20 runs short of the par score while batting first. "We got a good start but lost wickets in the middle overs. I thought 160-170 was a par score but we couldn't finish well," Azam said after the match. However, Azam also said that if he had stayed on the pitch till the end of the innings things would have been different. "They bowled well so I tried to build the innings but I got out early. If I stayed there, maybe it would have been a different ball game," he added. Azam's Zalmi will have another chance on March 16 against either Islamabad United or Quetta Gladiators, who will feature in the eliminator today, to qualify for the final. Scores in brief: Multan Sultans beat Peshawar Zalmi by seven wickets Peshawar Zalmi 146-7, 20 overs (Babar Azam 46, Tom Kohler-Cadmore 24, Mohammad Haris 22; Usama Mir 2-16, Chris Jordan 2-28) Multan Sultans 147-3, 18.3 overs (Yasir Khan 54 not out, Usman Khan 36 not out, Iftikhar Ahmed 22 not out; Aamir Jamal 1-23, Mehran Mumtaz 1-28, Salman Irshad 1-28) Player of the match - Usama Mir (Multan Sultans). - DNA

ASAS Intl school hosts annual sports Fiesta

Dr Arshad Zia, while addressing at the award distribution ceremony, appreciated teachers and students for their active participation in different sports

DNA

ISLAMABAD: ASAS Intl School has organised a sports Fiesta 2024 here on Saturday. A number of students took part in different games and won prizes from their teachers. Parents were invited to witness the event. They also took part in the race. Dr Arshad Zia, while addressing at the award distribution ceremony, appreciated teachers and students for their active participation in different sports. He said that sports are necessary for better education as well. Principal at the school Safia Jawad said in her address that sports encourage students to accept challenges. She said that sports promote positive competition. Chief Guest at the event was athlete Sadaf Siddique. Students also showed great discipline and skills in the Martial Arts.



Briefs

7 dead in coal mine accident in China's Shanxi

TAIYUAN : All the seven miners who were trapped in an accident in an underground warehouse of a coal mine in north China's Shanxi Province were confirmed dead, local authorities said Friday. The last body was retrieved at 6:23 a.m. Friday, marking the end of the rescue at the coal mine of the Taoyuan Xinlong coal industrial corporation in Zhongyang County, according to the county government. The coal pile in the warehouse collapsed at 10:45 p.m. on Monday when miners were repairing a malfunctioned coal feeder, burying seven people, said Gao Naichun, head of the mine. The collapsed coal broke the water pipes under the warehouse and led to water outbursts, which hampered the rescue efforts, said Gao.—APP

NATO to establish innovation centers in Finland

HELSINKI : The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is set to establish an accelerator and two test centers for communications and quantum technology in Finland, the government announced on Friday. A press release issued by the government said the Board of Directors of NATO's Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) has approved Finland's proposal to establish the facilities. The Ministry of Defense will be responsible for the project. The Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT) will establish an accelerator in Espoo, southern Finland, in collaboration with the Aalto University and the University of Helsinki. The accelerator will focus on next-generation communications and quantum technologies. The government said that one test center will be installed at the University of Oulu in northern Finland, while the other will be at a VTT office in Otaniemi, Espoo. The Otaniemi center will concentrate on cyber-secure communications, quantum technologies and space technologies, while the center at the University of Oulu will provide companies with opportunities to test 6G network technologies.—DNA

Nissan, Honda to explore partnership in electric vehicles

TOKYO : Japanese auto giants Nissan and Honda said Friday they had agreed to explore a strategic partnership in electric vehicles and other areas. Analysts said the move was aimed at catching up with Chinese rivals who have stolen a march in EVs while Japanese firms have lost ground by focusing more on hybrid vehicles. "To further accelerate efforts toward carbon neutrality and zero traffic-accident fatalities, it will be essential to strengthen environmental and electrification technologies as well as software development," a joint statement said. "The two companies have reached the understanding based on the belief that it is necessary to combine their strengths and explore the possibility of future collaboration," it added.

The scope of the feasibility study includes automotive software platforms, core components related to EVs, and complementary products, they said. "We are not competing only with the traditional car makers, but also with new players. These emerging brands with innovative products and new business models are making inroads into the auto market and are trying to gain dominance by capitalising on their overwhelming price competitiveness and amazing speed," Nissan chief executive Makoto Uchida told reporters. "We cannot win the competition as long as we stick to conventional wisdom and traditional approach," he said.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of United States of America Donald Blome hosted Iftar dinner for the leading business figures of Pakistan. CEO Murree Brewery and MNA Isphanyar Bandhara also attended the iftar dinner.—DNA

El-Sisi: Egypt is striving to secure a ceasefire in Gaza

El-Sisi also warned against the danger of an Israeli incursion into the city of Rafah

NEWS DESK

DUBAI: Egypt is seeking to reach a deal for a ceasefire in Gaza, increase entry of aid and to allow displaced people in the south of the enclave to move to the north, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said on Friday. El-Sisi also warned against the danger of an Israeli incursion into the city of Rafah, where an estimated 1.5 million people have sought shelter next to Gaza's border with Egypt. Aid officials have warned of looming famine in the coastal enclave. "We are talking about reaching a ceasefire in Gaza, meaning a truce, providing the biggest quantity of aid," El-Sisi said in a message recorded during a visit to a military academy. This would include "curbing the impact of this famine on people, and also allow-

ing for the people in the center and the south to move toward the north, with a very strong warning against incursion into Rafah," he said. "We warned of what is happening, that aid not entering would lead to famine," El-Sisi said. Egypt, which fears the displacement of Palestinians crowded near its border, has been trying, along with Qatar and the United States, to mediate between Israel and Hamas to reach an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages in return for Palestinian prisoners. On Thursday, Egypt's foreign minister called on Israel to open land crossings with Gaza to let in more aid. Hamas issues ceasefire proposal to mediators "We warned of what is happening, that aid not entering would lead to famine," Sisi said. Egypt, which fears the displacement of Palestinians crowded



near its border, has been trying, along with Qatar and the United States, to mediate between Israel and Hamas to reach an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages in return for Palestinian prisoners. On Thursday, Egypt's foreign minister called on Israel to open land crossings with Gaza to let in more aid. Mean-

while, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has reiterated his opposition to any efforts by Israel to relocate displaced Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to his country's Sinai Peninsula. The Egyptian leader made his comments during a phone call he received on Sunday from French President Emmanuel Macron who backed Egypt's stance on the issue. In October, Israel acknowledged that its Ministry of Intelligence had drafted a wartime proposal to transfer the Strip's 2.3 million people to the peninsula. A document reportedly proposed moving Gaza's civilian population to tented cities in northern Sinai, then building permanent accommodation and an undefined humanitarian corridor. A security zone would be established inside Israel to block the displaced Palestinians from entering, ac-

ording to The Times of Israel. Ahmed Fahmy, Egypt's presidential spokesman, said that during their call, El-Sisi and Macron discussed ongoing efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza, prisoner exchanges, and the delivery of humanitarian aid. He added that the two presidents had highlighted the importance of working toward a two-state solution to the crisis, with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state considered the only realistic way to bring about security and sustainable stability in the region. The French and Egyptian leaders had noted the need to prevent any military escalation in Gaza's Rafah city due to its likely catastrophic humanitarian repercussions on nearly 1.5 million Palestinians in the area. They also warned of the danger of the war in Gaza becoming a regional conflict.

Nigerian leader rejects ransoms, urges dialogue

ABUJA: Nigeria's leader has ruled out the payment of ransoms for nearly 300 schoolchildren abducted from their school in the conflict-hit north a week ago, raising questions from analysts on Thursday about how best to rescue the children without hurting them. Meanwhile, at least two people with extensive knowledge of the security crisis in Nigeria's northwest told The Associated Press the abductors of the schoolchildren in the state of Kaduna are known and are hiding in the vast ungoverned and unoccupied forests of the region. They both urged the government to engage in dialogue with the armed groups to resolve the protracted conflict. At least 1,400 students have so far been kidnapped from Nigerian schools since the first major school abduction—in Borno state's Chibok village in 2014—stunned the world. Most of those eventually released only regained their freedom after ransom payments, according to their schools and parents, even though the Nigerian government does not admit to paying ransom. On Wednesday, Nigeria's information minister Mohammed Idris told reporters that President Bola Tinubu directed security agencies to urgently rescue the schoolchildren and "in the process to ensure that not a dime is paid for ransom." No group has claimed responsibility for the Kaduna attack. Local residents blamed bandit groups known for mass killings and kidnappings for ransom in north-western and central regions, most of them herders in conflict with host communities. Unlike the Chibok girls, who were seized by Islamic militants from the Boko Haram group, no religious motive is suspected in the most recent abductions. The mastermind of the Kaduna abduction is known, as are other bandit leaders, said Murtala Ahmed Ruffa'i, an associate professor of peace and conflict studies at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, in Sokoto state, and one of Nigeria's foremost conflict researchers. "His father is alive," he said of the suspect behind the Kaduna abduction. "These bandits are people that are known by their names, families and by their locations. If you want to engage, you talk to the parents. They are criminals (but) still have parents that they listen to," he said.—DNA

France vows to prevent Russian victory in Ukraine: Macron

If Russia wins this war, Europe's credibility will be reduced to zero: Macron

WEB DESK

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron says his nation is prepared to make sure that Russia does not emerge victorious in the conflict in Ukraine, noting that sending troops to Ukraine was "possible." "If the situation should deteriorate, we would be ready to make sure that Russia never wins that war," Macron said on media reporters, warning that anybody advocating "limits" on aid to Ukraine "chooses defeat." While claiming that European security was at risk amid the Ukrainian conflict, Macron cautioned allies against imposing any restrictions on the support provided for Kiev. Reacting to the French opposition leaders' condemnation of his recent comments as bellicose, Macron said "if Russia wins this war, Europe's credibility will be reduced to zero", and would mean that "we have no security."

Criticizing the opposition leaders, he said that he "deeply" disagreed with them, and called them the reason behind Ukraine's defeat on the ground. "Today, deciding to abstain or vote against support to Ukraine, it's not choosing peace, it's choosing defeat. It's different," he said. Macron's main rival party, led by Marine Le Pen, chose to abstain from voting in parliament this week on the security pact between France and Ukraine, whereas the France Unbowed party on the far left voted against it. "If war spread in Europe, Russia would be to blame," Macron said. "But if we decided today that we would not respond, it would be choosing defeat already. And I don't want that." Calling the conflict in Ukraine "existential for our Europe and for France", Macron said anybody advocating "limits" on aid to Ukraine "chooses defeat." Macron said Ukraine was facing a challenging situation

on the ground and stressed the imperative need for increased assistance from its allies. "Peace does not mean the capitulation of Ukraine," he said. "Wanting peace does not mean defeat. Wanting peace does not mean dropping Ukraine," Macron was quoted as saying. When asked about the prospect of sending Western troops to Ukraine, he replied, "We're not in that situation today," he said, but added that "all these options are possible." Last month, Macron publicly refused to rule out sending ground troops to Ukraine, which prompted pushback from other European leaders, especially from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz over differences on how to support Ukraine. On Friday, Scholz was set to receive Macron in Berlin, after tensions between them erupted, regarding urgent consultations on further European military backing for Kyiv. The meeting will also be

attended by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who said that it falls to Paris, Berlin and Warsaw "to mobilize all of Europe" to provide Ukraine with fresh aid. Friday's meeting is of "great importance" for allies to "organize as much support as possible for Ukraine", said Scholz, who spoke Thursday with Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky by phone and underlined Germany's "unbroken solidarity" with Kyiv. Russia launched what it calls "a special military operation" in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, over the perceived threat of the ex-Soviet republic joining NATO. Since then, the United States and Ukraine's other allies have sent Kiev tens of billions of dollars' worth of weapons, including rocket systems, drones, armored vehicles, tanks, and communication systems. Western countries have also imposed a slew of economic sanctions on Moscow. The Kremlin has said the sanctions and the Western military assistance will only prolong the war.

South Caucasus aims for peace, stability, prosperity: Turkish FM

Hakan Fidan and his Georgian counterpart Iliá Darchiashvili attend 9th Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Georgia hosted by Azerbaijani top diplomat Bayramov

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Friday that the South Caucasus has the potential to become a region of peace, stability, and prosperity. At a joint press conference following the 9th Trilateral Foreign Ministers Meeting between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in Baku, Fidan expressed gratitude for the hospitality in the Azerbaijani capital and emphasized the importance of the three-nation mechanism in addressing shared interests and concerns. Fidan and his Georgian counterpart Iliá Darchiashvili attended the meeting hosted by Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. The trilateral meeting mechanism aimed to promote regional stability, peace, and prosperity. Fidan highlighted the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have a

negative impact on transportation and supply chains, as well as the humanitarian and economic costs of the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict. Concerning Israel's intensified attacks on Palestinians, the Turkish foreign minister said, "The ongoing massacre in Gaza continues to expose the weaknesses of the international system." The minister also expressed concern about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and called for an immediate cease-fire to allow humanitarian aid in. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of a two-state solution for lasting peace in the region and reiterated Türkiye's commitment to enhanced cooperation through trilateral and bilateral relations. He mentioned regional developments, such as Azerbaijan regaining territorial integrity after 30 years of occupation and Georgia becoming an EU candidate. During the meeting, he emphasized the need to improve cooperation and under-

stand the new situation in the region, saying, "There is a real opportunity ahead to transform the South Caucasus into an area of peace, stability, and shared prosperity." The minister also discussed a three-country agreement to strengthen Türkiye's successful cooperation in energy and connectivity with Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as measures to advance these efforts. He emphasized the importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line's full operational capacity, as well as the Black Sea's strategic importance in regional security, economy, energy, and transportation. The minister underlined the spirit of cooperation between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in multilateral economic platforms, citing the notable example of 2023. Fidan commended Türkiye's significant support to Azerbaijan and Georgia during its presidency of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) and reaffirmed Ankara's readiness to assist in various

areas. He congratulated Azerbaijan on hosting the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, stressing the importance of ensuring lasting peace in the South Caucasus for global security and connectivity. Later, the Azerbaijani foreign ministry said on X that the foreign ministers of Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Georgia "have signed the Baku Declaration on the outcomes of the 9th Trilateral Meeting." Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov remarked that by ending the occupation of Karabakh, the country laid the groundwork for regional peace and stability. "Azerbaijan consistently demonstrates political will and supports intensive direct negotiations and expects to sign a peace treaty with Armenia as soon as possible," Bayramov said. He underscored that the three countries are currently engaged in fruitful "regional economic collaboration, with significant regional and global economic

projects." Bayramov also highlighted that these projects are crucial for "fostering trade connections between the East and the West." "President İlham Aliyev attaches special importance to Azerbaijan-Georgia-Türkiye regional cooperation," he said. Georgia's Foreign Minister Iliá Darchiashvili, for his part, said he shared details about "Georgia's EU membership with both nations" during the meeting. He emphasized that the collaborative projects between the three countries would strengthen their relationship. During the trilateral meeting, they reiterated the "significance and durability" of their partnership, he said, adding, "I would like to emphasize that this format is one of the most effective and successful mechanisms of regional cooperation. This platform, particularly in light of current global and regional challenges, allows us to stay informed about the needs of the region."

Montenegro ready for EU membership: Hungarian FM

BELGRADE : Montenegro is ready to become a member of the European Union, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said. "The Hungarian government's stance is clear: Montenegro is ready for EU membership," said Szijarto after meeting with his counterpart Filip Ivanovic during his visit to the Montenegrin capital Podgorica. Speaking at a joint press conference, Szijarto said the EU is facing economic and security problems and new energy and dynamism is needed from outside. "We believe that this new energy can come from the Western Balkans and assertive countries that are ready for such cooperation," he said. He said the EU enlargement process is progressing slowly for the Western Balkans but one of Hungary's priorities will be to accelerate the process. Ivanovic said Montenegro attaches importance to the support given by Hungary towards its EU membership. "Determination and the commitment to constructive dialogue resulted in the establishment and maintenance of political stability in the country," he said. After declaring its independence in 2006, Montenegro made its official membership application to the EU on Dec. 15, 2008 and received "candidate country" status on Dec. 17, 2010. Montenegro started accession negotiations on June 29, 2012 and is expected to become the next member of the EU.—Agencies

Congo confirms first mpox cases

KINSHASA : The Republic of Congo has recorded its first cases of mpox in several regions, the health ministry has said, an indication of how the disease may be spreading across Africa since sexual transmission was first confirmed on the continent last year. Mpox is a virus that originates in wild animals and occasionally jumps to people, who can spread it to others. The virus was previously known as monkeypox because it was first seen in research monkeys. The World Health Organization said in November it had confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in neighbouring Congo for the first time. African scientists warned this could make the disease difficult to contain. The Republic of Congo's health ministry published its report on Wednesday. The report said some 43 cases had been reported to the ministry, including in nine out of the country's 12 departments. The government has not issued any further comment on the publication, which was not officially distributed to the media and appears to have been intended for internal use. Mpox became a focus of worldwide concern during an international outbreak in 2022 that saw the disease spread to over 100 countries, mainly by sex among gay or bisexual men. Mpox has been endemic in parts of central and west Africa for decades, but most cases involved infection from rodents, limiting the spread of the disease.—DNA

Philippine cancer patients seek alternative 'cures'

MANILA : Filipino single mother Mary Ann Eduarte delayed chemotherapy for her breast cancer for several years and instead took food supplements falsely promoted on social media as cures for the deadly disease. They didn't work and the cancer spread to her lungs and bones. Eduarte is one of many Filipinos duped by medical misinformation flooding the social media platforms where they rank among the world's heaviest users. A shortage of doctors, the difficulty of reaching a hospital in the archipelago, poor health literacy, and fear of incurring huge medical bills have led many people suffering from chronic conditions to seek alternative treatments online. In recent years, AFP digital investigation journalists have seen an explosion in the volume of posts and paid advertisements promoting unproven treatments for diseases such as cancer.—APP

Briefs

UN demands unimpeded aid access to Sudan

GENEVA: The United Nations called Friday for Sudan's warring factions to provide unimpeded access to deliver desperately-needed aid as the spectre of famine looms after nearly a year of conflict. The war between army chief Abdel Fattah el-Burhan and his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has since April last year killed tens of thousands, destroyed infrastructure and crippled the economy. It has also led to a dire humanitarian crisis and acute food shortages, with the country teetering on the brink of famine. Jill Lawler, the emergency chief in Sudan for the UN children's agency UNICEF, said Friday that there were enough aid stocks in Port Sudan, but the problem was getting the aid from there to the people in need. "Humanitarian access, getting the unimpeded access to these populations, ... is really critical," she told reporters in Geneva via video link from New York. Lawler said that the last week had led the first UN mission to reach Khartoum state since war erupted 11 months ago. —Agencies

KP CM's brother to contest NA-44 by-poll

SHAMIM SHAHID
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has decided to let his brother Faisal Amin Gandapur contest on the National Assembly seat from Dera Ismail Khan that was won by him in the February 8 general elections. The KP CM, who is also the president of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) provincial chapter, said his brother will contest by-elections from the NA-44 constituency which he vacated following his win on the PK-113 Dera Ismail Khan-III seat. Speaking about handing over the coveted KP constituency ticket to his brother in a video statement on Friday, the chief minister said he has conveyed the decision to party founder Imran Khan as well after he inquired Gandapur where he plans to "adjust" his brother in the provincial cabinet. "He did not know that my brother was yet to contest the elections," he said. The KP CM said he himself won the February 8 general elections on two seats, one which he retained and let go of the other. The PTI KP president told Khan that his brother will contest for the polls and go to the NA after winning. Gandapur, who defeated the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, took oath of the chief minister's office on March 2 after the PTI founder finalised his name for the top provincial post.

Embassy of Azerbaijan in Tehran to reopen soon

NEWS DESK
BAKU: In a recent interview with Azerbaijani news channel, Iran's ambassador to Baku, Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, revealed that a delegation from Azerbaijan has journeyed to Tehran to arrange for the reopening of their embassy in Iran, aiming to mend diplomatic strains from last year. Mousavi underscored the rich historical ties between the two neighboring nations and emphasized their commitment to resolving any misunderstandings to maintain strong bilateral relations. According to Mousavi, "The historical background of the two countries and the deep cultural and emotional relations between the people on both sides of the border of about 800 kilometers between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan do not allow problems and misunderstandings to continue." The ambassador remarked that both nations endeavored to navigate through the "icy period" in their bilateral relations with "wisdom, tact and resourcefulness" aiming to turn a new page in their bilateral ties.

Ambassadors, scholars advocate for int'l coop to tackle 'Islamophobia'

Dr. Mehmet Paçaci, Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, pointed to the alarming rise of Islamophobia globally, especially in the Western and certain non-Western countries including India

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: To commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), hosted a Roundtable Discussion titled, "Importance of Global Solidarity to Combat Islamophobia", bringing to the fore a global dialogue aimed at addressing the prejudices, intolerance, violence and injustices faced by Muslims worldwide. Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Chairman of the Council of the Islamic Ideology (CII), was chief guest; Ambassadors of Iran and Türkiye and noted academic and senior Foreign Office official joined as panellists. H.E. Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, enriched the discussion by contextualizing Islamophobia within the broader historical and geopolitical narratives. His critique of Islamophobia as a tool for political manipulation and his call for unity among Muslim nations underscored the importance of solidarity and collective identity in overcoming adversities. H.E. Dr. Mehmet Paçaci, Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, pointed to the alarming rise of Islamophobia globally, especially in the Western and certain non-Western countries including India. His discourse on the political misuse of Islamophobia and the urgent need for international accountability and cooperation offered a compelling call to action for both Muslim and non-Muslim countries to address this pressing issue. Chief Guest Dr. Qibla Ayaz delivered an illuminating address, providing deep historical insight into Islamophobia, identifying its roots and evolution over the centuries. Dr. Ayaz recommended fostering deeper understanding of Western cultures, promoting inter-faith dialogues, and the strategic use of media and academia to combat Islamophobia highlighting a path toward mutual respect and understanding.



Specifically, he stressed the importance of 'working in the West' on the one hand, and developing better understanding of the West within Muslim societies on the other hand. Dr. Qibla Ayaz also underlined the need for "retrospection" - noting that extremist actions of individual Muslims or disrespect for the rights of minorities in Muslim countries would neither result in better image nor help forge mutual understanding. In essence, he said he saw a 'ray of hope' and that, despite prevalent negativity and formidable challenges, collective action could help bring about positive change. A special video message by the Honourable Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) His Excellency Hissein Brahim Taha for the occasion was shared. The Secretary General emphasized the urgent need to combat and address the widespread prejudice and discrimination against Muslims globally and the importance of fostering a culture of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding across different faiths and communities. Moreover, he called for international solidarity, legal measures against hate speech and discrimination, and educational initiatives to dispel myths and misconceptions about Islam and its followers. Dr. Muhammad Israr Madani from the Islamic Research Council of Religious Affairs, provided a scholarly ex-

position on the multifaceted nature of Islamophobia, tracing its historical roots and present-day manifestations. His analytical insights into the contributing factors of Islamophobia, from media misrepresentation to the socio-political dynamics in Western countries, offered a comprehensive overview of the complexities involved. Dr. Madani's emphasis on strategic engagement, media literacy, and educational reforms proposed a constructive framework for countering Islamophobic narratives. DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcoming remarks, highlighted the journey since the March 2019 Christchurch terrorist attacks in New Zealand, highlighting the pivotal moments and global actions, including Pakistan's leading role in the OIC and the UN General Assembly, culminating in the designation of March 15 as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia.' While tracing the evolution and myriad manifestations of Islamophobia in recent decades, he emphasized that Islamophobia was not just prevalent in some Western countries but in non-Western parts of the world as well, including in Pakistan's neighbourhood where it was growing in the wake of the 'Hindutva' ideology. Noting that the world was experiencing extreme levels of tumult, he stressed that this was the time to build bridges, not to accentuate religious or cultural fault-lines or create further divisions. People of goodwill in all faiths should come forward and play their part in forging greater mutual respect, understanding, and inter-faith harmony, he concluded. Remarks by the esteemed speakers were followed by an interactive discussion session in which all participants took part enthusiastically. The discussion emphasized the importance of youth engagement, global solidarity, informed dialogue, and proactive measures to address Islamophobia. In the end, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BOG ISSI presented the honourable participants of the discussion with ISSI mementos, which was followed by a group photograph.



LARKANA: President Asif Ali Zardari showering flowers on the grave of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto. — APP

Amid opp. protest NA passes resolution seeking extension in 7 ordinances

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Friday passed a resolution seeking extension in seven ordinances amid protests by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC)-led opposition in the lower house of the parliament. Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar tabled seven ordinances and two bills in the house, amid a strong protest by the opposition members. The bills that were laid before the House included, The Civil Courts Amendment Bill, 2024 and the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Amendment Bill, 2024. The chair referred the bills to the standing committees concerned. The ordinances include Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Ordinance 2023, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, Pakistan Postal Services Management Board (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the National Highway Authority (Amendment) Ordinance 2023, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the Privatization Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 and the Establishment of Telecom-

munication Appellate Tribunal Ordinance, 2023. Speaking on the point of order, the SIC leader Omar Ayub Khan said the opposition rejected the ordinances. He asked the speaker to take pictures of those favouring the ordinances as those were "passed to sell Pakistan". SIC's Ayub said first the lawmakers must to see what the ordinance was. "Tell me what it was, tell me under oath how many people in the House have read it," he asked the lawmakers sitting on the treasury benches. He said an ordinance related to privatisation was introduced in the NA. He said even Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) members did not know what they were doing. "There are talks of selling these institutions of Pakistan, we are going on record on that," he said. Upon the opposition's commotion, NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq held counting of votes on the extension of ordinances. Following which, 130 votes came in favour of the resolution and 63 opposed it. Responding to the point of order, the law minister said pictures should be taken of those who were committing treason against Pakistan and writing letters to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Russia polls: Voting begins in election Putin is bound to win

Ballots will be cast over three days, even though the result is not in doubt as he has no credible opponent

MOSCOW: Voting has begun in Russia's presidential election, which is all but certain to hand Vladimir Putin another six years in power. Ballots will be cast over three days, even though the result is not in doubt as he has no credible opponent. Polling stations opened in the Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia's easternmost region, at 08:00 local time on Friday (20:00 GMT on Thursday) and will finally close in the westernmost Kaliningrad exclave at 20:00 on Sunday. It was at a grand military awards ceremony last December that Vladimir Putin, 71, told the Russian public he would stand for the presidency for a fifth time. At the solemn event, held in one of the Kremlin's most opulent halls, Russia's leader of 24 years had just handed out top honours to soldiers who had taken part in Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine. He was chatting with a small group of participants when the commander of a pro-Russian unit in Ukraine's occupied Donetsk region approached him.

"We need you, Russia needs you!" declared Lt-Col Artyom Zhoga, asking him to run as a candidate in Russia's forthcoming presidential election. Everyone voiced their support. Vladimir Putin nodded: "Now is the time for making decisions. I will be running for the post of president of the Russian Federation." His spokesman Dmitry Peskov later described the decision to run as "absolutely spontaneous". But the Kremlin rarely leaves its choreography to chance. Instead, straight away its well-oiled media machine swung into action. On all state channels, 71-year-old President Putin was promoted as a national leader who stood head and shoulders above any potential rivals. "Support for the president transcends party support alone," reported one correspondent on state TV news later that week. "Vladimir Putin is the people's candidate!" He has already been in power in Russia longer than any ruler since Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. He has been president since 2000, apart from four years as prime minister because of a two-term limit imposed by the Russian constitution. He has since changed the rules to give himself a clean slate to run again in 2024 by "switching back to zero" his previous terms. That means he could also run for another six-year term in 2030, when he will turn 78. During his time in office, Vladimir Putin has methodically tightened his grip on power so no real threat to his rule exists any longer. — Agencies

All eyes on race for Punjab, K-P governor slots

LAHORE: As the PPP leadership continues to hold its card over the candidates for Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa governors, it has largely become a one-horse race in the former though a senior party leader indicated that a surprise nominee should not be ruled out in both the provinces. With presidential elections sorted out, something that the PPP wanted to deal with prior to finalising their picks for the Punjab and K-P governors - the two positions offered to the party as part of the power-sharing formula with the PML-N - the announcement of the names for the slots is now expected in another two days or so. Punjab, which remains a more politically advantageous appointment for the party than K-P, initially had four candidates in the run, namely Makhdoom Syed Ahmed Mahmood, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Nadeem Afzal Chan, and Chaudary Riaz. However, Mahmood, who has already served as a governor once, is not interested in the post and pulled himself out of the race, according to well-placed sources. Chan, given his recent re-entry into the PPP from the PTI has inherent disadvantages despite being in good books of the party leadership. Similarly, a PPP leader said Riaz, a relatively less known political figure in this race, was unlikely to be considered for this position. This leaves Kaira as the candidate with the bright chances of making it to the office. Another plus for Kaira that puts him ahead of everyone else is that he is in good books of not only his party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari but also the 'powerful circles' as well as the PML-N, according to the sources. However, the sources said Kaira being "overly" comfortable with the PML-N could be a setback for him. They added that during the last coalition government, Kaira defended PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif better than his own people, raising many eyebrows about his future in the party. But a PPP leader described Kaira as a learned, soft-spoken and a down-to-earth person, who would in the capacity of the Punjab governor help the party make inroads in the province. He said Mahmood was not the kind of the person, who would keep the doors of the Governor's House open for the party activists all the time and that placed him at a great disadvantage. The vibrant and relativity young PPP leader, Faisal Karim Kundi, is likely to bag the post of the K-P governor. In K-P, Kundi has mettle it to take on not only the PTI but also the JUI-F. Also in the race for the slot is PPP's K-P President Mohammad Ali Shah Bacha, former minister Zahir Ali Shah, Barrister Masood Kausar, and Khawaja Yawar Naseer. — Agencies

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