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Ground operations in Ukraine possible 'at some point': Macron

Detailed News On Page-07

WHO urges Israel to drop Rafah invasion

Detailed News On Page-07



Babar opens up on loss against Islamabad United

Detailed News On Page-06



Funeral prayers of martyrs

Army committed to unrelenting fight against terrorism

This noble sacrifice stands as another glorious testament to the unflinching resolve of our gallant sons, who have never hesitated to offer the ultimate sacrifice

'Most terrorist attacks linked to Afghanistan'

STAFF REPORT

SIALKOT: A day after seven Pakistan Army personnel, including two officers, were martyred in a terrorist attack, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said militants are using Afghanistan soil to carry out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. "Terrorism against us is mostly being conducted from Afghanistan," the defence minister said while speaking to the media in Sialkot on Sunday. Two officers and five soldiers of the Pakistan Army were martyred while repulsing an attack by terrorists on a post of security forces in the North Waziristan district on Saturday. Pakistan has time and again accused the Afghan authorities of not taking action against terrorist outfits including the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating on its soil and involved in cross-border attacks against security forces and civilians.

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STAFF REPORT / DNA

RAWALPINDI: Funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed (age: 39 years, resident of Karachi) and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar Shahed (age: 23 years, resident of District Talagang) who embraced martyrdom while defending their motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan District, were offered at Chaklala Garrison Rawalpindi. Honourable President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of Army Staff, Senior serving Military and Civil Officers, relatives of Shuhada and locals of the area attended the funeral. "Pakistan Army has consistently upheld the ideals of Faith, Unity and Discipline. Guided by these enduring principles, Pakistan Army has always endeavoured to set higher benchmarks of professionalism and loyalty in its unrelenting fight against terrorism. This noble sacrifice stands as another glorious testament to the unflinching resolve of our gallant sons, who have never hesitated to offer the ultimate sacrifice for the defence of our Motherland. The whole nation stands in solidarity with our Armed Forces", President said.

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President attends funeral prayers

DNA

ISLAMABAD, President Asif Ali Zardari, on previous night, attended Namaz e Janaza of Shaheed Lt. Colonel Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar who had been martyred in Mir Ali, North Waziristan during a terrorist attack on Saturday. On the occasion, the president paid tribute to shuhada and reiterated the resolve to respond to terrorist activities with full force, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release, on Sunday. He said that the people of Pakistan and its armed forces were united and would face terrorism in unison. He also expressed the resolve to make the terrorists accountable for blood of each martyred jawan, adding that our brave brothers, sons and friends had been defending our borders. President Zardari resolved that the blood of the sons of the soil would not go in vain.



RAWALPINDI: President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir carrying the coffin of Army officer who embraced martyrdom in Mir Ali terrorist attack. - DNA

Iranian envoy dejected over loss of lives in Mir Ali

Iran always believe that Pakistani martyrs are Iran' martyrs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran Reza Amiri Moghadam has expressed deep condolences over the loss of precious lives in terrorist attack in Mir Ali. In his message the Ambassador said, "I am deeply dejected to see seven young Pakistani brothers in the security forces of Pakistan embraced Shahadat in a terrorist attack while protecting their motherland in the Holy month of Ramadan. We always believe that Pakistani martyrs are Iran' martyrs. My condolences to the people and government of Pakistan and the families who lost loved ones".

Putin expected to win landslide Russia election to tighten Putin's grip

Russia's election comes at what Western spy chiefs say is a crossroads for the Ukraine war and the wider West

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin is poised to tighten his grip on power on Sunday in a Russian election that is certain to deliver him a landslide victory, though thousands of opponents staged a symbolic non protest at polling stations. Putin, who rose to power in 1999, is set to win a new six-year term that would enable him to overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years. The election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. He casts it as a "special military operation". Russia's election comes at what Western spy chiefs say is a crossroads for the Ukraine war and the wider West in what Biden casts as a 21st Century struggle between democracies and autocracies. Support for Ukraine is tangled in U.S. domestic politics ahead of the

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Moscow polling station protesters pay tribute to Navalny

APP / AFP

MOSCOW: Queues formed outside Moscow polling stations on Sunday as some voters heeded a call by supporters of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny to cast protest votes in Russia's presidential election. AFP reporters at two polling stations saw larger numbers of voters at noon (0900 GMT) compared to earlier in the day following the call for a "Midday Against Putin" protest. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent rival, died in mysterious circumstances in an

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Briefs

CM Punjab condemns terrorist attack

Says Pakistan Army has written a history of bravery

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz has condemned terrorists attack on a checkpoint at Mir Ali in the area of North Waziristan. CM has paid tribute to the martyred officers and sepoy of Pakistan Army. CM expressed her heartfelt sympathy with the family members of the martyrs. Maryam Nawaz paid salute to the valour of Lieutenant Colonel Kashif for consigning the terrorists to hell. CM acknowledged that the officers and sepoy of Pakistan Army by sacrificing their precious lives for our dear homeland has written a history of bravery adding that the officers and jawans of the Pakistan Army are a pride of the whole nation.

Pak optimistic to get IMF package

The last review, if successful, will release a tranche of around \$1.1 billion

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Finance remains hopeful for a positive outcome of talks between Pakistan govt and IMF regarding final review of \$3 billion standby arrangement, a private news channel reported, citing sources. Headed by Nathan Porter, the IMF's assistant director of Central Asia and Middle East department, the mission arrived in Islamabad and held talks with finance, energy, and FBR officials. Pakistani officials, including Finance Minister M Aurangzeb and Energy Minister Musadik Malik, apprised IMF delegation of the measures taken to implement the lender's reforms.

PTI running smear drive on social media

Tarar condemns PTI's malicious campaign

Tarar, while speaking about the terror incident, said that Pakistan Army, the police and people have made sacrifices in the war against terrorism



ABBAS HASHMI / DNA

LAHORE: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar claimed Sunday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) social media team was behind the accounts attacking Pakistan Army and the soldiers who were martyred in North Waziristan a day earlier, warning action against them. At least seven Pakistan Army soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel and captain, embraced martyrdom after fighting

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PTI flays 'misleading, propaganda'

"Khawaja Asif and Ata Tarar's misleading propaganda about the Pakistan Army's martyrs is regrettable," Qaiser said

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's senior leader Asad Qaiser Sunday censured federal ministers Khawaja Asif and Attaullah Tarar for criticising his party over alleged involvement in an "insulting campaign" against the martyrs of Pakistan Army and security forces personnel.

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Air Chief Zaheer Babar gets extension

Zaheer Babar is a four-star air force officer and 16th Chief of Air Staff

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday granted a one-year extension to Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu. The prime minister has sent the advisory of the the Air Chief Marshal's extension to President Asif Ali Zardari and granted him extension after his approval. Zaheer Babar is a four-star

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Disagreement between PML-N, PPP on the issue of privatization

A significant political negotiation looms over the distribution of the NFC (National Finance Commission) award, spurred by the IMF's push for a return to pre-18th amendment allocations

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Tensions are brewing as the coalition partners brace for a looming showdown over the contentious issue of privatizing key state-owned enterprises, including Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and the Steel Mills. This clash is expected to come to a head amid discussions surrounding the National Finance Commission Award (NFC), presenting yet another formidable challenge for the coalition. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leadership has taken a firm stance against the privatization of the national flag carrier, PIA. Their opposition is not solely rooted in concerns over potential declines in PIA's performance post-privatization, but rather in the fear of mass layoffs that could affect tens of thousands of employ-

ees. These employees, many of whom were hired during various tenures of the PPP government, now face the prospect of unemployment should privatization proceed unchecked. The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is facing significant challenges due to its excessive staffing levels and longstanding financial losses. This over-staffing has contributed substantially to the airline's inefficiency and financial woes over the years. Many positions within the organization are filled based on political affiliations rather than merit, resulting in a workforce that often lacks the skills and motivation necessary to drive the airline's growth. Furthermore, the PIA continues to grapple with the repercussions of being banned from operating in European countries. This ban was imposed following the revelation of fake degrees held by some Pakistani pilots

during the PTI government's tenure. This incident not only tarnished the reputation of the airline but also underscored broader issues of regulatory compliance and safety standards within the aviation industry. The Pakistan Steel Mills stands as a poignant example of a burdensome venture draining resources without yielding commensurate benefits. Despite its potential, the institution has become synonymous with inefficiency, with a significant portion of its workforce seemingly more focused on reaping perks than contributing to its productivity. The prevalent presence of employees affiliated with political parties such as the PPP and MQM further complicates matters, as any attempts to privatize or reform the Steel Mills are met with staunch resistance,

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PUC Chairman vows global action against Islamophobia

PUC urges to promote interfaith harmony, and nurture culture of love, tolerance, and coexistence against misinformation and hatred

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi said the Council is set to escalate its efforts on a global scale to foster interfaith dialogue and harmony. Addressing international media in connection with the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' the other day, he emphasized that Islamophobia poses a grave threat to Muslims worldwide. Ashrafi urged world powers to accelerate initiatives to eradicate Islamophobia, labeling it as a toxic barrier hindering interfaith harmony. He called upon the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other international bodies to champion initiatives aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination while nurtur-

ing a culture of love, tolerance, and coexistence. He stressed that Islam embodies peace, love, and tolerance of Allah Almighty and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ashrafi lamented the incitement of non-Muslims against Islam, attributing it to misinformation and hatred propagated against Islamic teachings. Recognizing Islamophobia as a crime, Ashrafi highlighted the designation of March 15 as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' by the United Nations, a milestone achieved through collaborative efforts involving Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other entities. Ashrafi emphasized the urgency of addressing global anti-Muslim sentiment, branding

discrimination as a significant threat to world peace. He underscored the need to clarify the distinction between Jihad and terrorism through dialogue, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which fueled widespread misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the Western world. The PUC, Ashrafi said, pledged to intensify its global endeavors for interfaith dialogue and harmony, culminating in an upcoming international conference, themed 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' in Islamabad after the holy month of Ramadan. He informed that the conference would be comprised all faith leaders as the invitations will be tendered to Imam of Khana-e-Kaba, Grand Imam of Palestine, Sheikh Al-Azhar, Pop Francis, Bishop of Canterbury and others.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman PAEI Khurshid Barlas presents bouquet to the Charge d'Affaires of the Indian Embassy Ms. Geetika Srivastava on the occasion of Iftar dinner.—DNA

SBP denies reports of issuing plastic notes

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has categorically denied reports of issuing plastic currency notes. A spokesperson for State Bank of Pakistan, refuted the news of issuing plastic notes has been denied. The State Bank officials termed as baseless the news of issuing new polymer notes (plastic notes) circulating on social media for the past few days and said that there is no plan or proposal under consideration to make the notes polymer (plastic notes). It should be noted that the news of issuing new plastic notes to prevent fake currency and giving a briefing to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation in this regard came out couple of days ago. SBP to Introduce Plastic Banknotes to Curb Counterfeiting Today, the ongoing discussions between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Earlier, the ongoing discussions between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding the upcoming loan installment are set to continue. The IMF representatives will be briefed on various issues, including reforms in the Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR), tax collection, and immediate measures to reduce tax collection for the current fiscal year. Furthermore, officials from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) will present their plan to introduce new plastic currency notes to tackle counterfeit money, a strategy already implemented in Far Eastern countries and Switzerland.

Nighaban Ramadan package distribution underway

DNA

RAWALPINDI : The administration was making all-out efforts to complete distribution of Nighaban Ramadan Package before 10th Ramadan, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak. He informed that over 188,377 ration bags had been distributed among the deserving people under Nighaban Ramadan Package in Rawalpindi Division. Engr. Aamir Khattak said that the citizens could register their complaints on helpline 080002345 regarding hoarding and Nighaban Ramadan package. He informed that over 56,954 deserving families in Attock, 28,122 in Jhelum, 41,015 in Chakwal and 3363 in Murree were provided the ration packages at their doorsteps. The number of the deserving families in Rawalpindi is high, he said adding, the au-

thorities had been directed that in case of shortage of staff or stock, help should be taken from other districts of the division. Under the Anti-Hoarding Act, 2020, those found guilty of hoarding would be punished with imprisonment of up to three years and heavy fines, he said. All the traders, shopkeepers, stockists and warehouse owners should get registered their stock information in the Deputy Commissioner's office within three days. Otherwise, their stock would be considered as hoarding and confiscated as per law, Engr. Aamir Khattak said. Engr. Aamir Khattak further informed that show cause notices were issued to 96 Price Magistrates on poor performance. As many as 70,000 registered deserving people were provided with ration bags under the Nighaban Ramadan package of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, while the remaining 35,000 would

get the package before the 10th Ramadan, said Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi, Dr Hassan Waqar Cheema, adding, the ration bags were being delivered to the needy people at their doorsteps. The DC said no negligence would be tolerated in this regard. He said that there was a mechanism devised to verify the deserving people and record the receiving chit, so the bags should not be given to anyone to distribute on behalf of the government. The work to distribute the ration bags is continuous, for which 70,000 deserving people were given the ration bags, while the total number of deserving people under the Benazir Income Support Programme and NADRA record is 105,000 in the district. He said the Punjab government had activated a helpline, 080002345, to resolve the complaints of citizens regarding hoarding and the Nighaban Ramadan package.



ISLAMABAD : Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari presenting flowers to Traders Welfare Association President Syed Altaf Hussain Shah on the occasion of his visit to Satara Market. On this occasion, former Senior Vice President Khalid Chaudhry, Former Vice President Nisar Ahmad Mirza and former Executive Member Zia Chaudhry are present.—DNA

Measles outbreak claims six lives in K-P

PESHAWAR: The measles outbreak across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has claimed the lives of six children this year. A total of 1,236 confirmed cases have been reported from different parts of the province in response to which the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) has embarked on a robust vaccination campaign to contain the outbreak. From January to March, EPI has successfully vaccinated 26,725 children in different areas of the province. Moreover, an additional 200,000 children have received their measles vaccinations during the Intensified Outreach Activity conducted from February 12 to 24 this year. Despite these efforts, however, challenges persist, particularly regarding the lack of isolation wards at major teaching hospitals in Peshawar, a deficiency which has accelerated the spread of measles among children and necessitated urgent action to address the issue. The EPI has reported a total of 3,538 suspected cases of measles, out of which 1,236 cases have been confirmed. Tragically, there have also been six confirmed deaths attributed to the disease across KP so far, with the most affected age group being children between the ages of two and five. The Director of EPI, Dr. Muhammad Arif Khan, has emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts with the FDI and partner organizations to vaccinate every child in the province against 12 dangerous diseases, including measles.—APP

BISE plans ban on low-grade inspectors in examinations centers

Grade 18 and above will be posted for male examination halls while females of grade 17 and above will be posted in female examination halls

SHAMIM SHAID

PESHAWAR : The decision to ban the appointment of examination inspectors to the officers of Grade-17 and less than Grade-18 scale in board examinations of the Department of Education. Serious reservations of the Education Department have come to light on the appointment of low-scale officers as inspectors, the letter issued by the Secretary BISE to all Educational Institutions, said. Some officers consider the duty of said inspection as entertainment and earning, said the letter. Officers pay duty as per their convenience or only to get financial benefits, the letters said. If some officers are appointed in examination, examination duty is an integral part of official duty under the instructions and orders of the controlling authority headed by the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Refusal to do so is liable to disciplinary action under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa E&D Rules 2011 would be taken. Grade 18 and above will be posted for male examination halls while

females of grade 17 and above will be posted in female examination halls, it has recommended. The recommendations in this connection has been sent for examination duty will be personally signed with the name and stamp of the office of the head of the institution. Education Department has directed all the heads of schools to follow the letter sent to them. It has always been the endeavor of the BISE to discourage malpractices and cheating in the examinations, which not only bring a bad name to the Board, Educational Institutions but also cause irreparable damage to the nation. In order to check such practices, it is essential to bring forward, efficient, hardworking and dedicated officers to work as inspectors during the conduct of examinations. The BISE also sorted the help of all the affiliated educational institutions to eradicate the said evils and creating a clean environment in the examinations, thus giving the legitimate rights to the deserving students, who would be above to lead the country honestly and efficiently in future, the letter says. It is painful to say that some

officers treat the said duty as recreation and perform it as their convenience or for getting monetary benefits only by disregarding its very basis noble aim. Moreover, some of the officers, if appointed in the examination centers against their choice, refuse to eleventh hour, which creates a lot of problems for the Board although the examination duty is compulsory part of the official duty under the directives of the orders of the Controlling Authority (Chief Minister) and refusal of the same is liable to disciplinary action under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa E&D Rules 2011. Furthermore, it also forces the board to see the services of available officers, irrespective of their Character or attitude. In view of the above the Board has requested to recommend the names of dedicated and efficient officers of Grade-18 and above (Male) and Grade-17 and above (female) for the examination duty. The recommendation is mandatory to sign by the Head of the Institutions, with Office Stamp and Name. The recommendations should reach by name to the Secretary Board up to March 31, 2024.

All tourist sites worldwide opening to boost GDP

Zahid Chanzeb on Sunday revealed that the tourism industry generates 30 billion dollars in revenue to the national economy

PESHAWAR : Zahid Chanzeb, Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture, Museums and Archeology, Sunday revealed that the tourism industry generates 30 billion dollars in revenue to the national economy, which is 6% of the country's GDP. "Nature has generously blessed our province with the world's best hill stations and tourist destinations and only focusing on this sector can revolutionize the economy of the province that can ameliorate the quality of life of the poor over here and the present PTI-led KP govt is quite serious to exploit all such vital sectors on crash grounds", he added. Trillion of rupees in income can be obtained from the tourism sector to spend on ameliorating a lot of the poor and contributing in restoration of the economy and infrastructure of the province, he maintained. He expressed this during his visit to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) headquarters in Peshawar cantt wherein he went around various sections and got acquainted of its working. An introductory meeting was also held on this occasion. Zahid Chanzeb while chairing the meeting said that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has made it clear in his first policy statement that all due rights and financial resources of the province will be obtained from the federation, while simultaneously the rich mineral and natural treasures existed on our soil will also be explored and exploited with renewed spirit, among which the tourism sector is at the top, he exhorted. "We will open the attractive tourist, ecological and religious places and archeological sites in the province to the tourists and researchers from across the globe so that our tourism industry flourishes with leaps and bounds opening new vistas of income and employment opportunities for our educated youth. Similarly, our such candid steps will also enhance our soft image in the comity of nations all over the world, he added. The CM's aide on Tourism and Culture clarified that in the recent past, terrorism and unrest had tarnished our national face in the international arena, however, he said that the matchless sacrifices of our valiant nation and armed forces have yielded fruits wherein peace and harmony reigns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as else in the country and we have to benefit from it.—DNA

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حکومت پنجاب

Govt urged to focus on improving human capital

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Ferozpur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) senior vice chairman Shahbaz Aslam has said that with a view to deal with fiscal challenges the government should work on the three-way strategy by implementing short-term goals that will help to keep generating resources for smooth fiscal operations, medium-term goals where the government should focus on financial inclusion, documenting the economy by designing a system where all businesses can

be registered and properly document their income including collection of sales tax, initiating the process of privatization as well as improving governance by introducing reforms in each sector. In a statement issued here today, the FRIA SVC said as a long-term goal, the country must focus on improving its human capital, and revamping IT sectors by extending facilities and providing all the requisite supports. He said that ever-increasing cost of production in the country is the real threat to the industry, as frequent upward revisions

in policy rate and continuous fluctuations in rupee against dollar are posing further threat to the economy. He observed that the aggressive economic measures, high borrowing rates, inflation, oppressive taxation and unstable currency have been negatively affecting running businesses, many of which have closed their operations, while the remaining are struggling for survival. In the same way, we also need to work on designing a comprehensive and proactive strategy to tackle challenges related to strengthening border

security and implementing effective and comprehensive Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing measures holding accountable and taking to task all those who are involved in illegitimate activities, undermining both our economy and national interests, he added. Shahbaz Aslam said that the government does not have any pragmatic plan to address this liability, apart from asking for more loans to repay existing debt. Likewise, the target for current financial year's exports is too low to meet the country's revenue.



ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador to Pakistan visits headquarters of the National Logistic Cell. The ambassador was briefed about the working of the organization. —DNA

Special squads making efforts to prevent one-wheeling

RAWALPINDI: Special squads constituted by City Traffic Police (CTP) are making all-out efforts to prevent one-wheeling during Ramazan ul Mubarak, said City Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan here Saturday. He informed that more than 65 traffic officials were deployed by forming 6 special squads to prevent one-wheeling during Ramadan. The squads would consist of seven DSPs/circle officers, six senior traffic wardens, 17 traffic wardens and 25 traffic assistants, the CTO said, adding that the squads would operate particularly from 4 am to 7 am and after Iftar to control one-wheeling on the city roads. Special pickets were also set up for important highways where action would be taken against one-wheelers without discrimination, he added. Taimoor Khan said that all available resources were being utilized to protect human lives and prevent one-wheeling. Special monitoring cell was also checking the mechanics who alter the motorcycles for one-wheeling, he said. The effective and comprehensive action was being taken against the violators. The CTO urged the parents to keep a special eye on their children and play their imperative role in controlling the illegal activity. He said that a bike or vehicle should not be given to a youngster so that they could be safe from fatal accidents. The CTO said that all resources were being utilized to maintain flow of traffic as well as to prevent one-wheeling.

Gwadar Expressway Phase II underway

GWADAR: As a practical step towards the expansion of Gwadar Expressway Phase II of Gwadar Port, the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), Ministry of Maritime Affairs has floated a tender to hire the services of consultancy firms (National & International) for survey and feasibility study for the execution of the project. The Gwadar Expressway Phase II, with a length of 10.5 kilometers, aims to connect the Gwadar Port with New Gwadar International Airport. Any company registered as a consultant with the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), with relevant experience, and providing an affidavit confirming non-involvement in any arbitration or litigation with any government agency or department can apply for the project. The consulting firms shall be engaged via quality and cost-based selection as per Public Procurement Regulatory Rules while single stage two envelope bidding procedures as per PPR rule 36(b) will be adopted. Companies can submit all required documents by April 17, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday. Gwadar Eastbay Expressway is the main artery of Gwadar Port through which the entire traffic of the port will flow. —DNA

Align interest rate with the regional economies: Saqib

He urged the government to take the stakeholders on board and chalk out strategies to devise long-term policies for lowering interest rate, cost of doing business and inflation

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has stressed upon Government to align the interest rate with the regional economies and reduce input costs to create a more competitive and conducive environment for domestic industries to grow and further flourish. Saqib Rafiq, President RCCI in a local TV interview said that

the rising interest rates, soaring inflation, and massive currency devaluation has eroded the purchasing power resulting in making the industries less competitive. It is very unfortunate that the Pakistan has the highest interest rate in the region at 22%, compared to Malaysia's at 3%, China's at 3.45%, India's at 6.5% and Bangladesh's at 6%. The manufacturing output of large industries shrank 15% year-on-year in June 2023 owing to

the high cost of doing business. In addition, the 12-month period of FY2023 also shows an overall decline of 10.26%, he added. RCCI President further commented that the high interest rates has discouraged the industries including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from making investments in new equipment, technology, or expansion projects. High interest has always had negative consequenc-

es for trade, commerce, industrial output, industrial expansion, and socioeconomic development, he added. "It would be hard to compete with countries in the region such as India, Bangladesh and China in the presence of high interest rates," he added. He urged the government to take the stakeholders on board and chalk out strategies to devise long-term policies for lowering interest rate, cost of doing business and inflation.

Residents gather for suhoor, celebrating Ramazan with family and friends

ISLAMABAD: In the spirit of Ramadan, the streets of twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad echoed with the laughter and chatter of families and friends gathering for suhoor. The city's diverse food points witnessed a bustling scene as residents indulged in a variety of delectable dishes, including the renowned nihari, barbecue, chicken karahi, and halwa puri, all emblematic of the Garrison city's rich cu-

linary heritage. As dawn broke, families flocked to their favorite food spots, eager to partake in the pre-dawn meal before beginning their fast. Amongst the throngs of people, the atmosphere was filled with joy and camaraderie, as residents expressed their delight in celebrating Ramazan with loved ones. Talking to APP, Abdul Mateen, a local resident, commented, "There's something special about coming to-

gether with family and friends for suhoor during Ramazan. It's not just about the food; it's about the bonds we share and the sense of community that this month fosters." Echoing Rahman's sentiments, Ayat Fatima, another attendee, remarked, "Ramadan holds a special place in our hearts, and gathering for suhoor with our loved ones amplifies the blessings of this sacred month. It's a time for re-

lection, gratitude, and togetherness. The tradition of communal suhoor holds deep significance for Pindi's residents, symbolizing unity, generosity, and the importance of shared experiences. As the month progresses, the vibrant vibes of Ramazan are expected to continue, culminating in the joyous celebrations of Eid-ul-Fitr. With the aroma of traditional delicacies lingering in the air and the sounds of laughter filling the streets, the twin cities embrace the spirit of Ramazan wholeheartedly, embodying the essence of community and compassion that defines this auspicious time of the year.

City comes together to provide free Iftar meals during Ramazan

RAWALPINDI, Mar 16 (APP): The traditional activity of providing free charity meals during the holy month of Ramazan to the needy continues in the city, as traders communities, individuals, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) come together to serve Iftar meals. Various 'Dastarkhwan' and 'Langars' (free Iftar food spots) have been set up in different parts of the city, with banners and posters displayed on main roads near the prescribed locations to invite those fasting during Ramadan. One large free food spot has been set up in Namak Mandi, Raja Bazar area, where a considerable number of people including labourers and daily wagers are being served with food at Iftar time. "This is only to seek Allah Almighty's pleasure, a way to show our compassion to those who are needy," said Faisal Malik, a cloth shopkeeper, emphasizing the importance of serving those in need. Similar arrangements have been made by the business community in Purana Qila and College Road to serve deserving people, while another dastarkhwan is active near Benazir Shaheed Hospital on Murree Road, catering to both laborers and travelers. In addition to community-based dastarkhwan arrangements, NGOs and welfare organizations have also organized daily Iftar dinners at their prescribed locations to support those in need. A volunteer at a Langar Khana mentioned the increase in the number of individuals attending the meals each year, noting that the economic situation has led to more deserving visitors during the holy month of Ramazan.

Necessary to give some relief to the exporters

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Sunday that the demand for dollars in the market should remain balanced. He said that a balanced exchange rate increases confidence in the market, which is very important. He added that maintaining the dollar's value is necessary to maintain the current balance between imports and exports. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that a change in the value of the dollar affects the import and export sector, which disturbs the business environment. The business leader noted that the exporters get worried when the dollar becomes expensive. When the dollar becomes cheap, the imports start to increase, which

causes the deficits to rise. Both these situations affect the business environment. He said that the dollar's depreciation will increase the trade and current account deficit, which has been controlled with incredible difficulty. The seven-month current account deficit has been reduced to one billion dollars, and the federal government has to pay 24 billion dollars in debt servicing in the current fiscal year, so no risk can be taken. He said that exporters are currently facing problems. They have to use the most expensive electricity in the region. Gas has become more costly by 300%, the interest rate for them is up to 25%, and fuel is also expensive. The government had proposed to make electricity cheaper for the export sector, which the IMF rejected. In the current situation, finding another way to relieve the exporters has become necessary.

Youth unite in declaration of love, unity for nation

ISLAMABAD: In a powerful display of patriotism and solidarity, the youth of Pakistan expressed their unwavering devotion to their country, emphasizing the profound bond of brotherhood and unity that unites them as one people. Drawing upon the metaphor of a tree with numerous branches but anchored by a singular root, the youth have eloquently articulated their role as the foundation of Pakistan's strength and resilience. Despite the diversity of languages and cultures across the nation, their message remains consistent and resolute. "We are the roots of Pakistan, the foundation upon which our nation stands," remarked Ayan Babar, a college student from Islamabad. "Our diversity is our strength, and our unity is our power." Acknowledging the vibrant tapestry of colors that adorn their nation, the youth have celebrated the unity that binds them together as a cohesive whole. Through their collective efforts, they aspire to uphold the values of tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for all. "Our differences are what make Pakistan beautiful," stated Sadia Ali, a young activist from Rawalpindi. "But it is our shared love for our country that truly defines us as one people." In their public declarations, the youth have offered fervent prayers for the prosperity and well-being of Pakistan. They have invoked divine blessings upon their homeland, expressing a collective hope to see its cherished symbols – the flag, the moon, and the stars – forever filled with pride and joy. "Our love for Pakistan knows no bounds," declared Bilal Ahmed, a university student. "We pray for its eternal prosperity and stand united in our commitment to its future." In a poignant expression of unity, the youth have resoundingly proclaimed a single sentiment that echoes from the depths of their souls: "Long Live Pakistan." This solemn declaration symbolizes their unwavering dedication to the long-lasting prosperity and unity of their beloved homeland. As their voices unite in harmony, the youth of Pakistan stand as a testament to the enduring spirit of love, resilience, and unity that defines their nation. Through their collective efforts, they vow to continue working tirelessly towards a brighter and more prosperous future for all. —APP

CTO urges motorists to display patience during Ramazan

RAWALPINDI: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Taimoor Khan has appealed to motorists to display patience, follow the rules and avoid rash driving during Ramazan, particularly at Iftar time. "As the time for Iftar approaches near, everyone on the road wants to reach destination on time and in the process, they may opt for rash driving which often causes fatal road accidents," he said while talking to APP here Sunday. The CTO said that all traffic police wardens have been directed not to leave their points of duty at Iftar time, irrespective of the traffic load. He warned that strict action will be taken against those who were found negligent in performing their duties. To ensure smooth traffic flow during Ramazan, additional traffic wardens have been deployed across the city, Khan informed. He further stated that citizens can register complaints or seek traffic updates by dialling the phone number 051-927-2616. In essence, Khan's message underscores the importance of collective responsibility in ensuring road safety during this sacred time, urging motorists to exercise patience and prudence on the roads. —APP

Gwadar North Free Zone: Water supply project 60% complete

DNA

GWADAR: A project to establish a water supply network in the Gwadar North Free Zone is nearly 60 percent complete. This significant development aims to address the immediate needs of companies eager to commence operations within the current year. The project is divided into two parts. The first segment, being overseen by the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), extends from the dams to the outer boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone. The second segment, soon to be initiated by the China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC), will run from the inner boundary wall of the Gwadar North Free Zone to the designated areas for factories. Following a competitive bidding process, GPA awarded the contract to Saleh Techno Company. This company is in the process of installing water pipelines from two primary sources: dam water, including from the Sawar and Shadi Kor dams, and a newly constructed, Chinese-funded 1.2 MGD desalination water plant. A GPA official told Gwadar Pro that the cost of laying the water supply network from both dams to the boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone is Rs 110 million, with an estimated completion date in the first week of May. Chairman of GPA, Passand Khan Buledi, has played a crucial role in securing approval for water and power projects within the government's 2023-24 budget. In addition to the water supply project, GPA has also approved funding for electricity supply from the Deep Sea Port Grid Station to the North Free Zone.

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US strategy in West Asia

AFTER Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the Pentagon's promise to protect the Israeli occupation from other fronts has seen the US military itself being targeted. When taking into account the facts on the ground over the past six months, a general consensus may have been reached to justify a strong argument that the United States lacks any coherent strategy toward the events unfolding in West Asia. On the other hand, the Axis of Resistance appears to have emerged with the vital element of wisdom in confronting the genocidal Israeli war on Gaza and making sure that this genocide will not persist under its watch. The US and its proxy in the region, the Israeli regime, lack the foresight to grasp the developments made both before and after Operation al-Aqsa Flood by the Palestinian Resistance in Gaza. It is difficult to argue Washington has a coherent strategy toward West Asia without revisiting US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's remarkably lengthy article for Foreign Affairs magazine in early October, which made it abundantly clear that President Joe Biden's focus has swung to Russia and China because the West Asia region has become "quieter than it has been for decades." President Biden's "disciplined approach frees up resources for other global priorities, reduces the risk of new Middle Eastern conflicts," he wrote. Perhaps the most embarrassing segment of the 7,000-word twaddle was Sullivan's, who emphasized that "we have de-escalated crises in Gaza and restored direct diplomacy between the parties after years of its absence." Nothing could have been further from the truth. The essay presented an astonishing level of ignorance on the part of Washington. The same ignorance that enabled the Israeli occupation to turn the besieged Gaza Strip into a pressure cooker for 16 years, waiting to explode at any moment. And if Gaza were to explode, what ramifications would that have for the region? Five days after Sullivan assured us that the Biden White House has "de-escalated crises in Gaza", Hamas launched the largest operation against the Israeli occupation since 1948, an operation that essentially sent a message to Sullivan asking him "On what planet you are living on?" Also, shortly after Sullivan declared that the West Asia region was "quieter than it has been for decades", the US found itself stuck between a rock and a hard place bombing Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. If anything, the US National Security Advisor offered a unique insight into just how ill-informed the Biden administration was on West Asia, despite repeated warnings that the heinous Israeli crimes against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, the occupied West Bank, and at al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied al-Quds was on the verge of spiraling out of control. As Washington was busy pumping weapons to Ukraine in a bid to prolong an avoidable war with Russia while stocking up tensions between China and Taiwan, all so US arms and energy companies could reap the profits, the Palestinians were planning to avoid their extinction at the hands of a fascist government in "Tel Aviv". Sullivan's article was actually so awkward that Foreign Affairs magazine asked him to change it, but the original text can still be found on the internet.

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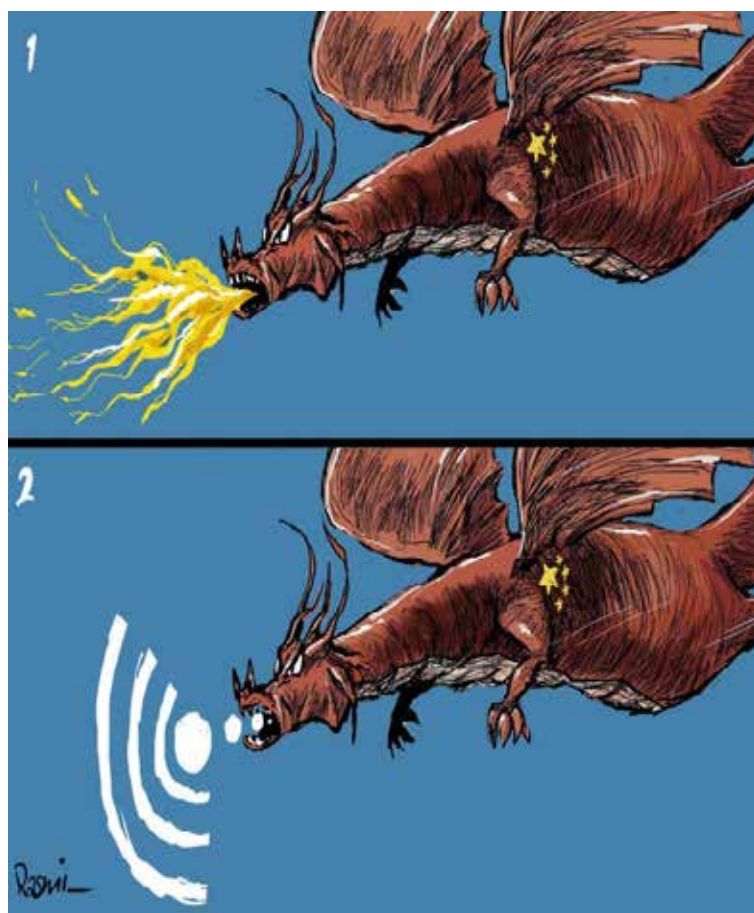
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Ukraine's armed forces are degrading

MARCH 2024 marks the beginning of the third year of war provoked by the member countries of the NATO military alliance and their Ukraine proxy against Russia. The past number of months have seen a slow and steady retreat by Ukraine's armed forces. Its defense lines supposedly established along the front lines east and south of the Dnieper River in past months were either not adequately constructed or were not built at all. People's deputy in the Ukraine legislature Serhiy Rakhmanin wrote on March 6 that Ukrainian authorities cannot decide who should finance the construction of defensive fortifications: the central government, local authorities, or specific military units? In reality, there are too few funding sources to pay for fortifications and too few support workers to build them. People's deputy Oleksandr Dubynsky, a former associate of current president Volodymyr Zelensky, wrote on Telegram on March 5 that fortifications have only now begun to be built in front line areas, citing the example of the Sumy region. The city of Sumy (pop. 275,000) is app. 200 km north and west of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Kharkiv is located less than 50 km from the Russian border. Dubynsky writes that although Zelensky gave an order as early as February 1, 2023 to construct new fortification lines in the defense-contested eastern regions of coup Ukraine, that was more than one year ago and it was all a show. Everything was said and done on television in order to convince the Ukraine population and Western allies that the defensive works were being carried out. He writes, "During the past year, fortifications were being built only on the airwaves of the president's daily 'telethon' broadcast [situation update]. Similarly, hundreds of enemy airplanes, thousands of enemy tanks and hundreds of thousands of enemy infantry were being destroyed. It is therefore entirely unclear how Russia could attack anywhere on the eastern front. If the enemy were watching the 'telethon', they would have abandoned their positions a long time ago and taken flight." Another deputy from Zelensky's party, Maryana Bezuglaya, wrote last month in the self-described 'anti-corruption' media outlet Antikor that there were almost no fortifications constructed in and around the cities of Severodonetsk, Lysychansk, Bakhmut and or Avdeevka recently lost to Russian forces by Ukraine. She notes wryly that such fortification did exist there, but only on paper. "The generals did not plan or control events, although, of course, the official reports say otherwise." According to Bezuglaya, if any fortifications were built, it was for the purpose of pleasing superiors, not particularly for military needs. She writes that in the city of Bakhmut, taken by Russian forces in May 2023, pillboxes were placed at "the western entrance to the city, so that the bosses could see them." But, as she explained, the Russians forces that eventually recaptured the city did so from the east. 'Fortification projects' cited by military and political officials in Ukraine have often seen their funding disappear into private hands. No surveys of the real attitudes of Ukrainians are available. Those surveys that have been published cannot be trusted at all because few people will tell pollsters they truly think, fearing arrest or rushed conscription.

Geopolitical conflicts: A quest to understand the struggle of influence

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



In the context of South Asia, the evolving Pak-Russia relationship presents a paradigm shift with geopolitical ramifications.

Traditionally viewed as adversaries, both nations are recalibrating their ties to capitalize on shared interests and regional stability.

Pakistan seeks strategic diversification amid its evolving relationship with the United States, while Russia aims to counterbalance alignments between India and the West. The multifaceted dynamics of this emerging...

THE book "Geopolitical Conflicts: A Quest to Understand the Struggle of Influence" explore the depth of the geopolitical theories forms the foundation for comprehending the intricate interplay between geography, politics and international relations. We all know that the "Geopolitics", as a discipline, seeks to unravel the complex interactions that shape the behavior of nations on the global stage. It involves thorough analyses of the relationships among countries, the distribution of resources and power, and the impact of global and regional factors on political decision-making. Essential considerations encompass borders, natural resources, military capabilities and economic strength, converging to determine a nation's strategic interests and foreign policy. Additionally, historical, cultural and ideological factors are incorporated into geopolitical analyses, recognizing their profound influence on international relations. Similarly, we all, as the student of political and social sciences, realize that the Geopolitical theories serve as frameworks facilitating an understanding of why nations cooperate or compete and unveil the stability or volatility of specific regions.

During describing distinct geopolitical approaches and theories, this book

also looks at one prominent geopolitical theory, the Heartland Theory posited by Sir Halford Mackinder. This theory propounds that control over Eastern Europe, or the Heartland, translates to global dominance. Despite its historical significance, the theory faces limitations in the contemporary era due to technological advancements and shifts in global power dynamics. Likewise, this book also finds another seminal theory, Sea Power, which emphasizes a state's influence derived from its ability to utilize the sea for military and civilian purposes. Alfred Thayer Mahan's insights, in this regard, underscore the significance of naval power in shaping geopolitical dynamics, offering a lens to analyze historical struggles and predict future conflicts. Furthermore, the Rimland Theory introduced by Nicholas Spykman delineates the coastal regions around the Eurasian landmass as pivotal geopolitical areas, challenging the centrality of the Heartland and reinforcing the importance of maritime influence. Moving beyond theoretical frameworks, the discourse extends to contemporary geopolitical issues, such as the AUKUS alliance and its implications in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. AUKUS, a trilateral security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and

the United States, signifies a strategic alignment aimed at bolstering security, technological capabilities and intelligence sharing. However, this alliance introduces geopolitical challenges, potentially fueling a Cold War mentality and exacerbating ideological divisions.

In the context of South Asia, the evolving Pak-Russia relationship presents a paradigm shift with geopolitical ramifications. Traditionally viewed as adversaries, both nations are recalibrating their ties to capitalize on shared interests and regional stability. Pakistan seeks strategic diversification amid its evolving relationship with the United States, while Russia aims to counterbalance alignments between India and the West. The multifaceted dynamics of this emerging partnership reflect a broader geopolitical chessboard where states navigate opportunities and challenges in pursuit of national interests.

In essence, the evolving landscape of global geopolitics demands deep analyses and critical examinations of theoretical frameworks and contemporary alliances. This book tries to unveil these complexities, offering a scholarly journey through geopolitical theories, major power dynamics, and emerging trends that define the complex embroidery of our ever-changing world.

The West needs to rethink its strategy in the Sahel

Hafed Al-Ghwell

The disillusion among the public is compounded by the glaring spotlight cast on unforced failures of governance, which is intensified through the lens of social media by an increasingly educated and engaged youth demographic. Public angst in turn fuels relentless demands for accountability and transparency, given the acute scarcity of resources, high levels of poverty, lack of basic services, increased competition for natural resources, intercommunal tensions, and mass displacement. When this fails to address or assuage long-term grievances, what comes next is a marked...

WEST Africa and the Sahel are experiencing a disturbing trend of political instability, coups, and the rise of violent extremist groups. The region is plagued by serious challenges, including weak governance, economic decline, and insecurity. The persistence and growing strength of harmful actors in the Sahel, the area that runs across Africa between the Sahara to the north and the savannas of Sudan to the south, threaten to exacerbate the crisis and spread mayhem across the continent. It is raising concerns that West Africa, despite its purported commitment to democracy and stability, is settling into a familiar pattern of repeated failures and inaction, resulting in entrenched insecurity across the Sahel. The region, stretching from Senegal in the west to Eritrea in the east, has long faced severe security challenges. A confluence of factors, from weak and illegitimate governance to the worsening effects of climate change, are contributing to the rise of violent extremism. Left unchecked, agitators in the Sahel appear eager to expand south toward coastal West African countries, raising fears that they will eventually establish footholds there. Such expansions will likely be facilitated by a lack of foreign involvement and increased cooperation among malign actors with shared interests, such as extremist groups and transnational criminal organizations. Far from being immune to this tumult in the Sahel, many governments in neighboring countries face a potent cocktail of civil-military frictions, escalating public discontent, and a crop of foreign partners all-too content to overlook military rule in favor of bolstering narrowly defined security interests.

The gravity of these conditions cannot be overstated; they leave an already fragile region in a precarious position, ripe for the picking by opportunistic actors. Future coup leaders will boldly calculate that the intense competition and prevailing power plays among global actors and increasingly assertive middle powers can provide a buffer, easing any international backlash they might face after a power grab. This incessant drumbeat of coups past, present, and future underscores a regional crisis that is neither transient nor superficial but rather symptomatic of deep-rooted grievances and a sense of disillusionment with political processes that have either stalled or failed to deliver on their promises. This pattern of instability, fueled by stagnant economies, persistent insecurity, and a crisis of legitimacy,

begs an urgent examination of the West's role in all this, and its heavily security-oriented approaches to challenges that are fundamentally political and social in nature. Within this context, coups in West Africa and the Sahel, four of which have been successfully executed since 2020, do not emerge from a vacuum but are reflective of broader regional disenchantment. Yet it is the specter of insecurity in particular that has served as a rallying cry for military juntas, which justify their usurpation of power on the grounds that elected governments have failed to protect and provide for their citizens. Such claims resonate not only in the barracks but on the streets, where often significant public support for coups reflects a populace more concerned with the outcomes of governance than the form it takes. The disillusion among the public is compounded by the glaring spotlight cast on unforced failures of governance, which is intensified through the lens of social media by an increasingly educated and engaged youth demographic. Public angst in turn fuels relentless demands for accountability and transparency, given the acute scarcity of resources, high levels of poverty, lack of basic services, increased competition for natural resources, intercommunal tensions, and mass displacement. When this fails to address or assuage long-term grievances, what comes next is a marked tolerance for violent excesses perpetrated by opportunistic actors. Such violent decline into permanent insecurity is also a reflection of negative sentiments toward perceived neocolonial influences, which have resulted in fraught relationships with former colonial powers, in particular France. Despite having the advantage of enduring historical ties to the region, authorities in the country have been unable to halt the rise of anti-French sentiment stemming from unmet expectations for economic prosperity and stability. A few Sahelian and West African countries are in the process of pivoting away from former colonial hegemony, denoting an irreversible shift in alliances and partnerships at the expense of the underlying pillars of democracy: robust institutions, rule of law, and economic development. By fueling these disconcerting developments, countries such as Russia have seized on the opportunities afforded by such strife to provide both rhetorical backing and, in some instances, substantive support to local actors contemplating regime change. Such calculated opportunism among external forces cleverly exploits worsening vulnerabilities and stokes the fires of instability to erode the capacities of threatened countries to guard against violent takeovers and maintain the integrity of their

hard-fought democratic institutions.

Even more frustratingly, several Western partners have implicitly endorsed these recurrent coups, prioritizing their own core security interests in the region. Schemes designed to stem flows of migrants, contain geopolitical adversaries, and secure counterterrorism gains, while critical, have come at the expense, alarmingly, of longer-term investments in democracy and governance. This myopic focus sets a dangerous precedent, fueling a cycle of instability in the region and inadvertently propagating a "coup contagion" that has the potential to resonate far beyond West Africa and the Sahel, potentially sowing seeds of discord even in North Africa. The subtext is clear: The international community is not merely a passive observer in West Africa's current crisis and the subsequent contagion that will likely endanger North African countries as well. It remains a fractious participant that refuses to reform its approach, thereby enabling mounting crises that are beginning to cause regional institutions to fray, hampering their ability to develop effective regional security responses. Last year, for instance, juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formed an alliance to resist the pressure they were coming under from the Economic Community of West African States, historically one of the most consistent organizations in efforts to uphold anti-coup norms in the region. Regional organizations such as this can prove instrumental in their roles as convening, coordinating, and overseeing agents that can provide help to countries such as Ivory Coast, where jihadist groups have been steadily encroaching on its borders. Crippling ECOWAS will undoubtedly result in coastal West Africa slowly becoming the next Sahel as a result of persistent political upheaval, with the potential for crises to spill over into sub-Saharan Africa and north toward the Maghreb. The West's historical predilection for security-centric interventions, at the expense of support for genuine democratic governance and efforts to address the root causes of economic and political disenchantment, might not only fail to stem the tide of unrest but could, indeed, exacerbate the very conditions that cause the erosion of democratic institutions. In the face of this burgeoning crisis, a recalibration of policies and priorities is required, with an emphasis on long-term, structural support for democracy that transcends mere election observers or military engagement.

Briefs

Disagreement
between
PML-N, PPP...

FROM PAGE 01
effectively thwarting much-needed efforts for revitalization and efficiency enhancement. One plausible explanation for the PPP's decision not to join the cabinet could be its reluctance to be in a position where opposing the privatization process would be challenging. Anticipating this scenario, the PPP may opt to exert pressure on the PML-N government in the near future, leveraging their awareness that the government's stability hinges significantly on PPP support. This strategic move could potentially empower the PPP to influence policy directions more effectively, using their political leverage to shape governance outcomes in alignment with their priorities. A significant political negotiation looms over the distribution of the NFC (National Finance Commission) award, spurred by the IMF's push for a return to pre-18th amendment allocations. Prior to the 18th amendment, 47.5 percent of the federal government's total revenues were distributed among the provinces. However, post-amendment, this volume was raised to 50.5 percent, reflecting a significant increase. The IMF contends that this shift has led to an imbalance, asserting that the provinces are receiving an excessive share and advocating for a rationalization of the distribution. Given that the PPP played a pivotal role in championing the 18th amendment, it is poised to resist any alterations to the NFC award. Their historical stance on decentralization and provincial autonomy aligns with the increased allocations to the provinces post-amendment. Consequently, the PPP is likely to vehemently oppose any attempts to roll back these allocations, viewing it as a regression in the devolution of powers and resources to the provinces.

'Most
terrorist
attacks...'

FROM PAGE 01
In the presser today, Asif said some facilitators of the terrorists have been traced, and Pakistan has raised the issue with the Afghanistan government, according to Radio Pakistan. He also reiterated that "those people [foreign national] who do not have valid documents would not be allowed to live in Pakistan". Earlier today, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar accused Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) social media team of being behind the accounts targeting Pakistan Army and the soldiers who were martyred in North Waziristan a day earlier, warning action against them. Tarar, while speaking about the terror incident, said that Pakistan Army, the police and people have made sacrifices in the war against terrorism. "I condemn the insulting social media campaign launched by a political party against the martyrs and their sacrifices," said the information minister while speaking during a presser in Lahore. Without naming the PTI, the defence minister said those behind the social media campaign against martyrs must be "linked with the terrorists".

Air Chief
Zaheer
Babar...

FROM PAGE 01
air force officer and 16th Chief of Air Staff. He took over command of the air force on March 19, 2021, from his predecessor ACM Mujahid Anwar Khan. It may be noted that Air Chief Zaheer Babar held a meeting with newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif few days ago and discussed matters of national importance.

Army
committed to
unrelenting
fight...

FROM PAGE 01
The bodies of Shuhada have been taken to their native home towns where they will be laid to rest with full military honour.

HBL PSL 9 Grand Finale
IU, MS to struggle for
title in grand finale today

The grand finale, slated to take place at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi today

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

KARACHI: The stage is set for an electrifying showdown as Multan Sultans and Islamabad United gear up to battle it out for the coveted title of HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9. The grand finale, slated to take place at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi today, March 18, promises to be a spectacle of cricketing brilliance, as two formidable teams lock horns in pursuit of championship glory. Having emerged victorious in their respective encounters, both Multan Sultans and Islamabad United are primed to unleash their full arsenal of talent and strategic prowess on the cricketing arena. Islamabad United, a two-time champion, secured their berth in the final by triumphing over Peshawar Zalmi in a thrilling clash, clinching victory by five wickets in the nail-biting eliminator two held on Saturday night. Meanwhile, Multan Sultans stormed into the grand finale with an emphatic display of dominance, dispatching Peshawar Zalmi by seven wickets in a commanding performance during the qualifier stage. Buoyed



by their recent success and bolstered by a formidable lineup of players, Multan Sultans are poised to seize the opportunity to claim their maiden PSL title in what promises to be a fiercely contested showdown. The finale fixture not only holds the promise of enthralling cricketing action but also carries the weight of crowning one team as the undisputed champion of HBL PSL 9. With both sides leaving no stone unturned

in their quest for supremacy, anticipation is rife among fans and enthusiasts, who eagerly await the pulsating clash under the floodlights of the National Bank Stadium. For Islamabad United, the prospect of adding another title to their illustrious legacy serves as a driving force, with the team's rich history and pedigree in the tournament lending them an air of confidence as they prepare to battle it out on the grand stage

once again. Led by experienced campaigners and bolstered by a blend of seasoned veterans and emerging talents, Islamabad United are poised to showcase their championship pedigree and stake their claim to the coveted trophy. On the other hand, Multan Sultans, buoyed by their recent surge in form and propelled by a wave of momentum, are determined to etch their name in the annals of PSL history by clinching their maiden title. With a well-balanced squad and a blend of firepower in both batting and bowling departments, Multan Sultans present a formidable challenge to their opponents, as they aim to script a fairy-tale ending to their campaign in the ninth edition of the tournament. As the cricketing fraternity braces itself for the culmination of yet another thrilling season of HBL PSL, all eyes will be on the National Bank Stadium tomorrow night, where Multan Sultans and Islamabad United will lock horns in a battle of skill, determination, and sheer grit. With the title hanging in the balance, the stage is set for an unforgettable finale, as two worthy contenders vie for supremacy in the pinnacle of Pakistan's premier T20 extravaganza.

Pakistan to face Jordan in
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers

PFF names squad for FIFA World Cup Qualifiers Round 2 against Jordan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) announced the final national men's squad for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifier Round 2 matches against Jordan on Thursday, with diaspora players set to join the team from Monday. Pakistan will lock horns with Jordan at the Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad on Mar. 21 followed by an away fixture in Jordan on Mar. 26.

In October 2023, the Pakistan men's football team beat Cambodia 1-0 to win their first ever FIFA World Cup qualifier in Islamabad. Pakistan subsequently lost 4-0 to Saudi Arabia in the second round. "The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) named a final squad for the forthcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 Qualifier Round 2 matches against Jordan,



scheduled to be held at Jinnah Stadium, Islamabad on 21st March followed by an away game in Jordan on 26 March," the PFF said in a statement. It said the week-long camp for the Jordan fixtures will be relocated from Lahore to Islamabad on Sunday. A total of 36 teams, grouped into nine groups of four teams each, are compet-

ing to progress through to the third round of the qualifiers. The top two from each group from the second round will head into the third round, where 18 nations will be split into three groups of six. From there, the top two of each group will secure their spot at FIFA World Cup 26. Pakistan men's football team coach Stephen Constantine on Saturday ac-

knowledged that Jordan was one of the best sides in Asia but vowed Pakistan would not "lay down" in front of their opponents. "We have very little time to prepare for such a big game. And unfortunately, we are going to play one of the best teams [Jordan] in Asia on 21st March," Constantine said. "We will fight against Jordan and not lay down." **Squad:** Goalkeepers: Yousuf Butt (D), Saqib Hanif, Abdul Basit and Hassan Ali, Defenders: Easah Suliman (D), Abdullah Iqbal (D), Mamoon Musa, Haseeb Khan, Mohammad Saddam, Mohammad Sohail, Omer Rao, Mohammad Fazal (D) and Mohammad Adeel, Midfielders: Rahis Nabi (D), Harun Hamid (D), Alamgir Ghazi, Rajab Ali, Ali Uzair, Shayekh Dost and Abdul Samad (D) **Forwards:** Fared Ullah, Waleed Khan, Imran Kayani (D) and Adeel Younis.

Shahid Afridi wants
Amir to take back
int'l retirement

ISLAMABAD: Former Pakistani captain Shahid Afridi has commented on the possibility of Quetta Gladiators' pace bowler Mohammad Amir reversing his retirement from international cricket. Afridi, while talking to a local news channel, praised Amir for his bowling skills and rated him among the best pace bowlers in the country. "Amir can easily make his way into the lineup of the Pakistan team even today. He falls in the category of Haris Rauf, Naseem Shah, and Shaheen Afridi," said Shahid Afridi. "There is still cricket left in Amir and he should play for Pakistan." Amir, who shockingly announced retirement from international cricket back in 2020 at the age of 28, claimed ten wickets in nine matches during the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine. Gladiators' wicket-keeper batter Sarfaraz Ahmed also voiced the same sentiments last month during the early stages of the PSL 9. Ahmed acknowledged the value Amir brings to T20 cricket in an interview and expressed confidence in the latter's abilities. - DNA

Conor McGregor
provides update on
UFC comeback

LONDON: UFC star Conor McGregor provided an update on his much-awaited comeback to the octagon stating that the negotiations are underway. McGregor was expected to make his UFC return this year but that couldn't happen as Dana White announced Alex Pereira vs. Jamahal Hill in the main event of UFC 300. However, the Notorious is now counting the days on his return and stated that he is eager to mark his return to the octagon. "I'm eager for [a return]," McGregor told Swedish outlet, Movezine. "We're in the first quarter of 2024, there's still a good chunk of the year left." "I've got two fights left on my contract," Conor McGregor explained. "Negotiations are ongoing." Remember, the last time McGregor was in the octagon was during his fight against Dustin Poirier after which he spent almost two years out of action following a nasty leg break at UFC 264 in July 2021. There were rumours that McGregor may face Michael Chandler at UFC 296 as the two spent the better part of last year having off-field bouts with one another but that didn't happen as the Notorious failed to meet UFC's policy of six months of mandatory drug testing after which White announced Leon Edwards vs. Colby Covington will headline the final UFC show of the year. - Agencies

Babar Azam opens up on loss
against Islamabad United

KARACHI: Peshawar Zalmi skipper second eliminator of the ongoing match, the star batter blamed his loss against United. "I think we very bad. We weren't up to the mark edging that his side was initially ahead to Imad Wasim and Haider Ali for how crucial in United's victory. Taking to so gratitude to the fans for their support stronger". During the match, United with only 21 runs on the board as they opener Martin Gupthill briefly fought Ayub, before being dismissed by Khurpoverplay. Gupthill remained a notable off 21 balls, including five boundaries over six overs, Azam Khan partnered batted sensibly for around five overs of the 11th over, hampering United's win. This is United's first PSL final since March 18 at the same venue. Earlier, Saim Haris' 40, propelled Zalmi to 185/5. Naof 3/30 in his four overs, while Shadab

Babar Azam has opened up on his side's defeat against Islamabad United in the ninth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 9). Expressing his views after side's "ordinary" bowling performance in the later half of the second innings for were in a good position after 10 overs. But our bowling after that was match," Babar said while acknowledging bowling performance. "Credit on their partnership which proved Twitter, the 29-year-old expressed team's commitment to "come back losing three wickets within four overs down Zalmi's 186-run target. In-form scoring 22 runs in an over against Saim Shehzad on the final delivery of the batting contributor for the United, scoring 34 runs and a six. With the scoreboard showing 50/4 with Imad in an attempt to stage a recovery. The pair until Luke Wood dismissed Azam (22) on the last delivery recovery efforts but Imad and Haider guided them to a thrilling 2018 with the team set to lock horns with Multan Sultans on Ayub's flamboyant 73-run innings, coupled with Mohammad seem Shah led the bowling attack for United, claiming figures and Obed McCoy chipped in with one wicket each. - DNA

Alcaraz faces Medvedev for Indian Wells title
Spaniard beat Italian Sinner 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 to book final spot

SPORTS DESK

INDIAN WELLS: Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz handed Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner his first defeat of 2024 to set up an Indian Wells final against Daniil Medvedev. Alcaraz's 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory ended Sinner's 19-match winning streak, including a 16-0 start to the year, and ensures Alcaraz will remain No. 2 in the world rankings next week. "To be able to end something like this, it's incredible for me," Spain's Alcaraz said of busting the Italian's streak. Sunday's final against fourth-seeded Russian Medvedev is a repeat of last year's championship decider. Medvedev also had to fight back in a 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over 17th-ranked American Tommy Paul. In the final he'll be out to thwart Alcaraz's bid to become the first repeat Indian Wells ATP champion since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-2016. Alcaraz and Sinner's semi-final was disrupted by a three-hour rain delay at 2-1 in the first set but proved worth the wait as the 20-something stars put on a show. "Matches with Jannik are always special,"

Alcaraz said. "We know we have to play at our highest level to win. We have to put magic on the court, unbelievable points and for the crowd it is also wonderful." Sinner quickly seized the initiative when play resumed, winning four straight games to pocket the first set. He saved the only

break point he faced, and gained the insurance break for a 5-1 lead, pouncing on a short ball for a stinging cross-court passing winner on break point. Alcaraz turned it around in the second set with a savvy change of style, backing up to give himself more time on the returns and gradually

working his way into the match. He broke Sinner with a deep volley winner for a 3-1 lead and held for 4-1 in a game that had fans on their feet cheering a thrilling rally at the net. He saved break points in the seventh and ninth games before sealing the set with a drop-shot winner. "I stayed strong mentally," Alcaraz said. "I think that's a really important part in this game." "This kind of match, a set down playing against someone that's playing an unbelievable game - I'm really happy with the things I've done. "I changed my style a little bit, I changed my game a little bit, and I think it worked very, very well," said Alcaraz, who is chasing his first title since winning Wimbledon last year. Sinner's mistakes were multiplying in the third set and Alcaraz broke in the third game, delivering a high backhand volley to end another scrambling rally. World number three Sinner, who had vowed to get a ball back, came up shaking out his right arm and rubbing his elbow. He suddenly was powerless to stop Alcaraz, who won five straight games, clinching the match with a forehand winner. It was the second straight year that Alcaraz stopped Sinner in the Indian Wells semi-finals.

Tarar
condemns
PTIs...

FROM PAGE 01
with terrorists as they attacked a security forces' post in North Waziristan District. Tarar, while speaking about the terror incident, said that Pakistan Army, the police and people have made sacrifices in the war against terrorism. "I condemn the insulting social media campaign launched by a political party against the martyrs and their sacrifices," said the information minister while speaking during a presser in Lahore on Sunday. Tarar alleged that PTI's social media team was behind these accounts, adding that such behaviour was intolerable and people behind the campaign have been identified. Urging the nation to come together for national unity and security, Tarar said that some "red lines should not be crossed", stressing that those who run such campaigns will be identified and brought to justice through legal action.

PTI flays
'misleading
propaganda'

FROM PAGE 01
saying that they were adopting a "misleading propaganda" against PTI. "Khawaja Asif and Ata Tarar's misleading propaganda about the Pakistan Army's martyrs is regrettable," Qaiser said while speaking to journalists. Earlier, Information Minister Tarar warned of an action against the PTI's social media team, saying that it was behind the accounts attacking Pakistan Army and the soldiers who were martyred in North Waziristan a day earlier. Meanwhile, Defence Minister Asif, without naming anyone, said that some people "mocked the martyrs and compared them to returning officers". "Those who give statements against the martyrs must be linked with terrorists," Asif had said during a media talk earlier in the day. However, PTI leader Qaiser hit back at the two federal ministers, saying that his party always acknowledged the sacrifices made by the soldiers defending the country's borders.

Russia
election to
tighten...

FROM PAGE 01
November presidential election pitting Biden against his predecessor Donald Trump, whose Republican party in Congress has blocked military aid for Kyiv. Though Kyiv recaptured territory after the invasion in 2022, Russian forces have lately made gains after a failed Ukrainian counter-offensive last year. The Biden administration fears Putin could grab a bigger slice of Ukraine unless Kyiv gets more support soon. CIA Director William Burns has said that could embolden China. Putin says the West is engaged in a hybrid war against Russia and that Western intelligence and Ukraine are trying to disrupt the elections. Voting is also taking place in Crimea, which Moscow took from Ukraine in 2014, and four other Ukrainian regions it partly controls and has claimed since 2022. Kyiv regards the election on occupied territory as illegal and void.

Moscow
polling
station...

FROM PAGE 01
Arctic prison last month. His widow Yulia Navalnaya had called on people to go to polling stations at the same time and spoil their ballots as a protest. Since the start of Russia's full-scale offensive in Ukraine in 2022, public dissent in Russia has been stifled and government critics have been jailed or forced to flee. After casting his ballot at a polling station where Navalny used to vote, IT worker Alexander said he came because this was one of the few ways he could protest. "If I hadn't done this, I would have felt like a coward," the 29-year-old said. Elena, 52, said people were "too afraid" to come out in large numbers. "I don't want Russia, my homeland, to be like this... I love my country, I want it to be free." Natalya, a 65-year-old pensioner, said she came with her friend Elena, a 38-year-old engineer, to spoil her ballot in memory of Navalny.

Briefs

UN experts call for oil firms to halt Israeli army supplies

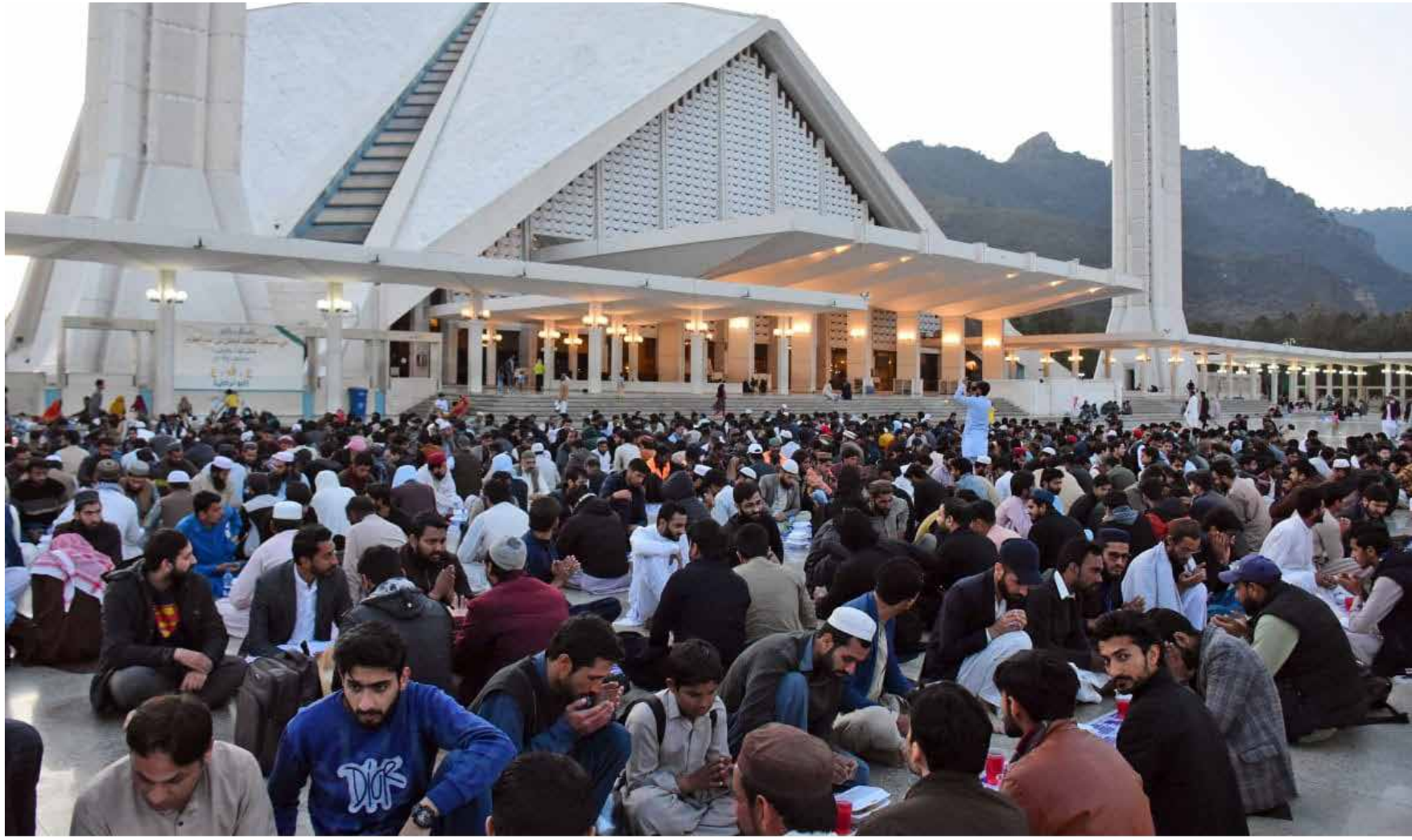
LONDON : UN experts have urged countries and oil companies to cut supplies to Israel's military, underscoring the devastating role of oil in fueling the raging genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Michael Fakhri, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, in a post on X on Saturday cited research from Oil Change International (OCI), which showed that three companies were supplying oil to the Israeli military through the United States, Brazil, Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Fakhri urged countries to immediately impose economic sanctions, and said countries supplying oil to the Israeli military are likely "complicit in Gaza genocide." He referred to the research saying that Israel receives regular shipments of oil via Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, and Egypt. Paradoxically, all of these countries have condemned Israel's actions in Gaza. "Countries should impose a weapon embargo and economic sanctions against Israel. Countries currently supplying weapons to Israel are complicit in genocide and starvation," Fakhri said in an interview with the Press TV website last week. The UN special rapporteur added that "Israel is also destroying the food system in Gaza" and "the only way" to prevent full-scale famine in Gaza "is to ensure humanitarian aid to enter without any restriction and for a permanent ceasefire.—Agencies

Maduro accepts nomination, seeks third term

CARACAS : Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro said that he will seek a third term in July 28 elections, from which the state apparatus has excluded his main rival - the favorite in opinion polls. "We'll go to a new victory," the 61-year-old said as he accepted his ruling PSUV party's official nomination to be its candidate, after 11 years in office marked by sanctions, economic collapse and accusations of widespread repression. There was no challenger from within the "Chavista" movement, in power for 25 years and named for Maduro's popular predecessor Hugo Chavez. "I am here for the people, that is why today, March 16 of this year, 2024, I accept the presidential candidacy for the elections of July 28," the incumbent said. Maduro will have served 18 years as president of the once-prosperous South American country at the end of a third, successive term. Since 2013, he has presided over a severe economic crisis, worsened by US sanctions, that has seen seven million people flee the country as GDP plummeted by 80 percent in a decade.—APP

Rural clinic offers respite in Zimbabwe

HARARE : Outside a hospital in rural Zimbabwe, scores of people wait patiently under trees or inside small tents for news of their loved ones. Vendors sell snacks, fruits and drinks to drivers queuing at the gates of what has become an unlikely sought-after healthcare destination in the impoverished southern African country. Zimbabwe's public health system has all but collapsed under years of mismanagement, amid shortages of funds, staff, medicine and equipment. When in need, those who can afford it, including government ministers, fly overseas to seek treatment. Some check into private, but relatively expensive clinics in Harare. Many others make the trip to Mount Darwin, a small village in the parched countryside about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the capital and home to the Karanda Mission Hospital. "I lost all hope of having my aunt treated in Harare, after we were asked to bring water for her to drink and bathe as well as to flush the toilet," says a SUV-driving man, who gave his name as Gunira.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Residents of Islamabad breaking their fast at Faisal Mosque in the Federal Capital. —ONLINE

WHO to Israel

Drop Rafah invasion plan 'in name of humanity'

I'm gravely concerned about reports of an Israeli plan to proceed with a ground assault on Rafah: WHO chief

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON : The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly urges the Israeli regime to decide against its planned ground invasion of the city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, which is enduring a genocidal Israeli war. The southern Gaza city has come to host the majority of the Palestinian territory's nearly 2.4-million-strong population, which has fled there from the scourge of the war. "I'm gravely concerned about reports of an Israeli plan

to proceed with a ground assault on Rafah," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Saturday. "Further escalation of violence in this densely populated area would lead to many more deaths and suffering," he added. "In the name of humanity, we appeal to Israel not to proceed and instead to work towards peace." The regime launched the war on October 7 in response to a retaliatory operation staged by Gaza's resistance movements, during which hundreds were taken captive. At least 31,553 Palestinians, most-



ly women, children, and adolescents, have died in the military onslaught so far. Ghebreyesus dismissed a so-called evacuation plan devised by the Israeli regime

ahead of Rafah's invasion. "The 1.2 million people in Rafah do not have anywhere safe to move to," the WHO chief said. "There are no fully functional, safe health facilities that they can reach elsewhere in Gaza," he said, adding, "Many people are too fragile, hungry, and sick to be moved again..." "This humanitarian catastrophe must not be allowed to worsen." A day earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced in a statement that he "approved plans for a military operation in Rafah, and the army is operationally preparing for it..."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has approved plans for a military attack on the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah. The statement provided no details on the exact time and date of the assault, and rejected the latest ceasefire proposal put forward by the Gaza-based Palestinian resistance movement Hamas as "unrealistic." Provision of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the besieged territory and release of Israeli captives were among the terms of the truce deal, which has been discussed several times in the Egyptian capital of Cairo.

Police in standoff with suspect in US shootings

TRENTON : An "extremely dangerous" suspect armed with an assault rifle was holed up in a New Jersey home on Saturday, authorities said, as police negotiators tried to coax him out after he allegedly killed three family members in two earlier shootings. Police had tracked 26-year-old Andre Gordon to the three-story house after a trail of violence that set off shelter-in-place orders in two states. "Andre, get away from the windows. We know you're inside, if you'd like to surrender, dial 911 now," police said over a loudspeaker. "You're a young man, you have too much to live for." Authorities said Gordon, who is believed to be homeless, began the day by carjacking a vehicle in Trenton before driving some 40 miles (65 kilometers) to the northern Philadelphia suburb of Levittown. There, police said, the suspect killed two people - identified as his 52-year-old stepmother and his 13-year-old sister. Three others in the house, including a minor, managed to hide "as he went through the house searching for them," Bucks County, Pennsylvania district attorney Jennifer Schorn said in a briefing. The suspect then drove to a nearby residence where he broke in before shooting and killing a 25-year-old woman - who Schorn said was the mother of his two children - before bludgeoning her mother with the butt of his rifle. She was expected to recover. Driving to a nearby discount store, the suspect carjacked a Honda vehicle from a 44-year-old man before fleeing. The man was not injured, according to Falls Township, Pennsylvania Sheriff Nelson Whitney. The suspect then drove across the state line back to Trenton, where he barricaded himself in the three-story house. Whitney said the suspect was believed to be armed with a powerful AR-15 style assault rifle. SWAT negotiators "will attempt to negotiate a peaceful surrender," Detective Lieutenant Lisette Rios of the Trenton police department said. People in the house were "successfully evacuated with no injuries," Rios added. Armed SWAT officers were seen using a ladder to climb onto the roof of the porch to help people inside escape through a window.—DNA

Downpour in N.Australia as Cyclone Megan approaches

SYDNEY: Tropical Cyclone Megan dumped massive precipitation off the north-eastern coast of Australia's Northern Territory, expected to step up intensity to a category three system by Sunday evening. Downpour has accompanied the tropical low to Groote Eylandt, an island off northern Australia, and caused power outages and flooding in Arnhem Land, public broadcaster ABC reported on Sunday, citing the country's Bureau of Meteorology. The cyclone is currently in the Gulf of Carpentaria and is likely to make landfall on Monday night or Tuesday morning, before weakening. Groote Eylandt is the largest island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, while Arnhem Land is home to the traditional landowners, the Yolngu people. Formed in the Gulf of Carpentaria, near Groote Eylandt, on Saturday afternoon, Megan is bringing huge rainfall and gusty winds to the western side of the gulf. The cyclone that strengthened to a category two system on Saturday evening.—APP

Macron :Ground operations in Ukraine possible 'at some point'

WEB DESK

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview said that Western ground operations in Ukraine might be necessary "at some point," days after meeting with German and Polish leaders. Last month Macron refused to rule out putting troops on the ground in Ukraine, which prompted a stern response from Berlin and other European partners. But the French president has not recanted from his position, but stressed that Western allies would not take the initiative. "Maybe at some point - I don't want it, I won't take the initiative - we will have to have operations on the ground, whatever they may be, to counter the Russian forces," Macron told newspaper in an interview conducted on Friday. "France's strength is that we can do it." Disagreements over the possibility of ground operations and the delivery of long-range missiles to Kyiv had threatened to undermine cooperation between the allies. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reacted angrily to Macron's earlier refusal to rule out sending troops to Ukraine and his pointed comments urging allies not to be "cowards." Macron met his German and Polish counterparts in Berlin on Friday, in a show of solidarity behind Kyiv. After the meeting, Macron said the three countries of the so-called Weimar Triangle were "united" in their aim to "never let Russia win and to support the Ukrainian people until the end." Earlier on, Russia will be asked for ceasefire during Olympics, Macron Tells Ukraine Interviewer Russia will be asked to observe a ceasefire in Ukraine during the Paris Olympics, French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview to Ukrainian television and posted by a Ukrainian journalist. "The demand for a ceasefire during the Olympics. They (the Russians) must do this. That is what has always happened," the interviewer said, speaking through an interpreter. "It will be requested," Macron says in French before a voiceover interpretation gives his response in Ukrainian as "Yes, we will ask for it." "The rule of the host country is to move in step with the Olympic movement," the interpreter quoted Macron as saying. "This is a message of peace. We will also follow the decision of the Olympic Committee." The International Olympic Committee condemned Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, saying the Russian government had breached the Olympic Truce, which aims to harness the power of sport to promote peace and dialogue. On Thursday, the president of the Russian Olympic Committee said the ROC would not boycott this year's Paris Olympics, despite restrictions on athletes imposed by the IOC as punishment for the invasion of Ukraine. Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday that she preferred that Russians and Belarusians "don't come." Russians and Belarusians had initially been banned from competing internationally in the wake of the invasion, for which Belarus has been used as a staging ground.

EU to bolster Egypt ties with billions in funding

European governments have long been worried about the risk of instability in Egypt

FOREIGN DESK

CAIRO: European leaders are expected to announce a multi-billion euro funding package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt in Cairo on Sunday, part of a push to stem migrant flows across the Mediterranean that has been criticized by rights groups. The agreement is designed to enhance cooperation in areas including renewable energy, trade, and security while delivering grants, loans and other funding over the next three years to support Egypt's faltering economy. European governments have long been worried about the risk of instability in Egypt, a country of 106 million people that has been struggling to raise foreign currency and where eco-

nomic adversity has pushed increasing numbers to migrate in recent years. Inflation has been running close to record highs and many Egyptians say they struggle to get by. Over the past month, however, the financial pressure on the government has eased as Egypt has struck a record deal for Emirati investment, expanded its loan program with the IMF, and sharply devalued its currency. Diplomats say Egypt's strategic importance has been underscored by the conflict in neighboring Sudan, which has created the world's biggest displacement crisis, and the war in Gaza, which borders Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Egypt has been the main conduit for international humanitarian aid sent to Gaza, and

along with Qatar and the United States has been trying to mediate a truce between Israel and Hamas. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will lead a delegation on Sunday that also includes the Italian and Greek prime ministers and the Cypriot president. Egypt's finance minister has said the government has lined up a total of \$20 billion in multilateral support after increasing its loan and economic reform program with the IMF. Of that, funding from the European Union is expected to total \$5.6 billion, Finance Minister Mohamed Maait told Asharq Business. Egyptian officials say Egypt deserves recognition for hosting an estimated nine million foreign residents and largely shutting off irregular migration from its north

coast since 2016. CROSSINGS VIA LIBYA But there has been a surge in Egyptians trying to cross to Europe via Libya, and the European Union is already providing funding aimed at reducing those flows. In recent months, the Greek islands of Crete and Gavdos have seen a steep rise in migrant arrivals - mostly from Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan - piling pressure on ill-equipped authorities and raising fears of a new smuggling route in the Mediterranean. Activists have criticized Western support for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who came to power a decade ago after leading the overthrow of Egypt's first democratically elected leader. Rights groups say tens of thousands of people have been

jailed in a crackdown that has swept up dissidents from across the political spectrum. El-Sisi's backers say security measures were needed to stabilize Egypt after the turmoil of the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprising and pave the way for providing social rights such as housing and jobs. EU moves to offer financing in return for migration curbs in other countries including in Tunisia have run up against obstacles and criticism. "The blueprint is the same as the flawed EU deals with Tunisia and Mauritania: stop migrants, ignore abuses," Human Rights Watch said of the plan to enhance ties with Egypt and provide new financing. The approach "strengthens authoritarian rulers while betraying human rights defenders," the US-based group said in a statement.

Turkish defense chief hails new anti-terror strategy

ANKARA: Minister of National Defense Yaşar Güler emphasized that Türkiye's new strategy helped them to eradicate terrorist groups, particularly the PKK. Speaking at an event in the capital Ankara on Sunday to mark the anniversary of a World War I battle, Güler said their new operations replaced "limited time operations with limited targets." "We are striking terrorist groups now with our new strategy to eliminate terrorism at its source, through comprehensive and constant operations," Güler said. "Make no mistake, our fight against terrorism for peace and safety will continue with resolve, with determination," he said. Güler was part of a Turkish delegation including Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and the director of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) who paid a visit to neighboring Iraq last week. The delegation sought to discuss measures against the PKK holed up in Iraq's north.—Agencies

Iceland volcano erupts for 4th time in 3 months

REYKJAVIK : A "volcanic eruption has started between stóra Skogfell and Hagafell on the Reykjanes Peninsula," said a statement from the Icelandic Met Office (IMO). Live video images showed glowing lava and billowing smoke. Iceland's Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management announced it had sent a helicopter to narrow down the exact location of the new fissure. The authority also said the police had declared a state of emergency due to the eruption. According to the IMO, it occurred close to the same location as a previous eruption on February 8. Lava appeared to flow south towards the dykes built to protect the fishing village Grindavik, it said. Just after 22:00 GMT, "the southern lava front was just 200 metres from the barriers on the eastern side of Grindavik and moving at a rate of about one km per hour," it added. "From initial assessments of web camera imagery and aerial photographs from the helicopter flight, the eruption is thought to be the largest (in terms of magma discharge) of the three previous fissure eruptions from the Sundhnukur crater row," IMO said, stressing the assessment was based on the first hour of "eruptive activity."

KSrelief food aid reaches needy communities worldwide

RIYADH: The Saudi aid agency KSrelief has distributed food to thousands of people around the world, the Saudi Press Agency has reported. Bijelo Polje town in Montenegro received 250 food baskets from the organization, benefiting 1,250 people, as part of KSrelief's Ramadan food basket project Etaaam. It is planned to distribute a total of 8,700 food parcels to the needy in Montenegro. In Bangladesh, 1,000 food baskets were handed out to the neediest families in the Kishoreganj region, helping 5,000 people, while 400 parcels were distributed in Bloemfontein, the capital of South Africa. In Indonesia's West Java province, 2,768 people benefited from 717 KSrelief packages, and 600 parcels were sent for 6,300 people in Cotonou, the capital of Litorral in Benin. The organization distributed a further 500 parcels to Ghana, benefiting 3,000 people in the Old Tafo Kumasi district. The project aims to deliver 5,300 food packages throughout five cities in Ghana, helping 31,800 of the country's neediest citizens. In Indonesia's West Java province, 2,768 people benefited from 717 KSrelief packages. (SPA) The Etaaam project is part of initiative is part of the relief and humanitarian aid offered by Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Ministry of Interior said recently that KSrelief.—APP

Briefs

Aseefa submits nomination for NA-207

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move marking her debut in the political arena, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, the youngest daughter of President Asif Ali Zardari, has submitted her nomination papers for the National Assembly seat NA-207 in Shaheed Benazirabad. The seat became vacant following her father's elevation to the presidency. Accompanied by provincial health minister Dr. Azra-Fazal Pechuho and a team of legal advisors, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari presented her nomination form to the returning officer, Sher Ali Jamali, private news channels reported. This marks her first foray into contesting for a public office, reflecting the continuation of the Bhutto-Zardari legacy in Pakistani politics. As the political landscape evolves with this new entrant, all eyes are on Aseefa Bhutto Zardari as she embarks on this journey to represent her constituency in the by-election. With her family deep-rooted history in Pakistani politics, her candidacy adds a fresh dimension to the upcoming electoral process in NA-207.

Maleeka Bokhari thanks Maryam Nawaz

DNA

LAHORE: Former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Maleeka Ali Bokhari thanked Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for her timely intervention in getting her name removed from the exit control list (ECL), also known as no-fly list, so that the former could visit her ailing sister in Australia. Maleeka had appealed to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to allow her to visit the "mother figure" sister in Australia, who had suffered brain haemorrhage and was on her deathbed. Taking notice of her request, Maryam through her social media account, X, assured her that she would talk to the concerned authorities in this regard. "Let me speak to the concerned authorities Maleeka. I hope you have filed a request in writing officially. May Allah bless your sister with good health," she tweeted. After a while, Maleeka thanked Maryam for her assistance. "Thank you for your timely intervention. I have been informed that my name has been removed from the no-fly list," she responded. In May 2023, names of hundreds of PTI leaders and former assembly members including party founder Imran Khan had been placed to the ECL. Their names were placed on the no-fly list following the May 9 incident so that it could be investigated.

SSGC seeks further hike in gas price

DNA

LAHORE: A month after the caretakers burdened the masses with gas price hike on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demand, the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) has requested the fuel regulator - the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) - to further increase gas prices from July 2024. The caretaker government had approved a 67% increase in the natural gas tariff with effect from February 1. The tariff was hiked to meet the deadline of the IMF for hiking the gas prices under structural benchmark criteria till February 15, 2024. In its fresh plea filed with the Ogra, the SSGC requested the fuel regulator to increase in the gas price by Rs274.40 per Metric Million British Thermal Unit (mmbtu). Citing an estimated Rs79.63 billion revenue shortfall, the SSGC urged Ogra to set average price of one mmbtu gas at Rs1740.80.

Israeli PM vows to invade Rafah despite world 'pressure'

Israel has repeatedly threatened to launch a ground offensive against Hamas in Rafah, now home to nearly 1.5 million mostly displaced Gazans sheltering near the Egyptian border

NEWS DESK

GAZA STRIP: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Sunday to send ground forces into Gaza's southern Rafah city despite growing international concern over the fate of Palestinian civilians sheltering there. Netanyahu, whose security and war cabinets were later due to discuss latest international efforts toward a truce deal, stressed that "no amount of international pressure will stop us from realizing all the goals of the war." "To do this, we will also operate in Rafah," he told a cabinet meeting, hours before he was set to meet visiting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for talks on the war raging since October 7. Israel has repeatedly threatened to launch a ground offensive against Hamas militants in Rafah, now home to nearly 1.5 million mostly displaced Gazans sheltering near the Egyptian border. US President Joe Biden, whose country provides Israel with billions of dollars in military assistance, has said a Rafah invasion would be a "red line" without credible measures to protect civilians. UN World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged Israel

"in the name of humanity" not to launch a Rafah assault, warning that "this humanitarian catastrophe must not be allowed to worsen." Envoys were planning to meet in Qatar soon to revive stalled talks for a ceasefire and hostage release deal. A Hamas proposal calls for an Israeli withdrawal from "all cities and populated areas" in Gaza during a six-week truce and for more humanitarian aid, according to an official from the Palestinian group. Israel plans to attend the talks, with cabinet members due to "decide on the mandate of the delegation in charge of the negotiations before its departure for Doha," Netanyahu's office said, without giving a date for when they would leave. The war meanwhile raged on, and overnight Israeli bombardment across the Hamas-ruled territory killed at least 61 Palestinians, the Gaza health ministry said. The dead included 12 members of the same family whose house was hit in Deir Al-Balah, in central Gaza. Palestinian girl Leen Thabit, retrieving a white dress from under the rubble of their flattened house, cried as she told AFP her cousin was killed in the strike. "She's dead. Only her dress is left," Thabit said. "What do they want from us?"

The war was triggered by Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel that resulted in about 1,160 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures. Israel's retaliatory campaign against Hamas has killed at least 31,645 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry. Shelling and clashes were reported in south Gaza's main city of Khan Yunis and elsewhere, and the Israeli army said its forces had killed "approximately 18 terrorists" in central Gaza since Saturday. More than five months of war and an Israeli siege have led to dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza, where the UN has repeatedly warned of looming famine for the coastal territory's 2.4 million people. As the flow of aid trucks into Gaza has slowed, a second ship was due to depart from Cyprus along a new maritime corridor to bring food and relief goods, said officials of the island nation. On Saturday the US charity World Central Kitchen said its team had finished unloading supplies from a barge towed by Spanish aid vessel Open Arms which had pioneered the sea route. Jordan on Sunday announced the latest aid airdrop over northern Gaza together with German, US and Egyptian

aircraft. The United Nations has reported particular difficulty in accessing the north, where residents say they have resorted to eating animal fodder, and where some have stormed the few aid trucks that have made it through. Palestinian militants seized about 250 Israeli and foreign hostages during the October 7 attack. Dozens were released during a week-long truce in November, and Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza including 32 presumed dead. Netanyahu has faced domestic pressure over the remaining captives, with protesters rallying in Tel Aviv on Saturday carrying banners urging a "hostage deal now." "The civilians... need to demand from their leaders to do the right thing," said one demonstrator, Omer Keidar, 27. In Rafah, the crisis has only grown worse, said medical staff at a clinic run by Palestinian volunteers that offers treatment for displaced Gazans. "We're facing shortages of medications," said Dr. Samar Gregea, herself displaced from Gaza City in the north. "There are a lot of patients in the camp, with all children suffering from malnutrition" and a spike in hepatitis A cases, she told AFP. "Children require foods high in sugars, like dates, which are currently unavailable."

PM assigns power ministry to Leghari

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday appointed Awais Leghari as federal minister for Power Division. Earlier, he was assigned the Ministry of Railways. Additionally, Musadik Malik, who previously held the additional charge of the Power Division, will now serve as the Minister of Petroleum only. A notification in this regard was also issued by the cabinet division.

Enemy will face a strong response: Mohsin Naqvi

DNA

LAHORE: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the attack on Mir Ali Check Post, stating that the nation assures that such a cowardly act will be dealt with a strong response that the enemy will remember forever. Federal Minister For Interior Mohsin Naqvi said that now is not the time for the enemy to attack and for us to only condemn silently. Federal Minister Mohsin Naqvi said that the way the enemy is attacking, a strong response will be given. The entire nation is united in the war against terrorism and stands with the Pakistani army. We all will give a strong response to the cowardly actions of the enemy.

4.6 magnitude earthquake hits parts of KP

DNA

PESHAWAR: A moderate earthquake with a magnitude of 4.6 was recorded in and around Swat, sending tremors through the region. The quake's epicenter was located at a depth of 188 kilometers, situated near the Pak-Afghan-Tajikistan border region. While no immediate reports of damage or casualties have been reported, the quake serves as a reminder of the seismic activity prevalent in the area. Authorities are monitoring the situation closely and urging residents to remain vigilant.



ISLAMABAD: Ikramullah, hailing from Qila Saifullah Balochistan, who is currently 9th class student at Lawrence College, calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. Ikramullah's house and school were damaged in 2022 floods. On instructions of the Prime Minister, he was facilitated to continue education. - DNA

Country's future depends upon well-educated youth: PM

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that country's future hinged upon well-educated and skilled youth of the country and for provision of quality education, the federal government would facilitate the high achievers with scholarship scheme to get education in the well reputed global educational institutes. The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Ikramullah, a student from Balochistan province, who is now studying in grade 9 in Lawrence College Murree. Under the prime minister's direction, the student from 2022 flood affected area of Qila Saifullah was provided with facility to get education at country's prominent educational institute. The prime minister recalled that he met the desperate student in Khasnoob camp in Qila Saifullah when floods had caused destruction in Balochistan province during 2022. He said that he had assured the student of provision of quality education, adding that it pleased him a lot that the student was now studying in Lawrence College. The student thanked the prime minister for giving him opportunity of meeting him. Congratulating the prime minister, he said that he prayed for Shehbaz Sharif for his kind gesture. The student also expressed his resolve to achieve the goal and serve the country in future. The prime minister advised him to serve the nation and country by working hard and concentrate upon his studies. He assured that all his educational expenditures would be borne by the government as the students were the future and hope for the country. The prime minister said that when he had visited the flood affected area, the student was in protest mood but now he was showing a discernible change. He mentioned that in Punjab province, they had sent high achievers to get education at the best European and Scandinavian countries who later returned back completely transformed and full of confidence.

NAB's deputy director arrested

KARACHI... The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) arrested its Deputy Director for allegedly facilitating the accused persons nominated in embezzlement cases in exchange for money. According to the details, the NAB Karachi and Islamabad chapters in a joint action arrested its Deputy Director Imran Shaikh on the charges of taking bribes from the accused arrested on charges of corruption and embezzlement. The corruption watchdog has obtained a one-day transit remand of Deputy Director Imran Shaikh who will be shifted to Islamabad on Monday. Earlier on February 16, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested 15 suspects including seven officers of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and Passport Immigration in a case pertaining to the issuance of fake Pakistani passports to Afghan nationals. According to details, three Assistant Director Passport Immigration, and four NADRA officers have been arrested by the FIA. The sources said that four agents and five Afghan nationals were also arrested in the operation. - DNA

Donald Trump warns of 'bloodbath' if he loses

The US might never have another election if he doesn't win in November, the former president has said

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: Former US President Donald Trump has warned of a "bloodbath" for the American automobile industry and the country as a whole if he doesn't win a second term in the US election on November 5. Trump made the remark during a rally in Vandalia, Ohio on Saturday while speaking about his plans to protect US carmakers from Chinese competition. The former president addressed China's leader Xi Jinping from the stage, saying that "you and I are friends, but... those big monster car manufacturing plants that you're building in Mexico right now... you're going to not hire Americans and you're going to sell the cars to us, no." "We're going to put a 100% tariff on every single car that comes across the line, and you're not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected," the presumptive Republican nominee in the election added. Trump urged Americans to vote for him in the fall, saying: "Now, if I don't get elected, it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole - that's gonna be the least of it. It's going to be a bloodbath for the country. That'll be the least of it." Later in his address, he also cautioned the crowd that "if this election isn't won, I'm not sure that you'll ever have another election in this country." Trump's speech that evening was mostly improvised as he complained about not being able to use the teleprompter due to strong winds. "I can't read this damn teleprompter. This sucker is moving. Like reading a moving flag in a 35-mph wind," the 77-year-old said. The team of US President Joe Biden interpreted Trump's mentioning of a "bloodbath" as a threat of "political violence" from their rival.

CM Maryam announces 3 months remission in punishment of prisoners



ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz has announced three months remission in the punishment of prisoners and release of 155 prisoners across the province. CM while addressing the iftar dinner ceremony organised in the Kot Lakhpat Jail stated that 155 prisoners are being released after paying a diyat amount of rupees 15 crore with the collaboration of philanthropists. A video call facility will be provided in all the jails of Punjab very soon. CM stated that she herself remembered the time spent during her period of imprisonment while coming to the Central Jail today. "I was imprisoned in the Death Cell Chakhi and

faced a difficult time. My father was also imprisoned in the same Jail but was denied permission for meeting him. I used to meet my father once a week only. Once I received a hand written letter of my father which stated that he after being arrested is being taken to the NAB. Someone in the jail told me that your father is feeling unwell and is being taken to the hospital. It was a time of great difficulty." CM stated that she used to query as what wrongful act she has committed for which she is kept in the jail and then used to sit on the praying mat. I used to wait for the appeal when I came to know that the Judge went on three weeks leave. I couldn't talk with my cancer patient mother in the Adiala Jail. I used to talk with my children for 20 minutes only. I was greatly worried about my 15 years old daughter as she also underwent a difficult time. Someone in the court told my father about the state of illness of my mother and despite his repeated saying, no one allowed his conversation with his wife. I spent the difficult jail time with patience and perseverance. A person gets 24 hours to think and ponder in the jail." CM said that few persons go to jail due to their faults and few due to their circumstances adding that even the innocent have to face punishments due to shortcomings in the justice system. We would definitely bring improvements in the jail system along with provision of possible ease for the prisoners. We are aware about the difficulties of prisoners and we would bring improvements in their food and other essential needs. A video call facility for the prisoners has been launched. I felt pleased to witness a youth prisoner talking with his wife and daughter via video call.

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