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Peace with Armenia is closer than ever: Azerbaijan's president

Detailed News On Page-08

Israel is provoking famine in Gaza, says EU's Borrell

Detailed News On Page-07



Sammy rejects PCB offer to coach Pakistan

Detailed News On Page-06



Amid spike in terrorism

Pak hits TTP hideouts inside Afghanistan

Pakistan, for the past two years, has repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits including TTP inside Afghanistan

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani forces on Monday early morning carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in the border regions inside Afghanistan against terrorists launching attacks in Pakistan from Afghan soil, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said on Monday. The target of today's operation was the terrorists belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which along with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is responsible for the March 16 attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country, resulting in deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials. On Saturday, at least seven Pakistan Army soldiers – including a lieutenant colonel and captain – embraced martyrdom after gallantly fighting with terrorists as they attacked a security forces' post in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The Foreign Office (FO) issued a detailed statement on the matter, saying that Pakistan, for the past two years, has repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits including TTP inside Afghanistan. It said that these terrorists pose a grave threat to Pakistan's security and have consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory. Pakistan accords prime importance to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. It has, therefore, always prioritised dialogue and cooperation to confront the terrorist threat. "We have repeatedly urged the Afghan authorities to take concrete and effective action to ensure that the Afghan soil is not used as a staging

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Terrorist commander killed in military operation: ISPR

At least eight terrorists were "sent to hell" after an intense fire exchange

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Security forces have gunned down at least eight terrorists, including a terrorist commander who orchestrated the Mir Ali attack, during an intelligence-based operation in North Waziristan District on the night of March 17 and 18, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement on Monday. According to the military's media wing, the operation was carried out on the reported presence of terrorists. During the conduct of the operation, the ISPR stated, at least eight terrorists were "sent to hell" after an intense fire exchange, including a high-value target terrorist commander Sehra alias Janan. The commander, the army's media wing added,

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TALAGANG: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif offers condolences to the family of Captain Ahmed Badar Shaheed at their residence in Talagang. – DNA

West must realize ground reality

Russia-NATO conflict is just one step away from WW3, says Putin

Putin said if the attacks continued, Russia would create a buffer zone out of more Ukrainian territory to defend Russian territory

AGENCIES

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Monday that a direct conflict between Russia and the US-led NATO military alliance would mean the planet was one step away from World War Three but said hardly anyone wanted such a scenario. The Ukraine war has triggered the deepest crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Putin has often warned of the risks of nuclear war but says he has never felt the need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. French President Emmanuel Macron last month said he could not rule out the deployment of ground troops in Ukraine in the future, with many Western countries distancing themselves from that while others, especially in eastern Europe, expressed support.

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North Korea fires ballistic missiles as Blinken visits Seoul

FOREIGN DESK

SEOUL: North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles on Monday in what analysts said was a calculated move to grab attention as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits South Korea for talks. Blinken is attending the third Summit for Democracy and met President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul early Monday. He is also meeting his South Korean counterpart on the sidelines of the event, for discussions now likely to be dominated by the allies' efforts to counter threats from

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Briefs

'CEC should be tried under Article 6'

Dr Yasmin asserted that their mandate was stolen

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: PTI leader Dr Yasmin Rashid called for severe punishment for the Chief Election Commissioner for allegedly stealing the party's mandate, suggesting that he should be tried under Article 6. During an interaction with the media at the anti-terrorism court, Dr Yasmin asserted that their mandate was stolen. She said that winning MPAs and MNAs were defeated through election rigging to form the government. The former provincial minister also expressed concern over a revival of May 9 cases, with their workers being arrested months after peaceful protests. She termed the cases unjust and targeting the political workers.

Mohsin Naqvi meets CM Sindh Expresses good wishes for Syed Murad Ali Shah

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: Federal Minister of Interior and Anti-Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi met Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah in Karachi today. Chief Minister Sindh congratulated Mohsin Naqvi on assuming the charge of Ministry of Interior and Anti-Narcotics. CM Sindh expressed best wishes for Interior Minister regarding his new responsibilities. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also expressed good wishes for Syed Murad Ali Shah on assuming the charge of Chief Minister Sindh. Both leaders discussed matters of mutual interests and overall law and order situation.

PTI supports AI demand

PDM-2 violating all fundamental rights

PTI Spokesperson said that the fake government's unjustified closure of the Internet, especially social media websites on daily basis in order to conceal facts regarding mandate theft

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Spokesperson said that PTI fully endorsed Amnesty International's demand for immediate restoration of social media platform X (formerly Twitter), saying that Pakistan had been made a laughing stock in the international community due to the unjustified blockage on social media and the chain of oppression against own citizens. PTI Spokesperson said that the fake government's unjustified closure of the Internet, especially social media websites on daily basis in order to conceal facts regarding the mandate theft in the general elections provided opportunities to the world to ridicule Pakistan. He stated that the constitution of the country was virtually suspended during the past 23 months and basic constitutional rights were being openly trampled upon under the feet. PTI Spokesperson said: "It is shameful that X has remained blocked in the country for

Continued on Page 06

Govt places restrictions on ministers, officials Unnecessary foreign trips prohibited

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has issued a foreign travel policy placing restrictions on federal ministers and government officials of the country travelling abroad, a private news channel reported on Monday citing official documents. The Cabinet Division issued the travel policy in light of the decisions of the federal cabinet. In the absence of an unavoidable situation, permission to travel abroad must be

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SBP maintains policy rate status quo

The continuity required to bring inflation down to targeted range of 5-7% by Sept 2025

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 22%, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said on Monday, adding that the continuity required to bring inflation down to targeted range of 5-7% by September 2025. The MPC, at its meeting today, noted that inflation, in line with earlier expectations, has begun to decline noticeably from H2-FY24. It also observed that despite the sharp deceleration in February, the level of

Maryam for building civic admin centres Temporary measures are not enough for price control, says CM

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and PML-N supremo Muhammad Nawaz Sharif co-chaired a meeting to review a proposal to build civic administration centers in three cities of Punjab in the pilot phase. The authorities concerned gave a detailed briefing that these centers will reduce the work pressure on

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FM Dar calls for enhancing bilateral ties with China, US

US ambassador assures FM Dar support for economic reforms



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong in a meeting with Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. DNA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong called on Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. The Foreign Minister underlined that Pakistan-China All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership is indispensable for the progress and prosperity of the two

countries and an anchor of regional peace and stability. Noting the unwavering commitment of leadership of the two countries to strengthening bilateral relations, the Foreign Minister reaffirmed Pakistans commitment to making joint endeavours for further deepening bilateral relations and to advance phase-II of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as envisaged by the

leadership of two countries. Ambassador Jiang underscored the special importance China accords to Pakistan and its firm support for Pakistans socioeconomic development, industrial and agriculture cooperation. He also agreed with the Foreign Minister for high-quality development of phase-II of CPEC.

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Minister vows health system improvement implementation

LAHORE : Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique has pledged to achieve a hundred per cent implementation of the health system improvement road map outlined by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

Chairing a crucial meeting of the Department of Specialized Health Care and Medical Education on Monday, he emphasized the commitment of the health department towards enhancing healthcare services across the province. He said that under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a new era of prioritizing public health has commenced, with a focus on serving the people effectively.

The minister said that Secretary Health Punjab Ali Jan Khan and his dedicated team were tirelessly working towards the betterment of the health system. He asked the health management to provide superior medical facilities to the patients visiting government hospitals. The minister directed to improve waste management systems in government hospitals and ordered the timely completion of ongoing developmental projects aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure.

During the meeting, a comprehensive review of the conditions of government hospitals was conducted, with Secretary Health Punjab Ali Jan Khan and other officials providing detailed briefings on the matter.

Prominent attendees included Special Secretaries Syed Wajid Ali Shah and Raja Mansoor Ahmed, Additional Secretaries Zahida Azhar, Agha Nabeel, and Dr. Hafiz Shahid Latif, Chief Planning Officer Abdul Haq Bhatti, along with various officers from the Primary and Secondary Health Care Department participated.—APP

SBP keeps policy rate steady at 22%

KARACHI : The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday decided to keep the interest rate unchanged at 22 per cent for next 45 days.

The announcement was made by State Bank of Pakistan Governor Jameel Ahmed after a meeting of the bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) today. The MPC noted that the monthly inflation in Pakistan was recorded at 23.1pc in February from 28.3pc. Pakistan was urged to continue strict monetary policy by the International Monetary Fund. The MPC noted that while energy inflation also decelerated on y/y basis in February, the adjustments in administered energy prices have continued to contribute to inflation directly and indirectly. This has implications for the needed sustained decline in inflation expectations of both consumers and businesses. Going forward, any further adjustments in administered prices or fiscal measures that may push prices up pose risk to the near and medium-term inflation outlook. Cognizant of these risks, the Committee assessed that it is prudent to continue with the current monetary policy stance at this stage.—APP

President for enhanced ties with the USA

President said that Pakistan had enjoyed a long-standing and broad-based relationship with the USA spanning over seven decades

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD : President Asif Ali Zardari has urged the need to enhance trade and investment relations with the USA, besides exploring collaborative opportunities in diverse sectors. He said that American enterprises should be encouraged to invest in the Pakistan Stock Exchange as well as bring innovative business ideas to the country's economy.

The President made these remarks while talking to the Ambassador of the United States of America (USA) to Pakistan, Mr Donald Blome, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. During the meeting, the President said that Pakistan had enjoyed a long-standing and broad-based relationship with the USA spanning over seven decades, which needed to be further strengthened. The President stated that



the top priority of Pakistan was to put its economy on the right track and overcome economic and security challenges. He highlighted that climate change was a global issue, and Pakistan was among the countries most vulnerable to its adverse impacts. He said that Pakistan wanted to improve its agricultural sector by adopting modern irrigation techniques to conserve water and reduce reliance on flood irrigation. The US Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr Donald Blome, said that Pakistan and the USA could enhance bilateral collaboration in the fields of trade & investment, climate change, renewable energy, agriculture and security. He informed that the USA had completed the Sindh Basic Education Program to build climate-resilient schools to strengthen Pakistan's education sector. The US Ambassador also congratulated the President on assuming the office for a second time.

High costs of electricity and gas push industry to brink: Mian Farid

If the government did not pay attention, most of the steel industry would have closed down, and millions of dependents would have become unemployed: partners

ISLAMABAD : Chairman Central M. Akram Farid of employers' organization Employers Federation of Pakistan during an emergency meeting with the manufacturers said that the country's industry has reached the brink of destruction due to the increase in electricity and gas prices. Not only the country's economy has been affected, but unemployment has increased a lot. He said that due to expensive electricity and gas, where the cost of production has increased so much that it is not possible to run the industry, he added that he said that the iron and steel industry whose path is material electricity is also it was done with so much expensive electrici-

ty. If the government did not pay attention, most of the steel industry would have closed down, and millions of people related to it would have become unemployed and the hearths of thousands of families would have gone cold, he stressed on the government. In the dire situation, take emergency measures, the government of Pakistan should formulate a policy according to the ground realities and the government will have to look at its factors so that the Pakistani industry can come out of the crisis. Due to the decrease in Pakistan's textile exports, about 7 million workers will be out of jobs. Granted, the iron ore industry has been hit the hardest due to the fall in power

prices, more than half of the steel industry has closed down, and the remaining ones will soon close down due to the increase in production costs. urged the government to reduce the interest rate and fix the dollar rate and try to overcome the problem of falling value of the rupee so that the industry can operate, that the economic and business environment is at a turning point. It has reached a point where the business community justifies the demand to impose an economic emergency to end the economic uncertainty. Businesses cannot run profitably under such harsh and unfavorable conditions, he suggested that the FBR should focus on reducing high tax rates in the upcoming budget to broaden the tax base and

increase overall tax revenue. It will help to improve. The business community will fully cooperate with the new government in its efforts to accelerate the pace of public sector development projects in a timely manner to further improve our infrastructure that will facilitate the growth of commercial and industrial activities and the revival of the economy. Said that we have to take swift steps to make the country a center of manufacturing activities and a paradise for investors like other countries in the region, one of which is reduction in markup rate, the officials stressed on the State Bank of Pakistan. That they bring down the markup rate keeping in mind the other economics of the area.—DNA

Pak earns \$1,719 million from IT services' export

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan earned US \$1,719.921 million by providing different Information Technology (IT) services to various countries during the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2023-24. This shows a growth of 12.78 per cent as compared with the US \$1,524.969 million earned through the provision of services during the corresponding months of the last fiscal year 2022-23, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. During the months under review, the export of computer services grew by 14.09 per cent as it surged from US \$1,224.499 million last year to US \$1,397.051 million during July-January 2023-24. Among the computer services, the exports of software consultancy services witnessed an increase of 1.14 per cent, from US \$3.502 million to US \$3.542 million this year while the export of hardware consultancy services also surged by 4.73 per cent, from US \$454.283 million to US \$475.783 million. The export of repair and maintenance services however decreased by 12.17 per cent from US \$1.594 million to US \$1.400 million whereas the export and imports of computer software services surged by 2.71 per cent, from \$349.635 million to \$359.094 million. Meanwhile, the export of information services during the months under review dipped by 19.62 per cent from US \$2.600 million to US \$2.090 million. Among the information services, the exports of information-related services increased by 1.99 per cent, from US \$0.804 million to US \$0.820 million whereas the exports of news agency services however decreased by 29.29 per cent, from US \$1.796 million to US \$1.270 million. The export of telecommunication services increased by 7.69 per cent as these went up from US \$297.870 million to US \$320.780 million, the data revealed. Among the telecommunication services, the export of call centres services increased by 18.95 per cent during the months as its exports increased from US \$121.349 million to US \$144.350 million whereas the export of other telecommunication services witnessed a decrease of 0.05 per cent, from US \$176.521 million to US \$176.430 million during this year, the PBS data revealed.—DNA

KP health minister vows to protect children

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Minister Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Monday emphasized the importance of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), playing a positive role in protecting the children from dangerous diseases. Chairing a meeting for the Expanding Program on Immunization (EPI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah highlighted the necessity for establishing district-level outbreak response committees to ensure prompt action in the event of any health crisis. He ensured all kinds of support to provide the best health facilities to the people of the province. The meeting, attended by key stakeholders including Director General Health Services Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Dr Shoukat Ali, and representatives from WHO and UNICEF, witnessed a comprehensive presentation by Director EPI Dr Muhammad Arif Khan. Dr Khan detailed the achievements, targets, and challenges faced by the EPI. Highlighting recent accomplishments, Dr Muhammad Khan informed that from January to March 2024, EPI successfully vaccinated 26,725 children in response to outbreaks across various areas of the province. Moreover, an additional 200,000 children received measles vaccinations during the Intensified Outreach Activity conducted from February 12 to 24, 2024.

Benazir Kafaalat quarterly tranche disbursement begins

ISLAMABAD : The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has initiated the disbursement of the quarterly tranche (January-March) of Benazir Kafaalat cash assistance to the beneficiaries across the country. According to an official source, the payment process has commenced across the country, including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan simultaneously. The increased payment of Rs. 10,500 per household is being disbursed among over nine million registered beneficiary families. The beneficiaries, in case of any complaint, can approach the nearest BISP Tehsil offices or call the toll-free helpline number 080026477 of the Benazir Income Support Program. The special control room has been activated in the BISP headquarters to address the complaints of the beneficiaries promptly.—APP



ISLAMABAD : Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Housing and Works, chaired a meeting of Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA). Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Secretary Housing and Works, was also present during the meeting. — DNA

Education Ministry, Muslim hands Improve student facilities

The Ministry of Federal Education and Muslim Hands Pakistan enhance school facilities, signing LoU for improving health and education access

ADIL SHAHEN

ISLAMABAD : The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has partnered with Muslim Hands Pakistan to improve the health and well-being of school children and staff by enhancing access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and basic education facilities. In this connection, the Directorate General of Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) and the Project Planning and Development Unit (PPDU) under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and Muslim Hands Pakistan, signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) on

Monday. Director General of BECS, Hameed Khan Niazi, and Executive Director of Muslim Hands, Syed Javed Gillani, signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organizations, said a news release issued here.

According to the agreement, both parties will collaborate on initiatives and projects related to the School WASH Programme in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). This partnership will commence on March 20, 2024, and will remain in force for the next one year, unless terminated earlier by mutual agreement or due to specific circumstances as outlined herein. The Directorate General of BECS and

PPDU will identify and provide a list of 25 schools in the federal capital in need of WASH interventions (out-of-school children). Furthermore, they will facilitate coordination with school administrations for the smooth execution of WASH projects. BECS and PPDU will support monitoring and evaluation activities to assess the impact of the interventions, besides assisting in organizing hygiene education sessions for students and staff. Muslim Hands will fund the WASH interventions in the identified 25 schools, including the procurement of materials and hiring of contractors as needed. Additionally, they will






design and implement the WASH projects in close coordination with BECS and PPDU and provide technical expertise and training for the maintenance and sustainability of WASH facilities. Muslim Hands will also conduct hygiene education sessions for students and staff in collaboration with BECS and PPDU and facilitate the capacity building of school staff and management. On the occasion, Director General of BECS, Hameed Khan Niazi, said that BECS is a unique model of one teacher, one school, and integrated teaching. He said that it costs the government Rs 18,000 per student in the formal education

system compared to Rs 4,000 per student in the non-formal system run by BECS, adding that these community schools would emerge as the best model by providing basic facilities. He further said that there are around 12,000 children out of school in ICT, and BECS has the capacity to absorb around 7-8 thousand children. He said that child's right to education and water and sanitation are human rights that cannot be taken away or compromised. Hameed Khan Niazi, DG BECS said that the government is committed to ensuring basic necessities for all, especially students and staff in non-formal education institutions.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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

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Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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



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Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Norwegian envoy commends PRCS humanitarian efforts

Ambassador Mr. Per Albert Ilsaas commended the strides made by PRCS under Chairman Laghari's guidance, noting the organization's remarkable countrywide program outreach and robust volunteer base; reaffirmed Norway's commitment to supporting PRCS's humanitarian endeavors

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Per Albert Ilsaas, met with Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) at the PRCS National Headquarters here on Monday. During the meeting, Ambassador Ilsaas emphasized the crucial role of humanitarian service, expressing a shared dedication to advancing such efforts in Pakistan. Ambassador Per Albert Ilsaas commended PRCS's pivotal role in alleviating the suffering of vulnerable communities. The meeting delved into various topics including bilateral relations, the programs and initiatives supported by the Norwegian Red Cross and the imperative of enhancing cooperation for the betterment of humanity. Chairman Laghari provided insights into PRCS's initiatives, notably its post-flood rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Pakistan, highlighting collaborative programs with support from the Norwegian Red Cross. These programs encompass basic healthcare, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities,



water supply schemes, mobile health units, deployment of mobile health teams and initiatives targeting vulnerable groups such as children under five and pregnant women. He also briefed the Ambassador about the newly launched pilot program of Cash and Voucher

Assistance, focusing on pregnant and malnourished women in Jamshoro district, Sindh province. In collaboration with the Norwegian Red Cross, PRCS is supporting 1000 pregnant and malnourished women by providing PKR 109,000 per family over a nine-month period. Chairman

Laghari commended Ambassador Ilsaas for his genuine concern for Pakistan's people and emphasized the visit's potential to strengthen ties between both countries, not only in humanitarian efforts but also in exploring areas of collaboration beyond diplomacy. He empha-

sized PRCS's anticipation of continued support from the Government of Norway, especially in the recovery phase following the devastating Monsoon 2022 floods. Chairman Laghari also expressed a keen desire to enhance cooperation, particularly with the Norwegian government and the Norwegian Red Cross, with the aim of strengthening collaboration in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, merged districts, and extending it to other provinces such as Sindh and Balochistan. Ambassador Ilsaas commended the strides made by PRCS under Chairman Laghari's guidance, noting the organization's remarkable countrywide program outreach and robust volunteer base. He reaffirmed Norway's commitment to supporting PRCS's humanitarian endeavors. Prior to this, the Norwegian envoy was briefed on various sectors and also recorded his impressions in the visitor's notebook during his visit. In appreciation of their shared commitment to humanitarian causes, Chairman Laghari presented Ambassador Ilsaas with a commemorative shield and souvenir symbolizing the enduring partnership between Norway and Pakistan in advancing these efforts.

COMSTECH announces winners of 2023 awards

COMSTECH Life-Time Contributions Award in Physics has been jointly awarded to Yasaman Farzan (Iran) and Asghari Maqsood (Pakistan), and the second award of same category in Mathematics has been bestowed to Saieed Akbari Feyzaabaadi (Iran)

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The OIC Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH), is proud to announce the recipients of the prestigious COMSTECH Awards 2023. These biennial awards recognize outstanding contributions to scientific research and innovation within the OIC community. The awards' laureates have been selected through a rigorous peer-review process, the 2023 awardees represent the pinnacle of scientific accomplishment across various disciplines. Their dedication has significantly advanced scientific knowledge and fostered innovation. COMSTECH Life-Time Contributions

Award in Physics has been jointly awarded to Yasaman Farzan (Iran) and Asghari Maqsood (Pakistan), and the second award of same category in Mathematics has been bestowed to Saieed Akbari Feyzaabaadi (Iran). COMSTECH Young Researcher Award won by Ahmed Zeeshan (Pakistan), COMSTECH Best Scientific Book Award won by Mohd Sapuan SALIT (Malaysia), COMSTECH Best Patent Award won jointly by So-mayyeh KOOHI (Iran) and AMRY Youssef (Morocco), COMSTECH Best Research Paper Award in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics has been awarded jointly to Imen Khouni (Tunisia) and Shujaul Mulik Khan (Pakistan), Naseem Iqbal (Pakistan) and Ismail Ocoyol (Turkiye), Kushairi Mohd

Salleh (Malaysia) and Ambreen Kalsoom (Pakistan), respectively, whereas K M Ariful Kabir (Bangladesh) has won in same category award in Mathematics. COMSTECH extends its warmest congratulations to all the winners for their remarkable achievements. Each recipient will receive a certificate signed by His Excellency the President of Pakistan (Chairman COMSTECH), a shield of honor, and a cash prize. Beyond individual recognition, the COMSTECH Awards celebrate the spirit of collaboration that drives scientific progress. The awardees' willingness to share their expertise inspires future generations of researchers within the OIC and across the globe.

AIOU allocates Rs.125mln for merit scholarships, research grants

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has allocated a significant amount of 125 million for financial assistance and scholarship programs. These programs are designed to help deserving, needy and bright students, said Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood. He was addressing at the prize distribution ceremony held in honor of the students who won Final Year Project Grants and Merit Scholarships in semester Autumn 2023. Speaking on the occasion he said that last year, a total of 36,640 students benefited from these opportunities, AIOU provides free matriculation education to the people of Balochistan, merged districts (Ex FATA), and

Gilgit-Baltistan, he added. In addition, VC said the university offers merit scholarships to bright students who secure more than 80% marks in each semester, and their fee is refunded. It is pertinent to mention here that a total of 129 students from various departments have been awarded merit scholarships for achieving more than 80% marks in the autumn 2023 semester. Additionally, 13 students from three departments have been granted final-year project grants. It's essential to note that as per university policy, students who secure 80% marks must apply within the given time to receive scholarships; otherwise, the university will not be responsible. The successful students were presented with cheques by the Vice Chancellor. Dr. Nasir Mahmood emphasized

that hard work is a key factor in achieving success in life. The purpose of the merit scholarships is to encourage talented students to complete their education. This celebration will motivate other students, and there are vast opportunities available for them in the world. Dr. Nasir also pointed out that Allah has blessed everyone with the same abilities, and the only difference between the successful and unsuccessful is the amount of hard work put in. This event was organized by the Directorate of Students Advisory and Counseling Services, Dean, Faculty of Sciences, Prof. Dr. Hajra Ahmed, Prof. Dr. Irshad Ahmed Arshad, Director, Student Affairs, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali also addressed the ceremony and congratulated the awardees.

TDAP facilitates fruitful visit of Chinese delegation to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) is proud to announce the successful facilitation of the visit by a distinguished Chinese delegation to Pakistan from March 15th to March 18th, 2024. Led by Pang Chi, Chairman, and Ms. Hu Yu, Legal Representative of Hunan Yuzhen Food Co. Ltd, China, the delegation's visit aims to explore avenues for enhancing bilateral trade relations between Pakistan and China. During their stay, the delegation engaged in constructive meetings and discussions with key stakeholders in Pakistan's agricultural sector. TDAP played a pivotal role in organizing these meetings, ensuring that the delegation had the opportunity to interact with leading exporters and industry players. The highlight of the visit included productive sessions with prominent entities such as The Fauji Meat Limited and members of The Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan. These meetings provided valuable insights into the quality and variety of meat and rice products available in Pakistan.—DNA

PAL invites submissions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) has invited submissions for the upcoming issue of the English Literary Journal "Pakistani Literature". Chairperson PAL Dr. Najiba Arif told APP that the Literary Journal "Pakistani Literature" includes creative works by prominent writers from all schools of thought and indigenous languages. She said that the deadline for the submissions of entries is April 24, 2024, and can be sent to email ID: asma.mansoor@iu.edu.pk. "We welcome original creative writing in English, translations of local languages of Pakistan into English, as well as theoretically grounded critical essays dealing with diverse Pakistan Literary traditions, said the Chairperson. She said that the journal, like other regular publications of the Academy, aims to promote literary works produced in various local languages.

Pakistan companies will participate at Techtexil

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Techtexil and Texprocess will be held from April 23rd to 26th, 2024. Texprocess will showcase the latest in garment and textile manufacturing machinery and services, while Techtexil, the leading international trade fair for technical textiles and nonwovens, will also take place at the same venue in Frankfurt am Main. Techtexil and Texprocess provide support to companies as they embark on their digital future journey. These premier international trade fairs feature more than 1,600 exhibitors from approximately 50 countries, presenting their most recent advancements and innovations. The fair presents a comprehensive program, including lectures on digitalization, production technology, intelligent textiles, digital printing, and delivery chains. These events spotlight cutting-edge digital technologies, revolutionizing textile production by addressing labor shortages and sustainability demands, while enhancing efficiency. Over ten exhibitors, including Lucky Textile, Master Textile Mills, Nishat Fabrics, and Sapphire Finishing Mills, will showcase their products at Techtexil, while Triple Tree Solution will participate in Texprocess. In 2022, both shows attracted 1,334 exhibitors (Texprocess had 182 exhibitors from 29 countries and Techtexil had 1,152 exhibitors from 46 countries) and more than 63,000 trade visitors, which once again made them Europe's foremost innovation platforms for the sector.

CDNS achieve Rs 1050 billion targets in fresh bond

ISLAMABAD: The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has achieved a target of Rs 1050 billion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, from July 1 to March, 15. The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, the senior official of CDNS told APP here on Monday. He said this was an Rs 200 billion additional annual target than the target of Rs 1300 billion for the previous financial year 2021-22. "The CDNS has set a reviewed saving target of Rs 1.4 trillion for the current financial year (2021-22) which will promote savings culture in the country," he said. Given the current market trend in the country, the ambitious target had been set to improve the savings culture further, he added. The official said that work was being done on institutional reforms in CDNS and new reforms and innovations were being introduced. "At this time Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has also been introduced in CDNS which will provide enough facilities to the users," he added. Replying to a question, he said the CDNS had collected an investment of Rs 60 billion by March 15th, 2023-24, through Islamic investment bonds.—DNA

Food exports grew by 54.05% in 08 months

ISLAMABAD: Food group exports from the country during the first 08 months of the current financial year grew by 54.05 per cent as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year. During the period from July-February, 2023-24, different food commodities worth \$4.969 billion were exported as compared to the exports of 3.225 billion in the same period of the previous year, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. The exports of rice grew by 85.83 per cent as over 3.932 million metric tons of rice valued at \$2.517 billion were exported as compared to the exports of 2.546 million tons worth \$1.354 billion in the same period of last year, it added. During the period under review, the exports of fruits and vegetables grew by 13.89 per cent and 39.27 per cent respectively as 688,950 metric tons of fruits valued at \$246.463 million and 724,252 metric tons of vegetables worth \$277.064 million were exported.—APP

GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT				
 Rescue 1122				
AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE TENDER NOTICE				
The Punjab Government is launching the "Air Ambulance Service" in Punjab to transfer critical patients to specialized hospitals from far-flung areas of South and North Punjab. One Air Ambulance shall be stationed at Rawalpindi/ Mianwali and the other at Multan/ Bahawalnagar.				
Accordingly, the companies prequalified/ registered with the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) are invited to submit their tenders/ bids for the provision of the following services for one year extendable on basis of performance as per the Punjab Procurement Rules-2014.				
No.	Description(s)	Estimated Cost	Bid Security	Tender Fee
1	Two Airplanes for provision of Air Ambulance Service in Punjab	PKR 440 million (For one year)	PKR 4 million	PKR 10,000
1) Tender documents can be obtained on a written request on the payment of a prescribed fee (non-refundable and non-adjustable) from the Procurement Wing of the Department at the below given address on any working day immediately after publication of this notice up to 28-03-2024 .				
2) Applications along with required documents should reach the Procurement Wing by 29-03-2024 at 11:00 am which shall be opened on the same date at 11:30 am in the presence of bidders in the Conference Room at the below given address.				
3) No application shall be accepted after the due date and time. In case of a holiday, the procurement procedure shall be done on the next working day at the same place and time.				
4) "Single-Stage Two Envelops Bidding Procedure" shall be adopted under Rule 38(2)(a) of Punjab Procurement Rules-2014.				
5) Procurement shall be carried out as per Punjab Procurement Rules 2014.				
6) The tender Notice and Documents are also available on the websites i.e. www.ppra.punjab.gov.pk and www.rescue.gov.pk .				
Rescue Headquarters, Thokar Niaz Baig, Lahore. Tel: 042-35131883 procurement1122@gmail.com. URL. www.rescue.gov.pk				

Briefs

Ramesh urges all political parties to forge unity

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Minister for Minorities Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora on Monday stressed that all political forces should work together to address the challenges faced by the people as solving the problems of the people is the top priority of the present government. Talking to a private news channel, he said that all stakeholders should work together to revive the economy, adding that all these measures will be taken to reduce the burden on the poor people. "Political stability leads to economic stability and sincere efforts are being made in this regard," he added. PML-N's top agenda is to deliver, he said, adding, now under the leadership of Shahbaz Sharif, PML-N will drive the country out of the existing issues. He said that the performance of the PML-N was proof of its commitment to public service, honesty, hard work, and transparency. PML-N government will make all our efforts to make Pakistan a developed, peaceful, and prosperous country, adding, that our practical initiatives will boost the economy and the nation will hear good news soon. Replying to a question, he said the government is well aware of the economic challenges faced by the country and the Prime Minister holds meetings daily to overcome these challenges.—APP

Death anniversary of actor Mehboob Alam observed

ISLAMABAD: Death anniversary of renowned television and film actor Mehboob Alam was observed on Monday. Born on March 14, 1948, Mehboob Alam was a versatile actor with a unique acting style. He was best known for his remarkable role in the Pakistan Television classic drama serial "Waris" in which he played the role of Chaudhry Hashmat Ali. He also appeared in famous PTV drama Andhera Ujala, Apnay Log, and Neelay Hath. Mehboob Alam also acted in 38 movies which included 12 Urdu, 15 Punjabi, and 11 Sindhi movies. He died on March 18, 1994, in Karachi at age 46.—APP

Taraar grieved over demise of Raja Waqar

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ataullah Taraar on Monday expressed his grief over the death of Raja Waqar Mumtaz, Islamabad District President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. In a condolence message, the minister expressed his heartfelt condolences to the family of Raja Waqar Mumtaz. The minister said that Waqar Mumtaz was a sincere and committed worker of the PML-N and his death had caused irreparable damage to the party.—APP

China and Pakistan to deepen cooperation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Ambassador to China Khalil Hashmi embarked on a significant visit to the School of Journalism at Tsinghua University, marking the inauguration of the new Pakistan Culture and Communication Studies office and agreeing to boost cooperation. This pivotal moment aimed to deepen the ties between China and Pakistan, particularly in the realms of media and culture. During the visit, Am-

bassador Hashmi engaged in discussions about potential initiatives to bolster cooperation between the School of Journalism and the Pakistan Embassy, Gwadar Pro reported. These initiatives are envisioned to solidify the already strong bond between the two nations. A notable outcome of these discussions was the announcement of a collaborative effort between the School of Journalism at Tsinghua University, the Pakistan Center for Culture and Communication Studies, Qaid-e-Azam University,

Beijing Foreign Studies University, and Communication University of China. Together, they will organize a transformative "China-Pakistan Cultural Corridor Caravan Class" set to take place over three weeks during the upcoming summer. This innovative caravan class will traverse the landscapes of the Karakoram and Hindu Kush Mountains. Participants will engage in research, teaching, and writing activities inspired by the ancient journeys of Chinese monks in the mountains of northern Pakistan, as well as the historical route of Gao Xianzhi's expedition across the Hindukush. Ten esteemed professors from both China and Pakistan will deliver enlightening lectures to students from both countries, fostering cross-cultural understanding and academic collaboration. Before the unveiling ceremony of the new office, Ambassador Hashmi had a significant meeting with Peng Gang, the Vice President of Tsinghua University.



ISLAMABAD: A man selling beads in front of a mosque in Islamabad. The sale of beads increases during the holy month of Ramadan.—Photo Mudassar Raja

Al-Shifa says corneal donations can transform thousands of lives

Maj. Gen (Retd) Rehmat Khan, there is a significant disparity between supply and demand of cornea in Pakistan and throughout the world, with corneal blindness accounting for up to 15% of all cases of blindness

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Maj. Gen (Ret) Rehmat Khan, the president of Al-Shifa Trust, on Monday, said that corneal contributions had the potential to give a fresh lease on life to thousands of people as nine thousand people were on the trust's waiting list for corneal transplants. He noted that the trust receives 800 corneal donations annually and has increased its capacity accordingly. However, the majority on the waiting list have to wait for years to get their vision restored and become useful citizens. According to Maj. Gen (Retd) Rehmat Khan, there is a significant disparity between supply and demand of cornea in Pakistan and throughout the world, with corneal blind-

ness accounting for up to 15% of all cases of blindness. He urged the masses to donate corneas, pointing out that in the previous thirty years, only two people had donated corneas, and people were reluctant to do so for various reasons. He informed the media representatives that Americans provide corneal donations for Pakistani patients because residents are reluctant to volunteer for this charitable endeavour. According to him, in August 2018, the first-ever eye bank was formed at the trust's Rawalpindi premises with the assistance of the American organisation Eversight. There, individuals can submit their wills to donate corneas. He continued by saying that because corneal donations in the country are so few, 53% of eye patients lack access to donated corneas; as a result, corneas must be imported from the



USA and Sri Lanka. A cornea is one of the simplest tissues to transplant because the donor and recipient do not need to match. He said it is a bloodless tissue that absorbs oxygen straight from the atmosphere. He went on to say that corneas from the elderly can be removed and transplanted into the eyes of much younger people. According to Maj. Gen. (Ret) Rehmat Khan, the Al-Shifa Trust has begun corneal transplants at its Sukkar hospital in addition to its Rawalpindi facility. In Sukkar Hospital, 50 corneal transplants have been completed successfully to date at no cost. Eighty percent of all surgeries performed at the Al-Shifa eye hospitals in Rawalpindi, Sukkar, Kohat, Muzaffarabad, and Chakwal are free of charge. So far, the trust has performed over one million different eye surgeries.

ANF recovers 2600 kg drugs in 11 operations

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 11 operations managed to recover over 2600 kg drugs and arrested 11 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 1.5 kg heroin and 175 grams diazepam powder were recovered from the possession of three accused arrested at Lahore Airport. 918 grams Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Doha at Peshawar Airport and one metric ton hashish was recovered from an area near Chaman Road Quetta. In another operation, 1300 kg hashish was recovered from Qila Abdullah. 120 kg Ice and 30 kg opium were recovered from Bonstan Panjgur area. In 8th operation, 49.2 kg hashish and 34.8 kg opium were recovered from two suspects rounded up near Motorway Toll Plaza Sheikhupura.

50.4 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects netted from Islamabad Motorway. He informed that in 10th operation, 11 kg hashish was recovered from Zakhakhel Khyber and in 11th operation, 2.5 kg heroin was recovered from the possession of three suspects nabbed near G.T Road Lahore.

Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

Businesses optimistic on appointment of Aurangzeb as Finance Minister

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Monday that masses and businesses are excited about the appointment of Aurangzeb to the position of Finance Minister. Muhammad Aurangzeb has no political baggage; therefore, it is hoped that he will make economic decisions on merit and not allow politics to guide the economy, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the respected and experienced finance minister can resolve problems confronting the economy if allowed to work independently. Talking to the business community, the

veteran business leader said Muhammad Aurangzeb is a professional and non-political person ready to deliver as expected. He added that with his appointment as the Minister of Finance, the public and the business community have become hopeful for improvement in the situation. Business people and industrialists believe important economic decisions will now be made on merit rather than factional politics. He hoped that PIA and other sick public institutions would be privatized, electricity and gas sector losses would be eliminated and business costs would be reduced. The business leader said that the people had seen Abdul Hafeez Sheikh, Shaukat Tareen, Ishaq Dar, Asad Umar, and Mufthah Ismail as finance

ministers, now the people and the business community are awaiting the moves of the finance minister who is not a slave of political groups. The new finance minister is respected in financial circles and can make tough decisions under pressure. He is now faced with the challenge of the success of the current IMF review and signing a new IMF program soon after the budget. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the new finance minister must also decide on the NFC award as the provinces' share is very high. The federation is left with nothing for essential expenses and has to take loans. He said that the provinces have not been able to increase the tax in the last ten years because they are getting more funds than they need.—APP

Pakistani dealers amazed at integration of Home appliances at AWE 2024 expo

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani dealers amazed at Integration of Home Appliances at the Appliance and Electronics World Expo (AWE) 2024 held here from March 14 to March 17. Pakistani dealer Mr. Muhammad Khurram Shahzad Alan, who has been doing business with China for over two decades, expressed his amazement at the seamless integration of various home appliances displayed at the expo. Considered one of the world's largest gatherings showcasing the latest in electronics and appliances, attracting dealers, manufacturers, and technology enthusiasts

from around the globe, AWE2024 continues to focus on live displays of smart homes, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Monday. Smart life solutions such as smart cities, smart healthcare, smart travel, and smart education, as well as innovative products such as VR/AR, wearable devices, service robots, outdoor appliances, and e-sports peripherals, are all on display at AWE2024. Khurram Shahzad Alan, who specializes in distributing home appliances in Pakistan, was particularly impressed by the innovative products showcased at the expo. He noted the trend towards smart home technology, where appliances can be seamlessly connected and

controlled through a single interface. "The level of integration and connectivity displayed here is truly remarkable. I have seen many advancements in home appliances over the years, but the extent to which these products can now work together, enhancing our daily lives, is truly mind-boggling," he said. The integration of home appliances is the future. The products here are not just standalone items; they are part of a larger, interconnected system that promises to revolutionize our domestic lives. "During his visit, Mr. Alan also interacted with several exhibitors and learned about the latest advancements in smart home technology.

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Chuck Schumer Juncture

THE matter will not be of interest to those who see politics as the "art of the impossible." As for those who see it as the "art of the possible" and believe that a lot of compromise and half-solutions are inherent to it, they cannot but be struck by the remarks of Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. He called for new elections in Israel in a recent speech, seemingly suggesting that Netanyahu no longer has a popular mandate. The latter has lost his way, becoming a prisoner of the past and "a significant obstacle to peace" who "all too frequently bowed to the demands of extremists like Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, who "have stoked tensions and violence." Doubtful that Netanyahu would do such a thing, Schumer said that kicking out the two ministers would be "a real and meaningful step forward." That is because Israel's rejection of the two-state solution is a "grave mistake", and the country should change course to achieve lasting peace. Schumer's statements coincided with the United States' announcement of sanctions on three additional Israeli settlers and, for the first time, on two agricultural entities. These measures were presented as part of the US and UK governments' efforts to put an end to the expulsion and displacement of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. The fact is that it will not be easy to turn this rhetoric of Schumers' - a towering Democratic figure who is among the most ardent of Israel's traditional headline supporters, as well as being the highest-ranking Jewish politician in US history - into the official position of the White House. However, it would also be a mistake to ignore the fact that his remarks were preceded by a number of statements and insinuations by the president reflecting frustration with Netanyahu and disapproval of the barbaric manner in which he is waging this war. After the speech, Biden did not hesitate to call it a "good speech," and he stressed that Schumer "expressed a serious concern shared not only by him but by many Americans." Biden also mentioned that the Majority Leader "had informed the presidential staff about the speech before delivering it." The executive shifting its position closer towards Schumer's is thus not impossible, though it is not guaranteed either. Joe Biden's presidential battle and its considerations will certainly bear on the direction he decides to take. Netanyahu, as is well known, has not only alienated many across the globe, including in Israel itself, and turned them against him, but has also alienated the United States, the primary supporter of his country and its war, and turned it against him. Incidentally, he is already making up for lost ground in this regard as well, as he was the first prime minister in Israeli history to break with the tradition of standing with the White House, regardless of who is president, becoming embroiled in political and partisan disputes and siding with the Republicans. In turn, the Reform Movement, the largest Jewish movement in the United States, expressed a position susceptible to change. Haaretz said the movement "agreed with the essence of the New York Senator's remarks", but "questioned whether they should have been said." Such an achievement, if it were realized, would undoubtedly create a more suitable environment for waging political battles that grant the Palestinians more of the rights they are entitled to. It would also be a less bloody, painful, and destructive environment.



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Putin's victory, West's frustration

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin won the latest election, which means he will remain in power until at least 2030. Many Western media outlets claimed that this is a "nightmare" for the West. According to the Russian Central Election Commission (CEC), Putin leads with 87.32 percent of the vote after 99.43 percent of ballots were counted as of Monday, which is a record victory in Russian elections. This election was held more than two years after the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out. Currently, Russia has a clear advantage in military forces and firepower, and the Ukrainian army faces difficulties on all fronts. An article entitled "In this Ukrainian village, almost no men are left" was published by the Washington Post on March 16, pointing out that "people are being caught like dogs on the street." Ukraine is facing serious difficulties with a need for more soldiers, and some people even demand that the police be sent to the front line. Putin has demonstrated his strong ability to control the situation over the past two years. The "special military operation" did not end as quickly as Moscow planned, but the comprehensive sanctions imposed by the US and the West on Russia did not crush Russia as they had hoped. Their military aid supported the fight in Kiev, but failed to create the expected advantage on the Ukrainian battlefield. Russia not only shows a powerful military capability, but also maintains stability in the economy and overall unity in society, without expanding opposition forces. Data from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Center, Russia's independent polling organization, show that around half of Russians "strongly support" the war with Ukraine, and 28 percent "somewhat support" the war. Russia has abundant food, energy and minerals. The West estimates that Russia's artillery shell production capacity is about three times that of the US and Europe. Despite the support of the entire West, Ukraine is still at a disadvantage, lacking in artillery and ammunition. In addition, Russia is a nuclear power with extremely strong strategic deterrence. French President Emmanuel Macron recently stated multiple times that he could not rule out the deployment of NATO ground troops in Ukraine in the future. In response, Putin stated on Sunday that doing so would be "one step away from a full-scale World War Three." Macron's stance has faced open questioning and opposition from countries like the US, UK and Germany, with only Finland expressing support. As long as Putin remains in power, Western countries as a whole will be unable to ease relations with Russia. Donald Trump has stated that once in office, he would seek to end the Ukraine war. However, Western animosity toward Russia and Putin runs too deep. Issues such as the Ukraine crisis, Baltic and Central European hostility toward Russia, and the Syria crisis remain unresolved, with the West unable to unify its stance to address them. Regarding China-Russia relations, after his election victory, Putin described it as a "stabilizing factor" in international relations. On Taiwan question, he stated, Taiwan island is "without any doubt an integral part" of the People's Republic of China. Western media heavily promoted calls from some supporters of late opposition leader Alexei Navalny to vote against Putin on Sunday at noon, but those voices were too few.

New government, old challenges!

Air Commodore Khalid Iqbal (R)

This has sparked confidence and optimism among the well-wishers of the country.

The evolving situation augurs well for Pakistan. The negotiations with the IMF have started, and the staff-level agreement is in the offing. One may safely hope that the country is likely to move forward on the road to progress and development. So far, so good! Nonetheless, the platter of the new federal government is full. It won't be easy-going. The starting point for the government is a phenomenal budget deficit of Rs8.5 trillion, marginal foreign exchange reserves (around US\$ 10 billion), and very high interest rates (22 percent). The trade deficit for the ongoing fiscal year is nearing US\$15 b. During January, the Sensitive Points index clocked an inflation rate of 32.6 % on a year-on-year basis. The tax-to-GDP ratio is around 10 percent...

FOR the new governments at federal and provincial levels, top priority challenges are sapping economy, political instability, and cross-border terrorist attacks. Each of these issues is decades old and of phenomenal magnitude. Cumulatively, these have stretched the societal fabric to a near rupture point. Recovering from these fault lines calls for unwavering national resolve and a whole-of-state and whole-of-society approach. The silver lining is that the people came out in numbers to vote in the recent elections. This indicates that the general public is genuinely interested in converting these challenges into opportunities. Moreover, all those who got elected, are keen to quickly become part of the evolving political system rather than sit on the fence. The transition from caretaker to newly mandated governments has been smoother and faster than even the most optimistic expectations. The rapid flow of felicitation messages from important capitals has strengthened the aura of international recognition of the outcome of the elections. Some of the international economic watchdogs have recently upgraded a couple of Pakistan's economic ratings. Reportedly, Euro-bonds have jumped to a new high value. This has sparked confidence and optimism among the well-wishers of the country. The evolving situation augurs well for Pakistan. The negotiations with the IMF have started, and the staff-level agreement is in the offing. One may safely hope that the country is likely to move forward on the road to progress and development. So far, so good! Nonetheless, the platter of the new federal government is full. It won't be easy-going. The starting point for the government is a phenomenal budget deficit of Rs8.5 trillion, marginal foreign exchange reserves (around US\$ 10 billion), and very high in-

terest rates (22 percent). The trade deficit for the ongoing fiscal year is nearing US\$15 b. During January, the Sensitive Points index clocked an inflation rate of 32.6 % on a year-on-year basis. The tax-to-GDP ratio is around 10 percent, one of the lowest in the region. The projected GDP growth for fiscal year 2023-24 is around 2-3%. Net debt liabilities, domestic and external, are nearing \$285 b or Rs 80 trillion. External debt financing over one year requires about US \$25 billion. There is a need for a paradigm shift in debt management practices. New avenues should be explored for debt relief, and debt rescheduling negotiations with the creditors should commence at the earliest. We need to enhance our exports. However, in most of the sectors, our industry is unable to compete internationally due to continuous hikes in electricity tariffs, gas prices, and indirect taxes. These issues need urgent attention. Moreover, there is a dire need to deliver long-awaited relief to the people, whose patience is depleting rapidly due to an unprecedented reduction in their usual household-related purchasing power. To make matters worse, the IMF is likely to come in the way of any meaningful relief that the government may plan for the low-income segments of society. Nevertheless, the government has options to mobilise the resources. Failure to run some of the State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) efficiently has stressed the country's public finances to a breaking point. Selling off the top 10 loss-making SOEs and cutting the inefficiencies in the power sector alone could provide enough fiscal space to alleviate some of the major sufferings of the people. The situation would further ease if the government puts through requisite tax reforms to broaden the tax base and eliminate the discretionary role

of tax collectors. During 2023, there were around 600 terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The origin of most of these attacks has been traced back to Afghanistan; brand-wise most of these attacks were carried out by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), duly facilitated by very powerful terrorist outfits based in Afghanistan. Besides combating the terrorists through its law enforcers, Pakistan has been exploring other means to reach a negotiated settlement with the TTP. Reportedly, the Afghan ruling coalition has, once again, urged the TTP to engage in discussions with Pakistan to de-escalate tensions. The new government should capitalise on this opportunity. It should also make a concerted effort to choke the logistics and restrict the movement of terrorist operatives from and to Afghanistan. To cool down the tempers of a divisive society, there is an urgent need for a "Grand National Dialogue." This dialogue must be meaningful, broad-based, multidisciplinary, and all-inclusive. It should be at academic, practitioner, and expert levels, in a combination of bottom-up as well as top-down formats. To boost the spirit of political inclusivity, there is a need to revive the good old forum of the "All Parties Conference" to swiftly build consensus on evolving challenges to the country. Effective and workable strategies to resolve all the major challenges facing the country are well known to the national leadership, but political polarisation remains the main hurdle to implementing these solutions. The need of the time is a new vision anchored on open-mindedness, creativity, innovation, and above all, the will to succeed. And together, we can do it!

— Air Commodore Khalid Iqbal (Retd) is Director National Security at Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, Pakistan. He may be reached at info@casslhr.com

Exposing blatant Western hypocrisy on Gaza aid

Hannan Hussain

Washington's proximity to rights groups, aid agencies, and striking UN assessments make clear that it is giving a carte blanche to Israel to step-up its bloodshed against starving Palestinians, and ignoring the humanitarian devastation on-ground. South Africa's renewed pressure at the International Court of Justice is geared towards addressing that exact hypocrisy, and putting the unimaginable suffering of besieged Palestinians at the forefront of all actions

HOW credible is "air dropped" aid and assistance to Gaza when bombs and brutalities dominate the Israeli genocide? Western military supplies continue to flood into occupation arms at the expense of Palestinians, and all those among them that are in the throes of death and destruction. Look at Washington. It refuses to address this contradiction as it sponsors the Israeli unrelenting onslaught on starving Palestinians. Billions in military aid to the occupation effectively ensure no relief in a fast-spreading famine, calling into question the credibility of so-called US "air drops." By opting for such an air drop measure, Washington attempts to justify the Israeli occupation's denial of critical humanitarian aid via conventional means. The Palestinians' right to livelihoods and prosperity is unquestionably tied to their own agency, and not the decisions of a power that is hellbent on sponsoring the genocide militarily, politically and financially. The West's hypocrisy is on full display as it floats rhetoric on peace and stability, but turns a blind eye to growing hunger, rampant famine, and scores of mothers that are struggling to feed their children amid sponsored bombing. The end goal of such inadequate, hypocritical and condescending aid is not to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian suffering of Palestinians, or provide "essential relief" to civilians. It is to further entrench the Israeli occupation, which has used starvation as an instrument of brazen repression and genocidal aggression against the Palestinian people. "Famine in northern Gaza has reached fatal levels, especially for children, pregnant women and patients with chronic diseases," said Ashraf al-Qudra, the spokesperson for the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza. "Thousands of people are at risk of dying of starvation," he warned.

As Gaza's starvation toll reaches double figures, the West shows no signs of relinquishing arms and other military supplies that are at the heart of occupation belligerence. The United States has reportedly approved over 100 distinct military sales to Israel since its genocide in Gaza, underlining the farce of recent air-drops and US platitudes to support stability in the enclave. As the current president of Refugees International pointed out to the Washington Post, this is an "extraordinary number of sales over the course of a pretty short amount of time" which severely indicates that the Israeli genocidal campaign would "not be sustainable without this level of U.S. support." Washington's proximity to rights groups, aid agencies, and striking UN assessments make clear that it is giving a carte blanche to Israel to step-up its bloodshed against starving Palestinians, and ignoring the humanitarian devastation on-ground. South Africa's renewed pressure at the International Court of Justice is geared towards addressing that exact hypocrisy, and putting the unimaginable suffering of besieged Palestinians at the forefront of all actions. "The threat of all-out famine has now materialised. The court needs to act now to stop the imminent tragedy by immediately and effectively ensuring that the rights it has found are threatened under the Genocide Convention are protected," said the South Africa presidency. Where is Western protest as the Israelis ban visa access to aid workers due in Gaza? How do millions in so-called Western humanitarian aid square off with billions in bombs and ammunition to the Israeli occupation? The view from the ground-up is that life-saving aid is unilaterally and openly denied without protest from nations that sustain this genocidal status-quo in Gaza. Germany's own

attitude towards Gaza's unspeakable suffering is a proof point in itself. After all, Berlin claims that the suffering witnessed in Gaza is beyond description, but refuses to end its diplomatic appeasement of Israel to the detriment of peace and autonomy among Palestinians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees also continues to serve as a prime target of Israeli-U.S. defamation and funding crunch, effectively serving occupation objectives of sustaining Gaza's widespread human suffering. There is no meaningful deliberation from the West to empower and sustain the core UN assistance mechanism. Instead they acted in unity to cut off lifesaving financial assistance when scores of children fought for survival. Present Western priorities remain increasingly focused on amplifying the Israeli UNRWA disinformation campaign, and their hypocrisy on a lasting, enduring, and justly negotiated ceasefire makes the West a chief aggressor against the liberties and survival of Palestinians. Now, some of the same Western sponsors of genocidal aggression are contemplating a shift in their cuts of UNRWA funding, desiring acknowledgment. But make no mistake: it is such Western attempts and attitudes that repeatedly trivialize the suffering, autonomy, and independence of Palestinian children and women beyond all bounds. Thus understood, whether these are condemnable "air drops" or blatant attempts to dehumanize the Palestinians, Western actions on aid and assistance deserve the highest degree of denunciation. Outsized military support for occupation genocide pales any effort to ease humanitarian suffering in Gaza. In turn, this makes their hypocrisy on Palestine clear as day.

— Source: Al Mayadeen English

Briefs

Pak hits TTP hideouts inside...

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ground for terrorism against Pakistan. We have also called on them to deny safe havens to TTP and to hand over its leadership to Pakistan," the FO said. The statement added that Pakistan has great respect for the people of Afghanistan; however, certain elements among those in power in Afghanistan are actively patronising TTP and using them as a proxy against Pakistan. "Such an approach against a brotherly country, which stood with the people of Afghanistan through thick and thin, manifests shortsightedness. It ignores the support extended by Pakistan to the people of Afghanistan over the last several decades.

Terrorist commander killed in...

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was involved in orchestrating the terrorist attack on a security forces' post in Mir Ali on 16 March and was "highly wanted by the law enforcement agencies". "Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the Security Forces of Pakistan remain determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," the ISPR mentioned in its statement. On Saturday, at least seven Pakistan Army soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel and captain, embraced martyrdom after gallantly fighting with terrorists as they attacked a security forces' post in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan.

FM Dar calls for enhancing...

FROM PAGE 01
Meanwhile, United States Ambassador Donald Blome engaged in a crucial meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday, emphasising US support for economic reforms in Pakistan. Acting US Mission Spokesperson Thomas Montgomery in a statement highlighted the comprehensive nature of the dialogue, stating that both diplomats addressed key areas including regional security, trade and investment relations, and the enduring significance of the US-Pakistan Green Alliance framework.

PDM-2 violating...

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over one month now. We fully endorse 28 civil society organisations' demand for immediate removal of ban on the social media platform allowing free flow of information as should be the case in a democratic country." He went on to say that the murder of freedom of expression and press had been the topmost priority of the usurped and anti-constitutional group. PTI Spokesperson stated that all kinds of coercive and brutal tactics ranging from enforced disappearances to blackmailing their families had been used to target the impartial journalists and social media workers.

Govt places restrictions...

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taken from the committee established on austerity. The government has also banned officials from staying in five-star hotels during foreign visits. "The federal ministers, ministers of state, advisers and assistants will be authorised to make three visits to foreign countries in a year. In special circumstances, these visits may be extended," the documents state. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce have been exempted from this ban. All divisions have to obtain a no-objection certificate from the Economic Affairs Division for visits to any international financial institution. As per the policy, "Support staff are also banned from travelling abroad.

Indian Wells

Alcaraz defends crown, Iga Swiatek crushes Sakkari

Carlos Alcaraz defended his crown at the Indian Wells successfully while Iga Swiatek crushed Maria Sakkari in the final to win the women's title

SPORTS DESK

INDIAN WELLS : Carlos Alcaraz overcame a sluggish start and finished with a flourish to successfully defend his Indian Wells crown with a 7-6(5) 6-1 win over Daniil Medvedev in the final.

The win ends a title drought for the world number two that stretched back to last summer's Wimbledon and makes him the first man to defend a championship in the California desert since Novak Djokovic won three straight between 2014-2016.

Alcaraz showed no ill effects from the ankle injury that forced him to withdraw from last month's Rio Open but said it was on his mind coming into the event.

In a rematch of last year's final, Alcaraz started slow, spraying errors around the court to fall 3-0 down but raised his level to get back on serve and eventually force a tiebreak. In the closely fought breaker, Alcaraz pounded a forehand that his Russian opponent could not redirect safely in bounds to hand Alcaraz the first set. The Spaniard romped through the second set, raising his arms in the air and letting out a roar when Medvedev missed another forehand wide on match point. Second seed Alcaraz smacked 25 winners to Medvedev's 11 and was especially effective against his opponent's second serves. Swiatek wins second title at Indian Wells.



Iga Swiatek reaffirmed her dominance at the Indian Wells by securing her second title at this prestigious event, delivering a masterclass performance against Maria Sakkari. The final scoreline of 6-4, 6-0 underscored Swiatek's superiority on the day, showcasing her unparalleled skill and determination. The match began with Swiatek, the world's top-ranked player, quickly asserting her authority, racing to an early lead. However, Sakkari, demonstrating resilience, clawed her way back into contention, leveling the score at 4-4. Despite this comeback, Swiatek's relentless pressure eventually told, as she clinched the first set with a beautifully executed forehand winner, a fitting end to a fiercely contested opener. The momentum firmly in her favor, Swiatek shifted gears in the second set, leaving Sakkari struggling to keep pace. With precision and power, Swiatek broke serve early, establishing a commanding 3-0 lead.

Her dominance continued unabated, breaking Sakkari's serve once more for a 4-0 advantage. As the match progressed, Sakkari's resistance waned, and Swiatek sensed the finish line was near. A sublime backhand winner down the line brought her to the brink of victory, which she secured emphatically by breaking Sakkari's serve to love, a forehand error from the Greek sealing her fate. This triumph at Indian Wells not only cements Swiatek's status as a force to be reckoned with on the WTA Tour but also improves her impressive record in career finals to 19-4, including an enviable 8-2 record at the WTA 1000 level.

FROM PAGE 01
Asked by Reuters about Macron's remarks and the risks and possibility of a conflict between Russia and NATO, Putin quipped: "Everything is possible in the modern world." "It is clear to everyone, that this will be one step away from a full-scale World War Three. I think hardly anyone is interested in this," Putin told reporters after winning the biggest-ever landslide in post-Soviet Russian history. Putin added, though, that NATO military personnel were present already in Ukraine, saying that Russia had picked up both English and French being spoken on the battlefield. "There is nothing good in this, first of all for them, because they are dying there and in large numbers," he said. Ahead of the March 15-17 Russian election, Ukraine stepped up attacks against Russia, shelling border regions and even used proxies to try to pierce Russia's borders.

Russia-NATO conflict is just one step away from...

FROM PAGE 01
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North Korea fires ballistic...

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The nuclear-armed North. Washington and Seoul wrapped up one of their major annual joint military training exercises last week, prompting angry retorts and live-fire drills from nuclear-armed Pyongyang, which condemns all such exercises as rehearsals for invasion. Seoul's military said it had detected the launch of "multiple short-range ballistic missiles" early Monday, which flew around 300 kilometers (186 miles) before coming down into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan. "We are closely sharing relevant information with the US and Japan and are maintaining utmost readiness," the Joint Chiefs of Staff added. After meeting Yoon, Blinken "condemned the... launch of ballistic missiles by the DPRK and reaffirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to the ROK's security," Spokesperson Matthew Miller said, referring to North and South Korea by their official names.

SBP maintains policy...

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inflation remains high and its outlook is susceptible to risks amidst elevated inflation expectations. Citing indicators, the central bank's committee decided to continue the current monetary stance required bring inflation down to the target range of 5-7% by September 2025. As per the SBP statement, the MPC reiterated that this assessment is also contingent upon continued targeted fiscal consolidation and timely realisation of planned external inflows. The committee also discussed a few key developments since its last meeting, which have implications for the macroeconomic outlook. First, the latest data continues to depict moderate pick-up in economic activity, led by rebound in agriculture output.

Maryam for building civic...

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police and will provide speedy justice to common man. They advocated, "Temporary measures are not enough, a solid policy should be brought instead for price control." They proposed to handover matters like price control, violation of environmental laws, violation of the Forest Act, hoarding, adulteration, labor laws, dengue and encroachment to the new department. It was also proposal in the meeting that enforcement powers of Local Law and Special Laws, Price Control, and Police may also be given to Civic Administration Centres for effective implementation. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif said, "By correcting demand and supply, the prices of essential commodities can be controlled automatically." Madam Maryam Nawaz highlighted, "There is no price control mechanism, capacity building of the departments is imperative."

Sammy turns down PCB offer to coach Pakistan

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) efforts to appoint a foreign coach for the men's cricket team hit another setback after former West Indies skipper Darren Sammy turned down the board's offer for the top post, The News reported on Monday.

Sammy's - who is also Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchise Peshawar Zalmi's head coach - refusal comes as he has an existing contract with the West Indies board wherein he is serving as the side's head coach in one-day internationals (ODIs) and T20Is. The development comes as the PCB's earlier bid to rope in former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson as the national side's head coach failed to materialise as the ex-cricketer - who is also the coach of Quetta Gladiators - returned home on Saturday night after rejecting the offer extended by the board. Watson, according to sources familiar with the matter, has held detailed discussions with PCB officials in Karachi during the ongoing PSL, wherein the latter had offered him the head-coach post. The ex-cricketer had initially expressed interest and had even chalked out his conditions for accepting the offer. However, despite a reported offer of \$2 million, Watson later declined the offer owing to the leak of information pertaining to the PCB's proposed package to the media, the sources added. The former all-rounder also cited his willingness to honour his current coaching and commentary commitments including an Indian Premier League (IPL) commentary stint and as the head coach of Major League Cricket side San Francisco Unicorns.

With both Sammy and Watson out of the race, the PCB might consider an interim arrangement for the national team's supervision during the training camp in Kakul from March 25 to April 8, preceding the five-match T20 series against New Zealand starting from April 14 in Lahore and Rawalpindi. - Agencies

Mbappe bags hat-trick as PSG hit six

France captain's hat-trick brought him to 24 goals in Ligue 1 this season

PARIS : An unstoppable Kylian Mbappe hit a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain romped to a 6-2 win away to Montpellier that allowed them to open up a huge 12-point lead at the top of Ligue 1. Vitinha put PSG ahead at the Stade de la Mosson and Mbappe doubled their advantage midway through the first half, only for an Arnaud Nordin header and a Teji Savanier penalty to bring Montpellier back level at the interval. However, a marvellous Mbappe goal restored PSG's lead shortly after the break and Lee Kang-in made it 4-2 before the France captain completed his hat-trick. Nuno Mendes put the seal on the victory late on, as Luis Enrique's side ended a run of three successive draws in Ligue 1 and extended an unbeaten domestic record stretching back to September.

A 1-1 draw for nearest challengers Brest against Lille means the Parisians are 12 points ahead at the Ligue 1 summit with only eight games left, and a 10th title in

12 seasons is an inevitability. Mbappe completed the whole 90 minutes of a Ligue 1 game for the first time since informing the club in mid-February that he intended to leave at the end of the season when his contract expires. His hat-trick, his third of the campaign, took him to 24 goals in Ligue 1 this season, and 38 in all competitions. Mbappe's second of the evening, PSG's third, was the pick of the bunch, as he found the net with

a superb shot from range which went in off the underside of the crossbar. "Mbappe was exceptional. We need to make the most of having him, as much as we can, and when we can no longer enjoy having him we will have to raise our game," said Luis Enrique. The downside of their performance came with the way in which they surrendered their 2-0 lead in the first half, conceding the penalty when Tanguy Coulibaly pounced

on Danilo Pereira's short back-pass and was then cluttered by PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. The defeat for Montpellier leaves them just a point above third-bottom Nantes, who are in the relegation play-off place and on Sunday sacked coach Jocelyn Gourvenec. Canadian striker Jonathan David continued his superb form in front of goal by scoring for Lille in their draw away to fellow Champions League contenders Brest. David gave Lille the lead midway through the second half in Brittany with his 22nd goal of the season in all competitions, and his 15th since the turn of the calendar year. The 24-year-old has netted 10 times in his team's last nine Ligue 1 outings. His total of 15 in Ligue 1 this season is bettered only by Mbappe. However, that goal was not enough to win the game, as Uruguayan striker Martin Satriano poked in a late equaliser for Brest, who remain second. Monaco could have climbed above Brest with a win at home to Lorient, but they were held to a 2-2 draw after Tiemoue Bakayoko headed in a 95th-minute equaliser for the struggling away side in the principality. - Agencies



Scheffler wins back-to-back Players Championship titles

MIAMI: World number one Scottie Scheffler became the first man to win back-to-back Players Championships with a superb eight under-par 64 on Sunday, giving him a one-stroke victory at TPC Sawgrass. Wyndham Clark, Brian Harman and Xander Schauffele all finished a shot behind Scheffler, with Clark going agonizingly close to forcing a playoff with Scheffler. All three of the challengers in the all-American battle needed birdies on the 18th and Clark was distraught after his 17-foot birdie putt lipped out. That left Scheffler, waiting on the range at 20-under, to celebrate his historic achievement of consecutive wins at the Ponte Vedra Beach course as he followed up his victory at Bay Hill last week with another display of his consistency. Scheffler entered the final round trailing overnight leader Schauffele by five shots but got his charge under way with an eagle on the par-4 fourth, where he holed out from 92 yards, before making three more birdies before the turn. It was classic Scheffler on the back nine as he kept out of trouble and added three more birdies for his bogey-free 64. Then it was over to the trio chasing him to make up the gap and while Clark made birdies on 16 and 17, he fell just short on the last. "We had a great finish yesterday and then got off to a slow start today but then the hole out on four kind of propelled us a little bit," said Scheffler. "I hit a lot of good shots, did a lot of good things this week and it's nice to come out on top. "It's tough enough to win one Players and so to have it back-to-back is extremely special." The chasing trio paid the price for crucial bogeys. Schauffele made bogeys on 14 and 15 and reigning US Open winner Clark's bid looked to have faded after bogeys on 10 and 14. Clark, who won this season at Pebble Beach, had his worst putting round of the week but found his touch with birdies on 16 and 17 before the 18th ended in frustration. "I don't know how that putt doesn't go in," he said. "It was kind of right center with like a foot to go, and I knew it was going to keep breaking, but it had speed and I thought it was going to good inside left, and even when it kind of lipped, I thought it would lip in. "I'm pretty gutted it didn't go in." "You finish second, you get a bunch of points and money and all that stuff, but it just sucks. I've always wanted and dreamed about making a putt that really mattered to either force a playoff or win a tournament, and I have yet to do it in my professional career, so I was pretty bummed that I didn't have one of those really awesome moments. "I'm still a little beside myself. I'm still shocked that putt didn't go in." - Agencies

Britain's Kenny Olympian retires from cycling

London :Dame Laura Kenny, Britain's most successful female Olympian, has announced her retirement from cycling. The 31-year-old won five Olympic golds and seven World Championship titles in a distinguished career on the track. She gave birth to her second child in July and had previously been targeting a fourth Olympics in Paris this year. "I always knew deep down I would know when the right time was," said Kenny in an exclusive interview with BBC Breakfast. "I have had an absolute blast but now is the time for me to hang that bike up." Kenny, who is married to former cyclist Sir Jason Kenny - the most decorated British Olympian, added: "It's been in my head a little while, the sacrifices of leaving the children and your family at home are really quite big and it really is a big decision to make. "More and more, I was struggling to do that. More people asking me what races was I doing, what training camps was I going on - I didn't want to go ultimately and that's what it came down to. "I knew the minute I was getting those feelings. Once I started to Jase, "I don't think I want to ride a bike any more", I said to feel relief." Kenny gave birth to her first son, Albie, in 2017 after which she returned to cycling, eager to prove athletes could juggle the demands of sport with motherhood. - Agencies

Barcelona secures vital La Liga Victory over Atletico Madrid

Lopez sealed the deal in the 65th minute with a towering header off Lewandowski's second assist

SPORTS DESK

PARIS: Barcelona registered a convincing 3-0 win at Atletico Madrid with strikes from Joao Felix, Robert Lewandowski and Fermin Lopez. The win helped the Catalan move to second in the La Liga standings but they are still eight points behind table-toppers Real Madrid. Atletico applied pressure on Barcelona in the early stages of the match but the visitors took the lead in the 38th minute with Lewandowski setting up Felix for an easy close-range finish. Lewandowski doubled his side's advantage two minutes into the second half as the Pole scored his 13th league goal of the season. Barca coach Xavi was sent off in the first half for making an observation on a referee decision with a 'screaming voice' and hand gestures but that didn't affect his side as Lopez sealed the deal in the 65th minute with a towering header off Lewandowski's second assist. "It was probably the most complete game. It was a match similar to

the one against Napoli," said Xavi referring to their midweek win in the Champions League. "It's an ideal match for our methodology and philosophy of play. We are



Barca, nobody relaxes here. We are going to try to improve and compete for the two most important titles.

"I am passionate and I want my team to win. For me the sending off was unnecessary and unfair but we have to accept it." Barcelona moved past Girona, who lost 1-0 to Getafe on Saturday, in the table with 64 points. "We are believing until the end. Trying to cut points and fight for the league," Lopez said. "Xavi told me to play calmly. I think we are in a good dynamic and we hope to extend it as long as possible". Atletico, who were down to 10 men in stoppage time after Nahuel Molina was shown a red card, suffered their first home loss of the season and are now fifth with 55 points. "They were better. The second goal took us straight out of the game. Congratulations to them because they played a good game," Atletico manager Diego Simeone said. "Nothing to complain about my players. They gave their all. Let's stay calm and push for fourth place. It will be complicated and difficult."

Briefs

China congratulates Putin on election victory

BEIJING : Key Russian ally China on Monday congratulated President Vladimir Putin on his election victory. "China expresses its congratulations on this," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said when asked about the vote at a regular press conference. "China and Russia are each other's largest neighbours and comprehensive strategic cooperative partners in the new era," he added. With 99 percent of polling stations having submitted results, Putin had secured 87.33 percent of all votes cast, official election data showed Monday, according to state news agency RIA. It is a record victory in a presidential election where he faced no genuine competition. "We firmly believe that under the strategic guidance of President Xi Jinping and President Putin, China-Russia relations will continue to move forward," Lin said, noting that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries.—DNA

Vietnam faces \$3bn crop loss from saltwater

HANOI: Vietnam faces nearly \$3 billion a year in crop losses as more saltwater seeps into arable land, state media reported Sunday, citing new research. The damage would likely center on the Mekong Delta region, known as "Vietnam's rice bowl" because it provides food and livelihoods for tens of millions of people, research from the country's Environment Ministry showed. Saltwater levels are often higher in the dry season but they are intensifying due to rising sea levels, droughts, tidal fluctuations, and a lack of upstream freshwater. The resulting crop losses could amount to 70 trillion dong (\$2.94 billion), state media VnExpress reported, citing new research from the Water Resources Science Institute, which is under the Environment Ministry. The research found among the most impacted parts of the region would be the southernmost Ca Mau province, which could lose an estimated \$665 million. Ben Tre province could face roughly \$472 million in losses, according to the study, which was presented Friday at a conference on water resource management. "With the current scenario, fruit trees account for 29 percent of the damage in Mekong Delta, while crops account for 27 percent, and rice accounts for nearly 14 percent," according to the findings. "The fisheries industry accounts for 30 percent, equivalent to more than 21,000 billion dong (\$840 million)," it added. Greater losses were forecast for the region in the future, rising over \$3.1 billion, the study said.—Agencies

Methane: a powerful gas heating the planet

PARIS: Climate talks often revolve around reducing the most dangerous greenhouse gas CO₂. But other powerful heat-trapping emissions - of methane - will be in the crosshairs at a global forum in Geneva this week. Methane - which is potent but relatively short-lived - is a key target for countries wanting to slash emissions quickly and slow climate change. That is particularly because large amounts of methane are simply leaking into the atmosphere from oil and gas projects. Methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry have risen for three consecutive years, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), hitting near record highs in 2023. Atmospheric methane (CH₄) occurs abundantly in nature and is the primary component of gas fuel. It is the second largest contributor to climate change, accounting for roughly 30 percent of global warming since pre-industrial levels, according to UN climate experts.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A woman selling small items to make her both ends meet, in the Melody Market.— Photo Mudassar Raja

Israel provoking famine in Gaza: EU's Borrell

Gaza was before the war the greatest open-air prison. Today it's the greatest open-air graveyard: Borrell

NEWS DESK

BRUSSELS: EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday that Israel is provoking famine in Gaza and using starvation as a weapon of war, an accusation Israel's foreign minister rejected. "In Gaza we are no longer on the brink of famine, we are in a state of famine, affecting thousands of people," Borrell said at the opening of a conference on humanitarian aid for Gaza in Brussels. "This is unacceptable. Starvation is used as a weapon of war. Israel is provoking famine." Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz in a response urged Borrell to "stop attacking Israel and recognize our right to self-defense against Hamas' crimes." Katz in a post on X said Israel allowed "extensive humanitarian aid into Gaza by land, air, and sea for anyone willing to help," but that help was "violently dis-

turbed" by Hamas militants with "collaboration" by the UN's aid agency UNRWA. "Gaza was before the war the greatest open-air prison. Today it's the greatest open-air graveyard," Borrell said at a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels. "It's a graveyard for tens of thousands of people and also a graveyard for many of the most important principles of humanitarian law." Borrell on Monday also reiterated his accusation that Israel was using famine as a "weapon of war" by not allowing aid trucks into Gaza. "Israel is provoking famine," he told a humanitarian conference. The bloodiest ever Gaza war broke out after Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on October 7 that resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures. The Islamist militants also seized about 250 hostages, of whom Israel believes 130 remain in Gaza, includ-

ing 33 who are presumed dead. Israel, vowing to destroy Hamas and free the captives, has carried out a relentless bombing campaign and ground offensive that Gaza's health ministry says has killed at least 31,726 people, most of them women and children. The 27-nation EU has struggled to come up with a united response to the war in Gaza as some members firmly back Israel and others are more pro-Palestinian. EU ministers were set to discuss a proposal by Ireland and Spain to suspend a co-operation agreement with Israel, but that move was unlikely to get the support of all 27 countries. The bloc was however expected to agree on sanctions both against Hamas for sexual violence on October 7 and against violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank for attacking Palestinians. Britain and the United States have already imposed sanctions targeting a small number of "extremist" settlers.

Israel 'deliberately' blocking aid to Gaza

GAZA : Anti-poverty charity Oxfam accused Israel of intentionally preventing the delivery of aid into Gaza during its war on the tiny enclave, in violation of international humanitarian law. The non-governmental organisation said on Monday in a report that Israel continued to "systematically and deliberately block and undermine any meaningful international humanitarian response" in the Palestinian territory. It alleged that Israel was defying an order by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in January to boost aid in Gaza, and was failing its legal responsibility to protect people in the land it occupies. "The ICJ order should have shocked Israeli leaders to change course, but since then conditions in Gaza have actually worsened," said Oxfam Middle East and North Africa director Sally Abi Khalil. "Israeli authorities are not only failing to facilitate the international aid effort but are actively hindering it. We believe that Israel is failing to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide." Oxfam said that "unjustifiably inefficient" inspection rules were causing aid trucks trying to get into Gaza to be stuck in queues for 20 days on average. It said that Israeli authorities arbitrarily reject "dual-use" items - civilian goods that also have potential military use such as backup generators and torches.—APP

South Korea summit warns of AI democracy risks

SEOUL : South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Monday called fake news and disinformation based on AI and digital technology threats to democracy, as some officials attending a global summit accused Russia and China of conducting malicious propaganda campaigns. Speaking at the opening of the Summit for Democracy being held in Seoul, Yoon said countries had a duty to share experiences and wisdom so that artificial intelligence and technology could be employed to promote democracy. Fake news and disinformation based on artificial intelligence and digital technology not only violates individual freedom and human rights but also threatens democratic systems," Yoon said. South Korea is hosting the third Summit for Democracy conference, an initiative of U.S. President Joe Biden aimed at discussing ways to stop democratic backsliding and erosion of rights and freedoms. Digital threats to democracy, and how technology can promote democracy and universal human rights, are expected to be the main agenda of the three-day meetings, attended by representatives from more than 30 countries, ranging from Costa Rica to the United States and Ghana. "As authoritarian and repressive regimes deploy technologies to undermine democracy and human rights, we need to ensure that technology sustains and supports democratic values and norms," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the summit. Blinken later said 2024 was an "extraordinary election year" to highlight risks of disinformation and falsehoods in cyberspace. He also repeated Washington's accusations that Russia and China are behind global campaigns aimed at manipulating information.—DNA

Indonesia announces official election results in 33 provinces

JAKARTA: Indonesia's General Election Commission (KPU) has announced the official results of the vote counts for the 2024 election in 33 of the total 38 provinces. "West Java, Papua, Mountain Papua, Southwest Papua, Maluku, and Papua are the remaining provinces," KPU Chairman Hasyim Asy'ari stated late on Sunday. The outcomes of the re-voting, which took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on March 9-10, will also be disclosed. Indonesia held its 2024 elections on Feb. 14, choosing national and regional legislative candidates in addition to the president and vice president. The three pairs of candidates for president and vice president are Anies Baswedan, a former Jakarta governor, alongside Muhaimin Iskandar, a former manpower and transportation minister.—APP

Sunak vows small business help as election looms

Sunak, whose Conservatives badly trail the main opposition Labour party in polls, announced £60 million (\$76 million) of investment to slash red tape and create 20,000 apprenticeships

LONDON: Britain's under-fire Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday launched measures to help small businesses navigate the weak economy, as he seeks to boost his standing before this year's general election. Sunak, whose Conservatives badly trail the main opposition Labour party in polls, announced £60 million (\$76 million) of investment to slash red tape and create 20,000 apprenticeships. "This government is sticking to the plan and leaving no stone unturned to make the UK the best place to do business," Sunak told a business conference in central England. UK economy returns to modest growth at start of 2024 "Taken together, these measures will unlock a tidal wave of opportunity and make a real



difference to businesses and entrepreneurs across the country." The prime minister said that from next month, the government will pay full apprenticeship costs for small and medium-sized enterprises. The scheme seeks to boost professional job opportunities for workers aged under 21 years and save

about £150 million per year for SMEs, Sunak added. It comes as the prime minister faces speculation over a plot within his Conservative party to unseat him before the election. While Britain officially remains in recession, recent official data showed that the economy eked out slender growth in January.—DNA

S. Sudan shuts schools for scorching heat wave

KHARTOUM : South Sudan is closing all schools starting Monday in preparation for an extreme heat wave expected to last two weeks.

The health and education ministries advised parents to keep all children indoors as temperatures are expected to soar to 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). They warned that any school found open during the warning period would have its registration withdrawn, but the statement issued late Saturday didn't specify how long schools would remain shuttered. The ministries said they "will continue to monitor the situation and inform the public accordingly." Resident Peter Garang, who lives in the capital, Juba, welcomed the decision. He said "schools should be connected to the electricity grid" to enable the installation of air conditioners.

South Sudan, one of the world's youngest nations, is particularly vulnerable to climate crisis with heat waves common but rarely exceeding 40 C (104 F). Civil conflict has plagued the East African country which also suffered from drought and flooding, making living conditions difficult for residents. The World Food Program in its latest country brief said South Sudan "continues to face a dire humanitarian crisis" due to violence, economic instability, climate change and an influx of people fleeing the conflict in neighbouring Sudan.—Agencies

Iran ranks high in satellite, space manufacturing

TEHRAN : Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology Issa Zarepour says the Islamic Republic is among the top 10 countries in manufacturing satellite and space launch vehicle. Iran is in possession of the base for launching satellite-carrying rockets into space and ground stations to receive data from satellites, Zarepour said in an interview with Iran's Arabic-language television news network Al-Alam TV on Sunday. Pointing to a significant milestone for Iran's space program after the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he said, "For example, our space launch vehicles can carry satellites weighing up to 200 kg and place them in orbit." Iran also plans to send heavier satellites into space in the next 5 years, the minister noted. Zarepour pointed to significant advancements in the country's space program for the year 1402 and said, "For the first time, Iran succeeded in placing its satellites in a Low Earth orbit, which is at a distance of 450 to 2,000 km from the earth. Iranian satellites are now in space.—APP

Turkey imposes Meta measure on data sharing

ANKARA : Türkiye's competition watchdog imposed Monday an interim measure on Meta Platforms Inc. meant to prevent data sharing between its Instagram and Threads platforms as it investigates possible abuse of the company's dominant market position.

In December, the Competition Authority (RK) launched an investigation into Facebook parent Meta over a possible violation of competition law by linking its social media platforms Instagram and the newer Threads. The authority said the interim measure would remain in place until a final decision is made since the data obtained and merged through these two apps could "violate competition law and cause irreparable damage" in the market. Separately, the authority fined Meta TL 4.8 million (\$148,000) daily as part of a separate investigation over a notification message that the company sends users about the sharing of data. The notification about data sharing between the company's Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp services did not provide sufficient information and was not transparent enough, it said. The user notification was also designed to guide users to approve data sharing which was not deemed sufficient to address anti-competition concerns, it added. A Meta spokesperson did not immediately comment on the decisions.—APP

Meloni praises EU-Egypt deal on migration flows

It is the best way to cope with migratory flow, and we appreciate Egypt's efforts in this regard :PM Meloni

FOREIGN DESK

ROME : Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said an agreement signed Sunday between the European Union and Egypt is the best way to tackle irregular migration flows. Meloni was among the European leaders who attended a ceremony in Cairo where a 7.4 billion (\$8.05 billion) financial package to support Egypt was signed by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. She expressed pride in Italy's role in making the agreement happen. "It is the best way to cope with the migratory flow, and we appreciate Egypt's efforts in this regard," she said. Meloni also recalled Italy's Mattei Plan, which includes development ini-

tiatives for Africa, aiming to assist origin and transit states in managing human traffickers through investments and incentives. "Italy has a project with African states which is under construction and amounts to 5 billion, and Egypt is part of it," she said. She said that efforts are being made to establish an international alliance against human traffickers. Meloni also highlighted common challenges faced by the region, including food, water, energy security and development. Meanwhile, the EU has pledged a 7.4 billion (\$8 billion) funding package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt, the country's president said on Sunday. "Charting a course of deeper relations between Egypt and the European Union has been coupled with a financial package of approximately 7.4 billion euros

to bolster the Egyptian economy," Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said at a joint news conference with European leaders. "This envisages three main components, namely concessional financing, investment guarantees and technical support for the implementation of bilateral cooperation projects," al-Sisi added. The announcement came following a meeting in Cairo between al-Sisi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, leaders of Italy, Greece, Belgium, Austria, and the Greek Cypriot administration. Al-Sisi said that they spoke about the need to further cooperate on common challenges, primarily illegal migration. "We confirmed our unwavering commitment to combating this phenomenon through our persistent collaborative efforts. This shall

encompass tackling the root-causes through development-focused solutions and improving regular migration routes," he added. Regarding the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip since Oct. 7, the Egyptian president said that during talks he emphasized the "inevitability of a ceasefire with utmost urgency and an end to Israel's hostilities." "We agreed with the European leaders on the categorical rejection of an Israeli military operation in the City of Rafah, which will only exacerbate the already exacerbated humanitarian crisis in the sector," al-Sisi added. Egypt has been under economic pressure due to the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, which impacted the country's revenues from tourism and shipping through the Suez Canal. Israel has waged

a deadly military offensive on Gaza since a Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023, which killed nearly 1,200 people. More than 31,600 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have since been killed in the enclave, and nearly 73,700 others injured amid mass destruction and shortages of necessities. The Israeli war has pushed 85% of Gaza's population into internal displacement amid a crippling blockade of most food, clean water, and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN. Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Briefs

SC orders re-polling in PB-50

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday ordered re-polling on PB-50 Qilla Abdullah constituency of Balochistan Assembly. A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa conducted the hearing on the petition of ANP Zamurd Khan. The apex court gave its verdict with the mutual consent of all political parties including the Election Commission of Pakistan. Earlier, the court annulled the ECP's order to hold re-polling at six polling stations and directed the electoral watchdog to conduct fresh voting in the entire constituency as per the law. ANP's Zamurd Khan contended that the turnout at many polling stations of the constituency remained very low and therefore fresh elections must be ordered in PB-50.

Babar demands probe into PTI's foreign bank accounts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: PTI's estranged founding member Akbar S Babar demanded on Monday an investigation into the party's 'secret' foreign bank accounts. Babar, in a letter to Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, wrote that no action was taken even after the verdict on the PTI foreign funding case which was announced 20 months back. He added that legal action against PTI's foreign bank accounts was still awaited alleging that "the accounts may be used for anti-state activities". "Despite PTI's illegal foreign funding being proved, no action to protect the national security of Pakistan was worrisome," said Babar in the letter. He also asserted that all provisions of the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) August 2022 order must be implemented. Terming the secret foreign bank accounts a 'crime', the estranged PTI leader demanded accountability.

Faiz Hameed's brother arrested

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Anti-Corruption Circle Rawalpindi has arrested former Naib Tehsildar Chakwal Najaf Hameed after the cancellation of his bail in corruption case. It is pertinent to mention that Najaf Hameed is brother of former DG ISI General Faiz Hameed. Najaf Hameed was arrested after cancellation of his pre-arrest bail in a corruption case. Former Punjab Minister Hafiz Ammar Yasir is also co-accused in the corruption case. Anti Corruption Special Court judge Ali Nawaz Bakhar cancelled the bail plea of Najaf Hameed when court was told by anti-corruption counsel that allegation against the accused have been proved true.

PM expresses desire to bolster Pakistan-UAE economic ties

He highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) as an efficient mechanism to attract foreign investment into priority sectors including agriculture, minerals & mining, I.T



KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) to Pakistan, paid a courtesy call on the Prime Minister. The Ambassador congratulated the Prime Minister on his re-election and conveyed best wishes of U.A.E. President Sheikh Mohamed

bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and hoped that the strong fraternal ties between the two countries would be strengthened further in the years ahead. The Prime Minister thanked the U.A.E. leadership for their warm messages of greetings and conveyed his best wishes for President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Vice President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al

Nahyan. Recalling the historic ties between Pakistan and the U.A.E., the Prime Minister said Pakistan attached great importance to its brotherly relations with U.A.E. The two countries had always supported each other and there was a strong desire on both sides to elevate the relationship to a higher level, the PM added. The Prime Minister further said that Pakistan wanted to translate the tremendous political goodwill into a strong-

er economic partnership. Noting the exciting transformation of the U.A.E. into a hub for commerce, tourism, and investment, the Prime Minister said Pakistan wanted to partner with the U.A.E. He highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) as an efficient mechanism to attract foreign investment into priority sectors including agriculture, minerals & mining, I.T., renewable energy and industry.

On the multilateral side, the Prime Minister congratulated the U.A.E. for successfully hosting COP 28 meeting on climate change last year as well as its efforts to bring peace in Gaza while serving as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. He also appreciated the U.A.E. for hosting nearly 1.8 million Pakistanis who were a bridge between the two countries. The Ambassador reaffirmed the U.A.E. leadership's commitment to Pakistan and said that U.A.E. looked forward to work with the government of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to build stronger ties. The Ambassador extended an invitation to the Prime Minister on behalf of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to visit the U.A.E. at the earliest convenience. While accepting the invitation, the Prime Minister also reiterated an invitation to the President of U.A.E. to visit Pakistan at his earliest convenience and said the people of Pakistan were waiting to accord him a very warm welcome.

MQM-P 'ready' to induct Faisal Vawda

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Monday expressed willingness to see former federal minister Faisal Vawda join its ranks ahead of the Senate elections set to take place on April 2. "We had invited Vawda to join [MQM-P] in the past [...] I pray that he joins the party's ranks," MQM-P leader Rauf Siddiqui said while speaking with journalists in Karachi. Commenting on the upcoming Senate elections, MQM-P's Siddiqui - who himself is a candidate for the polls - said the party has fielded a total of eight candidates for the upper house. However, Vawda has reiterated that he's still an "independent" political leader. "I'm still independent," Vawda said during a presser in Karachi, adding that he would consider joining a political party when it's in "season", as independent candidates are currently trending. Expressing his views on the political landscape and prospects of the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) role in the Centre, Vawda - who's contesting the Senate elections in an independent capacity - said he doesn't see the Bilawal Bhutto-led party securing power in Islamabad.

Israel renews crimes in Al-Shifa, denude men, displace families

The Hamas Movement said the Israeli occupation army's storming of Al-Shifa Medical Complex in western Gaza at dawn Monday was an expression of confusion and chaos

NEWS DESK

ISRAELI occupation forces forced multiple families out of streets and buildings surrounding the Al-Shifa Hospital in western Gaza City where they had taken shelter. Occupation forces continue to randomly shell and fire at citizens in the area while raiding several homes in the area. The Israeli military also demanded all Palestinian citizens immediately leave al-Rimal neighborhood and the Al-Shifa Medical Complex on Monday after it launched an attack on the medical facility for the second time since the war on Gaza began. Local media reported that around 30,000

Palestinians are currently besieged in the medical complex, which is coming under the direct fire of Israeli artillery and strikes. The medical complex also hosts around 5,000 wounded people. As a result of the attacks, flames went off in the Department of Specialized Surgery, which hosts the largest number of displaced people in the medical complex. Israeli occupation forces prevented emergency services from entering the area to put out the fire, adding to the list of brutal actions conducted by the occupation on Monday. Our correspondent also said that Israeli occupation forces seized the phones of several medical staff members and displaced people, besieging the complex from every corner.

Punjab approves budget 2023-24

LAHORE: Punjab Finance Minister Mutjaba Shujaur Rehman has stated that the government would establish an IT City in the province and initiate an air ambulance service and the Punjab Education Programme. While presenting budgetary proposals during the Punjab Assembly session on Monday, the minister affirmed that the journey of progress was commencing again in Punjab, where merit and transparency would be ensured. He assured that the welfare of the people would be guaranteed, with relief provided to the poor. "Today, I am presenting the first people-friendly budget of our government. We have achieved leadership that has given a new vision of service to the cabinet and bureaucracy." The minister emphasised that the provincial government would set an example of good governance in Punjab. He said that the Ramadan Relief Package was being delivered to

the doorsteps of vulnerable segments of society, with an allocation of Rs30 billion for the package. Rehman highlighted that the price control system had been activated and a zero-tolerance policy was being adopted against hoarding and profiteering. The finance minister disclosed that the overall volume of the budget for the financial year 2023-24 was Rs4,480,700 billion, with estimated revenue collection at Rs3,331,700 billion. Under the NFC Award, he added, Punjab would receive Rs2,706,400 billion. Rehman announced the establishment of an IT city in Punjab at a cost of Rs10 billion to promote IT, and the commencement of the air ambulance service shortly. Rehman disclosed that the Punjab Education Programme was being initiated at a cost of Rs2 billion. The minister affirmed that all facilities would be provided to farmers under one roof, with no new taxes being imposed. - DNA

Maryam seeks Plan for underground train project

LAHORE: "Decision has been taken to start metro train projects in three cities of Punjab," said Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while co-chairing with PML-N Supreme Leader Muhammad Nawaz Sharif a special review meeting on 20 thousand electric and petrol bikes for students, and 657 buses projects in five cities. Madam Chief Minister also sought a plan for the underground train project in Lahore. Quaid PML-N said, "The number of bikes for students should be increased. The monthly installment of bikes for students should be kept at the minimum." He added, "It is responsibility of the government to share the financial burden of students." Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif said, "The bus fare should also be set at the minimum for the public." Earlier, the authorities concerned briefed that 19,000 petrol and 1,000 electric bikes will be given to the students free of interest on easy monthly instalments in

collaboration with the Bank of Punjab. They told that the Bikes would be given to students with traffic license across Punjab. Bikes will be given to the students in easy instalments. Interest will be paid by the Government of Punjab. The monthly installment of the petrol bike will be less than Rs 5000 and that of e-bike will be less than Rs 10000. After e-balling in May, delivery of bikes will start in the same month. In cities, 50:50 percent quota is reserved for male and female students, while in villages, 70 percent quota is reserved for male students and 30 percent quota is earmarked for the female students. Madam Chief Minister said, "Receipt of applications will be announced before Eid." Moreover, it was apprised in the meetings that 300 hybrid diesel buses will be purchased for Lahore, 78 for Rawalpindi, 100 for Multan, 110 for Faisalabad, and 110 for Bahawalpur. 27 fully electric buses will be operated in Lahore. - DNA

Azerbaijan's president says peace with Armenia is closer than ever

In December, the South Caucasus neighbors issued a joint statement saying they want to reach a peace deal and have since held numerous talks

DNA

BAKU: Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said on Sunday his country is "closer than ever" to a peace deal with Armenia, half a year after Azerbaijan recaptured its Karabakh region from its ethnic Armenian majority, prompting a mass exodus of ethnic Armenians. "Today, we are in an active phase of peace talks with Armenia," Aliyev said in remarks after meeting NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Baku, according to a transcript published on the Azeri leader's website. "We are now closer to peace than ever before." Stoltenberg said he welcomed the move toward peace between the two nations. "I appreciate what you say about that you are closer to a peace agreement than ever before," Stoltenberg said, according to a transcript published on NATO's website. "And I can just encourage you to seize this opportunity to reach a lasting peace agreement with Armenia." In December, the South Caucasus neighbors issued a joint statement saying they want to reach a peace deal and have since held numerous talks, including

two days of negotiations in Berlin in February. The press office of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan did not immediately respond to Reuters' request to comment on Aliyev's statement. Christian Armenia and mostly Muslim Azerbaijan first went to war over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988. After decades of enmity, Azerbaijan in September recaptured Karabakh, controlled by its ethnic Armenian majority since the 1990s despite being internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. The offensive prompted most of the region's 120,000 ethnic Armenians to flee to neighboring Armenia. Armenia denied that and said those who fled could have stayed on and been integrated into Azerbaijan. Key elements in securing a treaty are the demarcation of borders and the establishment of regional transport corridors through each others' territory. Armenia has also raised the issue of determining control of ethnic enclaves on both sides of the border. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's Minister of Defence, Colonel General Zakir Hasanov, has met with a delegation led by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Azerbaijani media reports, citing the Ministry of Defence. At the official welcoming ceremony hosted by Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry, J. Stoltenberg passed along the guard of honour and signed the "Book of Honour" in accordance with the protocol. Colonel General Z. Hasanov welcomed the delegation and expressed his satisfaction with seeing them in Azerbaijan. The Minister thanked NATO for supporting the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan during the 30-year occupation and the current period.

گیس کے استعمال میں لازم ہے احتیاط

گیس لیکج کی صورت میں اپنی حفاظت یقینی بنائیں اور یہ احتیاطی تدابیر اپنائیں

- گھڑکیاں اور دروازے کھول دیں
- ماچس یا لائٹرز ہرگز نہ جلائیں
- بجلی کا سوچ آن آف نہ کریں
- میں والو بند نہ کریں
- کھلی فضا میں آجائیں
- گیس لیکج کی اطلاع دہرگز نہ دیں

ہیلپ لائن: 1199

آپ کی حفاظت کی ضمانت

احتیاط کی عادت یقینی حفاظت