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Detailed News On Page-07

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Detailed News On Page-07



Pak expected to shine at T20 World Cup

Detailed News On Page-06



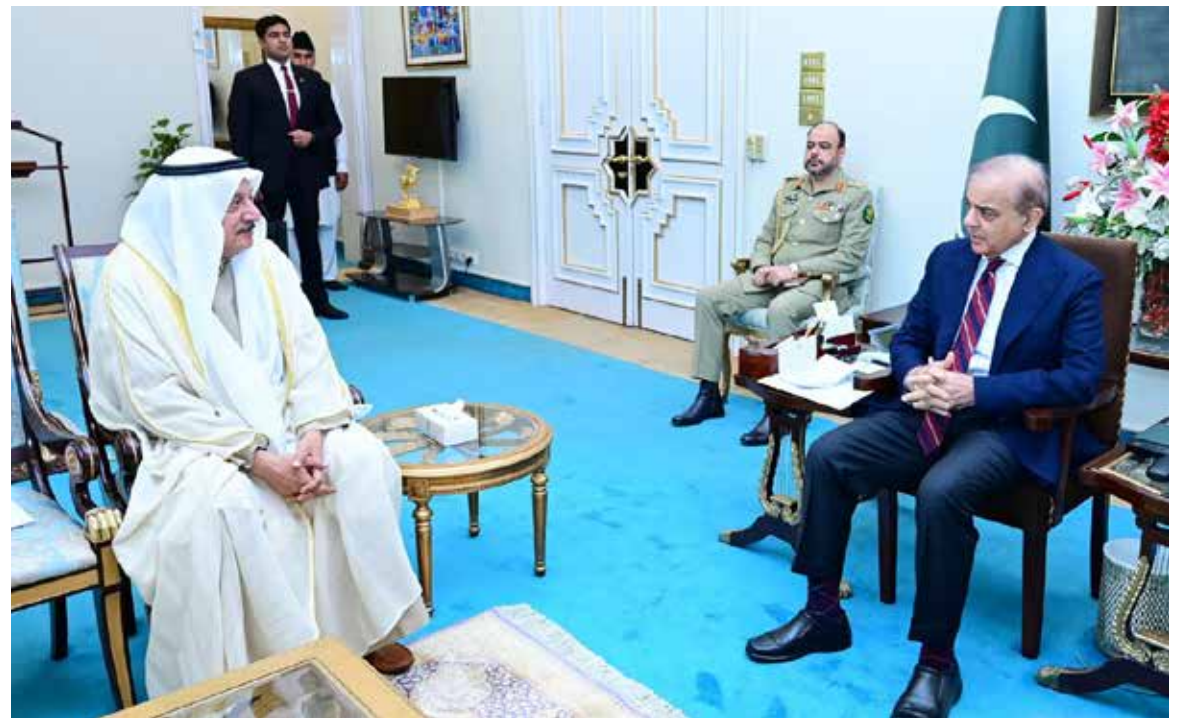
Kuwaiti ambassador calls on PM for efforts to implement Pak, Kuwait agreements

The prime minister noted with satisfaction that both countries had signed seven agreements for cooperation in diverse areas including food security, technology, hydel power, mining and minerals

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday called for concerted efforts to ensure the early implementation of seven agreements worth \$10 billion signed between Pakistan and Kuwait in November last year. The bilateral ties were discussed in a meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Pakistan Nassar Abdulrahman Jasser Almutairi who called on him. The prime minister noted with satisfaction that both countries had signed seven agreements for cooperation in diverse areas including food security, technology, hydel power, mining and minerals, water supply and mangrove rehabilitation, a PM Office press release said. In this context, he emphasized the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) which provided a robust and efficient mechanism to attract foreign investment into Pakistan. He said that Pakistan attached great impor-

tance to its historic and deep-rooted ties with Kuwait. He thanked the Kuwaiti leadership, including the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, for the warm wishes and felicitations on his re-election. He also extended an invitation to Amir of Kuwait to visit Pakistan at his earliest convenience. The Kuwaiti ambassador thanked Pakistan for its support to Kuwait in difficult times. He thanked former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif for his strong public support to Kuwait's independence and sovereignty during the 1990-91 crisis. He also expressed gratitude for Pakistan's support to Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ambassador reaffirmed Kuwait's strong commitment to build closer ties with Pakistan. Prime Minister Shehbaz appreciated Ambassador Almutairi's contribution in fostering stronger ties between Pakistan and Kuwait.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kuwait Nassar Abdul Rehman Almutari called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

President Zardari felicitates Putin on his re-election

Hopes Pak and Russia ties will grow more



DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Tuesday conveyed his heartfelt felicitations to President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on his victory in the Presidential elections. "I am confident that relations between Pakistan and Russia will grow further under your dynamic leadership," the president further posted on X account.

US envoy Blome calls on FM Aurangzeb

Assures support for Pakistan's work to complete IMF SBA

DNA

ISLAMABAD: U.S. Ambassador Donald Blome met with the Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb to discuss further U.S. cooperation and support for Pakistan's efforts to meet its reform targets, including improvement of the country's tax administration and investment climate. Continued on Page 06

Amid Pakistan's anti-terror strikes US urges Taliban to prevent terror attacks from Afghan

We urge the Taliban to ensure that terrorist attacks are not launched from Afghan soil

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States' Department of State on Tuesday urged the Taliban government in Afghanistan to prevent terror attacks from their soil while also asking Pakistan to ensure the security of civilians during counterterrorism operations. A day earlier, Pakistani forces carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in the border regions inside Afghanistan against terrorists launching attacks in Pakistan from Afghan soil following the March 16 attack. The Mir Ali attack martyred at least seven Pakistan Army soldiers - including a lieutenant colonel and captain - after they gallantly fought with terrorists as they attacked a security forces' post in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). "We deeply regret the loss of life and injustices sustained during the attack in Pakistan, and the loss of

Pak denounces fresh curbs on Kashmiri political parties

India home ministry declared the Yasin Malik faction of the JKLF as an "unlawful association"

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Tuesday denounced Indian authorities' decision to declare several political parties of India-occupied Kashmir as "unlawful associations". In a statement, the Foreign Office said: "Pakistan denounces the Indian authorities' decision to declare the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Freedom League (JKPFL) and four factions of Jammu and Kashmir

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Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Parvez Elahi suffers bone fracture

Elahi has been facing medical issues for a while

MEHTAB PIRZADA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President Parvez Elahi, who is incarcerated at Adiala jail, suffered a bone fracture due to a fall while using the washroom, it emerged on Tuesday, when the prison official presented a medical report in a local court in Lahore. Adiala jail deputy superintendent apprised the Lahore Anti-Corruption Court during the hearing of a case against Elahi - related to illegal recruitment in the Punjab Assembly - about the former chief minister's medical condition. The jail deputy superintendent told the judge, Arshad Hussain Bhutta, that Elahi had fallen in the washroom on March 17 which caused him a fracture. Meanwhile, the indictment of the suspects, which was due in the court, could not be issued as the number of suspects was not complete.

Nawaz's sons acquitted in NAB cases

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court Tuesday granted relief to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's sons - Hasan and Hussain - on the petitions seeking acquittal in corruption cases related to the Al-Azizia Steel Mills, Flagship company and Avenfield apartments. Earlier, while presenting arguments before the court, the brothers' counsel Qazi Misbah said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz was exonerated by the trial court in the Flagship reference, while the National Accountability Court (NAB) withdrew its appeal against the trial court verdict as well on November 29, last year. The lawyer said the proceedings could not be carried out merely on the allegations of abetting in a crime, when the main suspect had been acquitted. At the outset of the case, the court inquired Deputy Prosecutor NAB Azhar Maqbool about the report he was supposed to submit on the plea.

Amid X disruption

Security czar seeks review of social media laws

The interior minister was of the view that freedom of expression should be separated from propaganda, and smear campaigns against people

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Amid countrywide disruption of the popular social networking platform, X, for more than a month, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has sought review of social media laws to "stop its misuse". X, formerly Twitter, remains inaccessible to millions of netizens in Pakistan since its suspension before the February 8 general elections. "Social media laws should be envisaged," Naqvi said while speaking to journalists in Lahore on Tuesday, adding "Social media is being misused. Social media regulations have been implemented across the globe." The interior minister was of the view that freedom of expression should be separated from propaganda, and smear campaigns against people. "Everyone has right to freedom of speech, however, it should not be misused." Responding to the question, Naqvi said that smear campaigns against politicians, judiciary, and other national institutions should be stopped. He advocated implementation of social media laws in the country following patterns of developed countries like the United States (US). His statement came after Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Atta Tarar's admission that the social networking app was suspended in the country. Tarar, responding to queries regarding X's (former Twitter) suspension, said that the platform was already banned when they came to power, whereas, there was no

Continued on Page 06

ATC issues non-bailable arrest warrants for KP CM

PTI members took to the streets to vent their spleen over the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in a corruption case

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) has issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and another 12 accused in the May 9 riots case. The court of Malik Ijaz Asif issued the warrants for the accused including former federal minister Shireen Mazari, Murad Saeed, and Musrat Jamsheed Cheema. It orders producing them on April 2. The court issued the warrant at the request of local police. On May 9, PTI members took to the streets to vent their spleen over the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in a corruption case. Angry protesters ransacked public property, stormed state assets and attacked sensitive installations across the country, leaving a trail of devastation.

Cipher case: IHC seeks advocate general's response

Chief justice stresses significance of cross-examination and expressed a commitment to upholding the defendants

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued on Tuesday a notice to the Advocate General, calling for a response to appeals lodged against the conviction of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in the cipher case. IHC Chief Justice Aamir Farooq and Justice Mian Gul Aurangzeb heard the case in which notable figures including family members of Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi, elected representatives, senators, and legal experts also attended. Lawyers representing Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi, namely Salman Safdar, Sikandar Zulqarnain, and others, presented arguments before the bench. Salman Safdar, the legal representative of the accused, initiated the proceedings by scrutinising the procedural aspects of the case. He highlighted alleged discrepancies in the filing process of the FIR, emphasising irregularities in dates and the absence of crucial documentation linking the defendants to the case. Drawing attention to the role of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the initiation of the inquiry, Safdar underscored the necessity of adhering to legal protocols. He asserted that the inquiry allegedly commenced prior to the formal filing of the complaint, casting doubt on the integrity of the investigation process. In response to queries from the bench

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Imran acquitted in two cases

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: A district and sessions court in Islamabad Tuesday granted relief to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan in two different cases pertaining to the vandalism during March 2022 long march on the former prime minister's plea seeking acquittal. Judicial Magistrate Shaista Kundi accepted Khan's petitions and acquitted him in cases registered at Islamabad's Lohi Bhair and Sahala police stations. At the outset of the hearing, Khan's lawyer, Advocate Naeem Panjotra, argued that the vandalism, as per the case, took place at his client's behest. "Several cases were registered in a single day, PTI's founder was [framed] in the same role," he further argued. He added that neither a notification was issued nor the party was informed regarding the enforcement of Section 144. The lawyer maintained that the plaintiff is the Station House Officer (SHO), who has no jurisdiction to register the case. "There are no witness

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MARRIOTT ISLAMABAD

Pak first IT city being built in Lahore: CM

The Cabinet also approved project for the supply of 20,000 petrol and electric bikes by the Bank of Punjab

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif chaired third meeting of the Provincial cabinet. The Cabinet ratified the approval of annual budget and supplementary budget grant for the year 2023-24. The approval to handover Lahore Knowledge Park to Punjab Central Business District Development Authority was also given by the cabinet. The land will be transferred to CBD to build Pakistan's largest IT city. Madam Chief Minister said, "Pakistan's first IT city is being built in Lahore." She added, "Tech giants like Google and Microsoft have already shown their interests in the IT City." She directed to complete both towers of IT City in one year. Madam Chief Minister highlighted, "The world's major educational institutions will be invited to build campuses in the Knowledge City." She added, "There will be a Film City too." The Cabinet also approved project for the supply of 20,000 petrol and electric bikes by the Bank of Punjab. Madam Chief Minister said, "Electric bikes are essential to reduce environmental pollution but are currently not that much viable due to risk of battery

theft and low mileage. Therefore, It has been decided to give petrol bikes along with electric bikes." She added, "To reduce burden on students, the down payment will be reduced to Rs 25,000 and the monthly installment will also be less than Rs 5,000." Madam Chief Minister said, "The distribution of bikes will start in May this year." She added, "A separate scheme will be introduced to give bikes to students who have achieved significant success in examinations." On the direction of court, the cabinet approved the trial of founder PTI and Shah Mehmood Qureshi from Adiala Jail. The Cabinet also gave, in-principle approval for the extension of posting on deputation of CEO Punjab Transport Company. The Cabinet approved the provincial representation of Punjab in the Council of Common Interest Secretariat. The approval for the transfer of Government of Punjab's Grade 19 Vacancy in Council of Common Interests Secretariat Islamabad was also granted. Punjab Air Ambulance Project was also discussed in the meeting. Madam Chief Minister said, "All facilities are available for the rich and the influential people, but nothing to save life of a poor man." She added, "We want to provide every facility

of timely treatment to our people." The Chief Minister lamented, "It is unfortunate that Sargodha does not have adequate facilities for the treatment and transfer of heart attack patients." She added "Sitting in offices, it seems that air ambulance is not needed, but it is needed, because Rescue 1122 received 11 hundred calls for air ambulance in emergencies." Madam Chief Minister highlighted, "In Lahore PIC Emergency, heart attack patients arrived from distant areas within 8 hours. Therefore, Air Ambulance Project is very much needed, but it will be rolled out on trial basis in the first phase." The Chief Minister said, "We should feel pain for the poor. How sad it was that sanitary workers lost their lives in Faisalabad due to lack of safety kits." The Cabinet also gave in principle approval to reduce the number of law officers in Punjab to 66 after following a strict performance-based criteria. Madam Chief Minister said, "I have not recommended anyone." She added, "Corruption, political affiliation and incompetence will not be tolerated in Government service." Provincial Ministers, Chief Secretary, IG Punjab Police, Secretaries and other senior officers concerned attended the meeting.



LAHORE : Consul General of Iran Mehran Mowahid Far called on Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif in Lahore. During the meeting, matters related to boosting bilateral relations, enhancing mutual cooperation and expanding mutual exports were discussed.—DNA

District administration implements traffic plan during Ramadan

ABBOTTABAD: In response to the increased rush during Ramadan in Abbottabad, district administration and traffic police have implemented a comprehensive traffic plan aimed at mitigating congestion and reducing accidents on the city's roads. Despite existing restrictions on dumpers and trucks on main highways during the day, traffic jams have become a common occurrence, to address this issue, the traffic police have imposed restrictions on both dumpers and trucks from seven in the morning until seven in the evening. The citizens of Abbottabad have expressed support for the traffic plan, recognizing its importance in easing traffic congestion during peak hours. However, concerns have been raised about the impact on school children, who often get stuck in traffic during the morning rush, and the heightened traffic during the evening rush, exacerbated by the time for breaking the fast and increased routine. Traffic police emphasized the importance of considering the public's difficulties during Ramadan, with the belief that the current hours of restriction are appropriate. They assure that old timings will be reinstated in normal routines, with no restrictions on dump trucks after seven in the evening until seven in the morning. The public has commended Commissioner Hazara, Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad, and the SSP Traffic Warden for their efforts in devising a practical traffic plan.—APP

WHO renovates 63 KP health facilities after disasters

The initiative of refurbishment of health facilities was taken in response to the disastrous floods in Pakistan during year 2022 and other climate changes

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : World Health Organization (WHO), in its strive for ensuring health service, has r y village in Charsadda district, Dr. Babar said the rehabilitation process is in progress in the whole country. The refurbished health facilities in KP are in districts including Charsadda, Chitral, D.I.Khan, Kohistan Upper, Nowshera, Swat, Tank, Hangu, Dir Lower, Haripure, Manshera and Abbotabd. The rehabilitated health facilities included Basic Health Units (BHUs), Rural Health Centers (RHCs), Labor Rooms, Tehsil Headquarter Hospital etc. Around 15 health facilities are renovated in Dera Ismail Khan (D.I.Khan) district of KP witnessing maximum damage due to 2022

floods. Similarly, 11 health providing buildings were revamped in Swat district. For improvement of routine immunization, WHO has supported the refurbishment of seven Divisional Expanded Programme for Immunisation (EPI) halls in Mardan, Hangu, D.I.Khan, Bannu, Swat, Manshera and Abbotabad. Similarly twenty Labor Rooms were refurbished and made operational for provision of necessary health facilities to expecting mothers and new born at their door steps in districts including five in D.I.Khan, five in Swat, four in Tank, one in Hangu, one in Charsadda, two in Kohistan Upper, one in Lower Dir and one in Haripure. Dr. Babar said these initiatives have been taken with cooperation of Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and ser-

vice facilities are restored with provision of required human resources and medicine. Appreciating the goodwill gesture by global organization, WHO, local people present on the occasion highly hailed the initiative and said destruction of BHU Kotkay had caused a lot of problems and inconvenience to them. Hundreds of people including men and women had to visit different areas for getting medical treatment due to destruction of the BHU in their locality by raging floods in August 2022, they added. Talking to people, Dr. Babar held out assurance that WHO will continue its support to people in getting necessary health facilities within the vicinity of their homes and for this purpose different initiatives will be taken time and again.

Capital maintains clean air for 2 consecutive days

ISLAMABAD : The air quality of the federal capital remained healthy for the second consecutive day on Tuesday as the atmospheric pollutants remained below the threshold of the national environmental quality standards. The Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) daily air quality report indicated a reduced ratio of air pollutants, recorded below permissible limits. The agency is responsible to ensure the protection of the environment under the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997. The hazardous air pollutant particulate matter of 2.5 microns (PM2.5), which was a hazardous atmospheric contaminant, remained 29.04 micro grammes per cubic meter on average which was lower than the national environmental quality standards (NEQS) of 35 microgrammes per cubic meter and denoted the air quality healthy. PM 2.5 is generated through the combustion of an engine, industrial emissions, burning garbage or inflammable material and dust blown up by fast-moving cars plying on non-cemented patches of the roads. The ratio of nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide (NO2&SO2 respectively) also remained below the NEQS that were mostly produced during the industrial emissions from the factories involving complex and extraordinary chemicals' use in production processes. The NO2 remained 12.04 microgrammes per cubic meter and SO2 was 12.8 microgrammes per cubic meter. The EPA officials claimed that the vehicular emissions due to increased automobiles was one of the leading cause of bad air quality.—APP

Enhanced drug resistance testing improves TB treatment

ISLAMABAD: On World Tuberculosis Day, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) encourages medical service providers and practitioners in Pakistan to enhance drug resistant tuberculosis (DRTB) diagnosis by increasing the use of GeneXpert diagnostic testing among suspect tuberculosis (TB) cases. Additionally, patients who do not show improvement with initial TB treatment need to be urgently referred to health facilities specialized in treating DRTB. MSF medical team is concerned that DRTB patients referred to the MSF managed Programmatic Management of Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (PMDT) site in Gujranwala district, Punjab, are only a fraction of people infected in the community and that a significant portion of DRTB cases is going undetected and untreated. "Many of the patients we see at the PMDT clinic have been misdiagnosed and have a history of unsuccessful treatment regimens, characterized by a cycle of temporary improve-

ment followed by relapse," says Dr. Shoaib, MSF medical coordinator. "With the correct treatment these patients have a good chance of recovering, but they need to be identified as DRTB patients first," he says. National statistics confirm this concerning trend of low enrollment of DRTB cases, indicating that many individuals infected with DRTB are either undetected or misdiagnosed. In Gujranwala, only 136 out of the expected 340 DRTB cases were enrolled at the PMDT site in 2023. World Health Organization (WHO) data show that at the national level the ratio is even more significant, with only 23% of the estimated 20,000 DRTB cases being identified and receiving appropriate treatment. The WHO ranks Pakistan as the fourth highest-burden country for DRTB worldwide. Tuberculosis is a major public health problem worldwide. It is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium that primarily targets the lungs but can also impact other parts of the body

and lead to life-threatening complications. Though TB is treatable with antibiotics, bacterial resistance to commonly used TB medications can develop, causing the treatment to become ineffective. At the MSF PMDT clinic, referred patients are tested with a GeneXpert testing machine which, in a matter of hours, allows our doctors to accurately diagnose TB, determine which drugs are effective against it and start the patient on treatment. GeneXpert molecular diagnostic testing is preferable to smear microscopy which identifies less than half of all TB cases and does not detect resistance to rifampicin. It is a more flexible testing method that can process non-sputum samples, such as stools and tissue, to help detect extra pulmonary and paediatric DRTB cases. "By optimizing the utilization of existing GeneXpert machines and increasing the number of locations where people can get tested, we can improve the early detection of DRTB cases" says Dr. Shoaib.—DNA

FBISE to implement national curriculum from 2024

ISLAMABAD : Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) has announced that National Curriculum of Pakistan 2022-23 notified by Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, Government of Pakistan stands implemented with effect from Academic year 2024 and onwards. According to a notification available with APP, Federal Board has informed all the heads of institutions affiliated with FBISE at SSC and HSSC levels, that the National Curriculum will be implemented for grades IX and XI in the subjects of English Compulsory, Urdu Compulsory, Pakistan Studies, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and Computer Science while for grades X and XII the same shall stand implemented with effect from Academic year 2025 and onwards for these subjects. The National Curriculum of 'Pakistan Studies' 2022-23 stands implemented for grade IX with effect from Academic year 2024 while for grades X and XII the same shall stand implemented with effect from Academic Year 2025 and onwards. The National Curriculum of Islamiyat Compulsory 2022-23 has already been implemented at SSC level while at HSSC-I Level, the decision will be taken shortly subject to the availability of valid and reliable books/reading material. The notification further said that both SSC and HSSC Levels Examinations of all the subjects mentioned above will continue to be Students Learning Outcomes (SLOs) based instead of Textbooks based. Accordingly Question Papers will be based on the SLOs given in the curricula of each of these subjects instead of textbooks. All the curricula/SLOs of these subjects will be uploaded shortly on FBISE website www.fbise.edu.pk for instructional/assessment guidelines along with Model Question Papers and other necessary allied material. A suggested list of books of different publishers as reference/reading material which is not prescriptive in nature is being given here under for each subject along with other details. The institutions are, however, free to rely on any other valid and reliable instructional/reference material to fulfill the instructional requirements of the SLOs of these subjects. However, institutions may further shape their instructional and assessment practices around the SLOs and teaching resources/reference material of these subjects for preparing their students.—DNA

YADEA, Bank Alfalah partner for eco-friendly transportation

Yadea Pakistan and Bank Alfalah will now offer financing options for all Yadea bike models, allowing customers to spread their payments over a period of up to 36 months

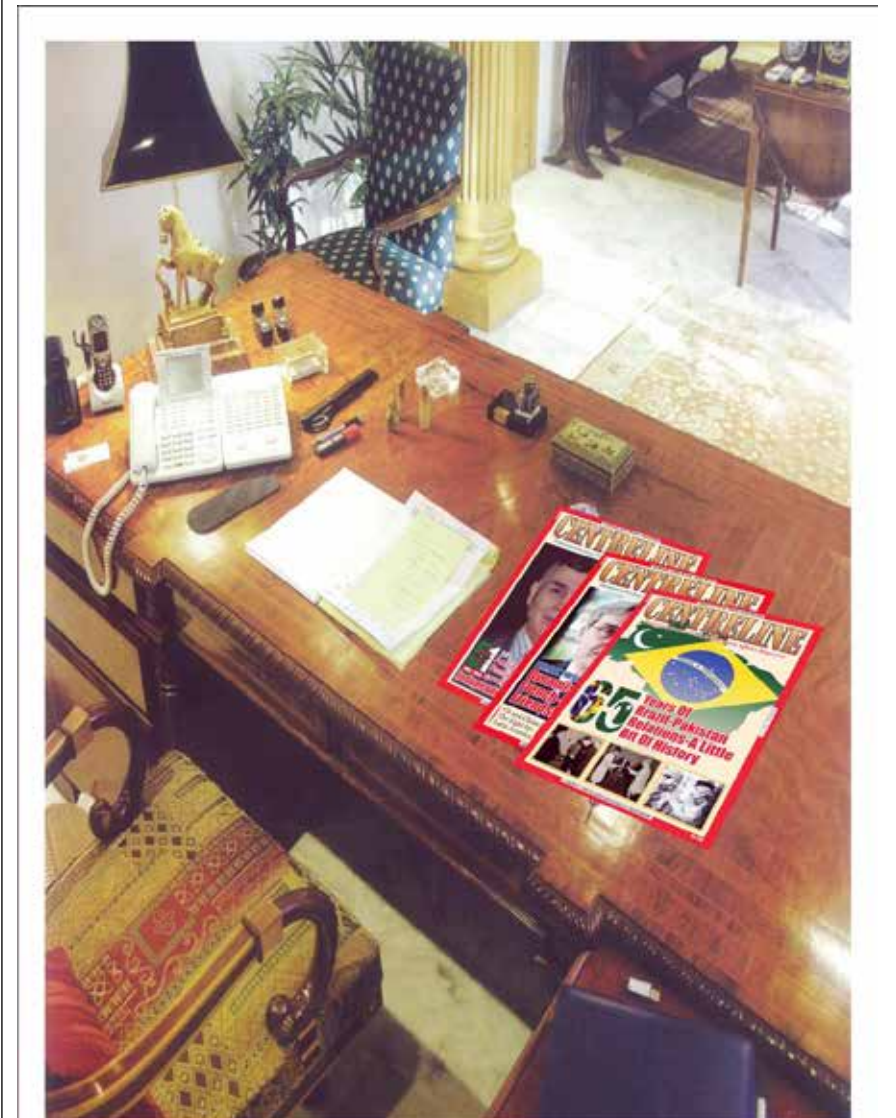
LAHORE : Yadea Pakistan, a global leader in electric bikes and Bank Alfalah have joined hands in a special partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate its customers with bike financing opportunities. This collaboration is set to make it easier for people to buy Yadea electric bikes and enjoy exclusive benefits. Alongside Muhammad Salman MD Yadea Pakistan, GM Consumer Finance at Bank Alfalah Mr. Muhammad Qasim were present in the ceremony. Yadea Pakistan and Bank Alfalah will now offer financing options for all Yadea bike models, allowing customers to spread their payments over a period of up to 36 months. What's even better is that for the

first 6 months, customers won't have to pay any extra money on the amount they borrowed. This 0% Markup offer is designed to provide a helping hand to buyers, making it more affordable to own a Yadea bike. Speaking at the Occasion, Muhammad Salman - Managing Director Yadea Paki-

stan said, "Today marks a significant milestone in our journey towards making sustainable mobility accessible to all. Our collaboration with Bank Alfalah underscores our commitment to providing innovative solutions that not only revolutionize transportation but also empower individuals to

embrace a greener, more efficient future. Together, we're paving the way for a brighter tomorrow, where electric mobility is not just a choice but a sustainable way of life." As an added value, Bank Alfalah customers who purchase a Yadea bike will receive exclusive benefits,

including free check-up services for a whole year. Nonetheless, they can enjoy peace of mind knowing that their bike will be taken care of without any additional costs. Both Yadea and Bank Alfalah are enthusiastic about this partnership and the positive impact it will have on customers. By combining their strengths, they aim to make electric mobility more accessible and affordable for people across Pakistan. Yadea, recognized as the number one electric bike manufacturer globally, is now available in all major cities across Pakistan. With a rapidly expanding network, Yadea is committed to bringing its innovative and eco-friendly electric bikes to even more locations in the near future.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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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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Islamabad.....1122 & 16
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TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

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PM Shehbaz wants relief for recent rain affected people

The prime minister was given a detailed briefing by the NDMA about the relief and rehabilitation activities in wake of recent torrential rains as well as weather forecast and preparedness

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed for submission of a report regarding quick and transparent provision of relief to the people affected by recent torrential rains across the country. He also directed the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to accomplish a joint survey report in collaboration with the provinces, besides enhancement of cooperation with the provinces to face the future calamities. The PM also sought an implementation report over his directive in the previous tenure regarding technical improvement of NDMA, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister was given a detailed briefing by the NDMA about the relief and rehabilitation activities in wake of recent torrential rains as well as weather forecast and preparedness. The meeting was attended by Minister for Economic Affairs and Establishment Ahmad Khan Cheema, Chairman NDMA Lt Gen. Inam Haider Malik and relevant senior officials. Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal attended the meeting through video



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif being briefed about the relief and rehabilitation activities in the wake of recent torrential rains as well as weather forecast and preparedness, Islamabad. —DNA

link. The meeting was apprised of the recent damages, rescue efforts and distribution of assistance amount. The NDMA with assistance of provinces; specially Balochistan would soon complete a collective verification survey over number of complete and partially damaged houses. Under the PM's directive, a total of

766,000 kg dry ration would be distributed in Gwadar till March 24, out of which about 388,000 kg ration had been distributed so far till March 16. Moreover, 97,000 kg ration had been distributed in Quetta and Dalbadin, it was further informed. The PM directed that the relief process should be completed immediately, besides

ensuring transparency in its distribution. With earlier completion of joint survey, the aid should be provided to the affected people only, he stressed, adding that affected people from the recent rains could not be left in despair and it was among government's top priority to support them. The meeting was further informed

about the weather forecast during April to June and July to September in the current season and the preparedness of NDMA. The prime minister was also apprised of the relief assistance sent to the affectees of Gaza by the NDMA. From October to this day, a total of 320 tons relief goods had been sent.

Expert call for taxing tobacco to help channelize health initiatives

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The calls for raising taxes on tobacco are gaining momentum as Dr. Muhammad Zaman endorses the policy that imposing taxes on tobacco saves lives as was advocated by the SDPL. Dr. Zaman, the founding chairman of the Department of Sociology at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) and head of the Zaman Research Center underlined the need for imposing more taxes to save lives. "Taxing tobacco saves lives by reducing consumption and channeling resources towards essential public health initiatives," he said. The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) had earlier pointed out deficiencies in tax collection framework as well as the need for increasing taxes on tobacco products

particularly cigarettes. The institute had published a detailed report based on government data that says that the country lost Rs 567 in revenue during the last seven years. The report titled "Tobacco Taxation in Pakistan: Unraveling the revenue loss of Rs567b to the exchequer," has unearthed the staggering financial toll inflicted by the tobacco industry on the national exchequer. Dr Zaman said that cigarette is a non-essential and perilous commodity. He said affordability of the cigarettes was the major contributor to high consumption and ultimately diseases and fatalities in the country. He said increasing prices of cigarettes was internationally proven strategy to curtail the consumption. Dr. Zaman endorsed the alignment of tobacco tax-

ation with the guidelines outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO), emphasizing the imperative to develop a long-term taxation policy grounded in global best practices and Article 6 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). In order to substantiate his argument of making the cigarette unaffordable to curb consumption, Dr. Zaman referred to a recent research report by Capital Calling that said that increase in prices of cigarette has resulted in decrease in consumption. The Islamabad-based think tank Capital Calling reported that "one in every ninety-four smokers was forced to quit smoking after a significant raise in taxes." "The interviews with the smokers and data collected from these

cities show that they are now saving the money by quitting smoking to fulfil other needs like food, education and health of their children, and paying the utilities. More than 31 million4 Pakistani adults (15+) or about 19.7 percent of the total adults use some of tobacco which is one of the highest in the world," it further said. Malik Imran, Country Head of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, highlighted the staggering economic toll of tobacco consumption, citing an annual loss of Rs 615 billion. He referred to a World Bank report and said that there was ample room to increase tax on tobacco products. "The government can generate additional Rs 17 billion Rs 65 billion from the industry by increasing the tax up to 26 percent," he said.

Chinese, Pakistani vocational institutions sign agreement

ISLAMABAD: China's Yantai Vocational College (YOC), Chinese logistics firm Sino Mall (Pvt) Ltd., and Government Monotechnique Institute, Mehrabpur, Sindh on Monday signed a framework agreement to co-construct Ban Mo College in Pakistan. In this connection, the Ban Mo College signing, unveiling and opening ceremony of the first phase training course was held at the YOC, which was attended online by officials of Pakistan's Embassy, Beijing and Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (STEVTA), Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. The agreement aims to deepen international exchanges and cooperation in vocational education, particularly in line with the 'Belt and Road' initiative, according to TANG Int'l Education Group. As per the agreement, the YOC will provide pre-job training for Sino Mall's Chinese employees in overseas logistics management, as well as Chinese + Professional skills training for its local employees in Pakistan. Development of logistics, Chinese teaching resources and vocational education courses, facilitating international academic education and exchange visits for Pakistani students, and responding to Sino Mall's language and skill training needs in other specialties are also part of the agreement. Utilizing YOC's teaching resources and online platforms for education services in Pakistan, developing professional standards and course standards recognized by Pakistani education authorities, conducting community activities, volunteer services, and vocational training for Pakistani residents are also included in the scope of the agreement. The three parties will jointly develop the logistics Chinese teaching resource base and construct characteristic vocational education courses and co-construct a high-level logistics industry-college-research training base, integrating practical teaching, enterprise production and social technology services. The agreement envisages construction of a Ban Mo College in Mehrabpur, Sindh, according to Mansoor ul Hassan Siddiqui, Director General TANG Pakistan.—DNA

Jobless youth enlisting in Russia-Ukraine war

ISLAMABAD: Brigadier (ret'd) Aslam Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), said on Tuesday that unemployed youth from poor nations are joining the Russia-Ukraine war in large numbers. Human smugglers are promising youth good jobs in Europe and then delivering them to the armies of both warring nations, he said. Aslam Khan said in a statement issued here today that this tendency can't be stopped as the unemployed youth of poor nations will continue to become part of this war for money, irrespective of their political affiliations. He said youth should be prevented from becoming the fuel for the war. The family members are not even informed in the event of the death of a person in a foreign land. Human traffickers transport youth to Russia on the promise of a good future in Europe. The youths are told they are being sent to Europe via Russia, where they will get a huge salary.—APP

Sri Lankan envoy for increasing bilateral trade



ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari presenting shield to High Commissioner of Sri Lanka Admiral Ravindra C Wijegunaratne (Rtd) following a meeting at the High Commission of Sri Lanka. DNA

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Pakistan, Ravindra Chandrasiri Wijegunaratne has said that Pakistan and Sri Lanka intend to double the bilateral trade between the two countries to \$800 million, for which the potential in various sectors in both countries should be exploited. At present, the bilateral trade potential between the two countries is \$1 billion, which is achievable, but it will take the bilateral trade to the target of 800 million dollars, the Ambassador said. The Sri Lankan Ambassador in Pakistan said here while talking to the delegation led by President Islamabad

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, said a press release issued by Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) here on Tuesday. Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and United Business Group, FPCCI Secretary General, Zafar Bakhtawari, and Executive Member of ICCI, Amir Hamza were also included in the delegation. The Sri Lankan Envoy said that the bilateral trade between the two countries was \$400 million last year, which was less than the trade of \$510 billion in the year 2018. The Sri Lankan Ambassador said that Pakistan and Sri Lanka signed a Free Trade Agreement in

2005, which was Pakistan's first FTA with any country. He said that in the beginning, this free trade agreement had good effects on the bilateral trade of both countries, but in the present era, both countries can reap a lot of benefits from this agreement. He said that there are plenty of opportunities between the two countries in agriculture, industry, tourism, and especially religious tourism, which can be implemented by planning and increasing the volume of mutual trade. He said that geo-strategically Pakistan is of utmost importance, especially its land link with Central Asia, and economic integration is also very useful for Sri Lanka.

NCA Gilgit Campus an initiative to provide art education at doorstep

ISLAMABAD: The National College of Arts (NCA) Gilgit Campus is an initiative to provide art, design, and architecture education in the region. According to NCA, this initiative will also mitigate the financial strain on prospective students and facilitate students with education at their doorstep. The Gilgit campus has equipment for studios, laboratories, lecture theatres, and a library, said an official of NCA Gilgit Campus.—APP

UBG stands united with Pakistan Armed Forces

ISLAMABAD: The leadership of the United Business Group (UBG), including Chief Petron S.M. Tanveer, President Zubair Tufail, Chairman (sindh zone) Khalid Tawab, Secretary General (Sindh) Hanif Gohar, and others, have expressed their unwavering solidarity with the Pakistan Army in its ongoing battle against terrorism. In light of the recent martyrdom of Pakistan Army officers and personnel, the UBG leadership paid rich tributes to their sacrifices and reiterated their commitment to supporting the armed forces. They acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the army in safeguarding the nation against terrorism and maintaining the country's defense robustness against nefarious elements. The UBG leadership praised the bravery of Pakistani soldiers, highlighting their relentless efforts in combating terrorism, militancy, and insurgency within the country. They expressed confidence that, with the support of the entire nation, the armed forces would succeed in eliminating terrorism and eradicating its roots from Pakistan. Emphasizing national unity, the UBG leaders affirmed that the entire nation stands united in solidarity with the armed forces in their fight against terrorism. They underscored that the sacrifices of our martyrs would never be forgotten and that the nation remains resolute in seeking justice for their sacrifices.—DNA

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Fawara Chowk parking plaza to be renovated

RAWALPINDI: Director General (DG), Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza on Tuesday directed the authorities concerned to renovate Fawara Chowk parking plaza. According to a RDA spokesman, the DG during a visit inspected Fawara Chowk parking plaza and directed the Estate Management (EM) Directorate of RDA to undertake extensive renovation work there. She emphasized the urgency of optimizing the functionality of the parking plaza in a proper manner. Kinza Murtaza instructed the EM Director to expedite the work to operationalize the basement of the plaza and promptly install rooftop sheds. Moreover, she also underscored the importance of maintaining cleanliness within the premises. The spokesman informed that the visit signifies RDA's commitment to enhance urban infrastructure and ensure all possible facilities for the citizens. On the occasion, Chief Engineer, Muhammad Anwar Baran, Director Estate Management, Shahzad Gondal, Director Engineering, Muhammad Kamran, Deputy Director Estate Management, Raja Waqar Asghar, and Assistant Director Architecture, Syeda Rida Sultan were also present.—APP

Briefs

Govt. earmarks
2 billion for
Pakistan
Startup Funds

ISLAMABAD: The government has earmarked Rs 2 billion for the Pakistan Startup Fund, aiming to bolster venture capital investment within the country. An official from the Ministry of IT said that this fund will extend financial support to startups, with each receiving 30% backing, while venture capitalists will contribute the remaining 70% of the capital. This initiative, he hoped is anticipated to significantly contribute to Pakistan's economic growth. To boost mobile phone production domestically, he said the government has unveiled a 3% Research and Development (R&D) incentive for the local handset manufacturing industry. This incentive, he was of the view, is designed to enhance the industry's global competitiveness in terms of pricing. The government plans to introduce a strategy for manufacturing components within Pakistan, thus making locally produced phones more affordable compared to imported ones through a tariff-differential policy. Highlighting the potential of Pakistan's cellular market, the official said that the country ranks as the seventh-largest market for cellular users globally, boasting 191 million cellular connections.

"However, we import most of our mobile phones. We need to manufacture them locally and develop an industry to export made-in-Pakistan phones," he remarked.—APP

PAL to
organize a
seminar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) would organize a literary seminar on National consciousness in literature on March 21 in connection with Pakistan National Day. The seminar will be presided by prominent literary figure Fateh Muhammad Malik, while Director General National Language Promotion Department (NLPD) Dr. Saleem Mazhar will be the guest of honour on the occasion. Chairperson PAL Dr. Najiba Arif, Dr. Naheed Qamar, and Dr. Manzoor will shed light on the topic in the seminar. Rehman Hafeez will be the moderator of the event. The seminar aims to promote national consciousness and highlight the importance of literature as a healthy indicator of a society that has always been used to promote a healthy value system. In the past times also, stories and epics were used to project a positive and powerful image of society. So, it is very healthful to produce literature in almost every form and genre so that our coming generations may know their history and may be able to pave national consciousness and love for Pakistan as a state.—APP

Huawei proposes App to create smart cities across Pakistan

The app seamlessly connects government services, service hotlines, health and education offerings, and various mini-apps. With internet connectivity, this Super App can potentially transform cities across Pakistan into smart, efficient hubs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., a prominent Chinese multinational technology corporation, visited the office of Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja. Led by Ethan Sun, CEO Huawei Pakistan, the team engaged in discussions related to various programs, initiatives, and ICT infrastructure. The delegation highlighted an exciting development in which the company designed a Super App that serves as a comprehensive digital ecosystem. The app seamlessly connects government services, service hotlines, health and education offerings, and various mini-apps. With internet connectivity, this Super App can potentially transform cities across Pakistan into smart, efficient hubs. During the meeting, Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja shared her vision for digitalizing Pakistan, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. She emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for the youth and leveraging technology to enhance their capacity and drive economic



growth. In response, Huawei's CEO expressed the company's commitment to contributing significantly to the digitalization of Pakistan's economy and overall development. He said his company aims to create a fully connected and intelligent world. China's tech giant in the past had also announced an investment of nearly \$100 million

in Pakistan to build a regional headquarters in Islamabad. This investment included expanding an existing technical support center to support the sale of Huawei consumer devices. Additionally, the company's presence in Pakistan created jobs and contributed to the local economy. It also actively collaborated with more than 60 local universities in Pakistan to es-

establish ICT academies. Through these academies, Huawei trained approximately 40,000 young students, enhancing their digital skills and contributing to the country's talent pool. The meeting was attended by several key officials, including Jahanzeb Rahim, Member Telecom; Faisal Ratal, DG Telecom; Dr. Babar Majid Bhatti, CEO of the

National Information Technology Board (NITB); and Ahmed Bilal Masud, Director of the Subsidiary Board. Additionally, Shahzad Rasheed, CEO of Huawei Cloud; Yu Shaoning, Deputy CEO of Public Affairs; and Saad Talha Saeed, Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations at Huawei, were also presented.

Film legend
Muhammad
Ali
remembered

ISLAMABAD: The 18th death anniversary of legendary Pakistani actor Muhammad Ali was observed today. Mohammad Ali was born on 19th April 1931 at Rampur in India. Muhammad Ali's family migrated from India to Karachi after the partition in 1947, a private news channel reported. He joined Radio Pakistan Hyderabad station as a broadcaster in 1956. Later, he moved to Radio Pakistan Karachi where its then Director General Zulfikar Ali Bukhari became his mentor for his acting career. He started his film career in 1962. He was the lead actor and 'hero' in 94 films. He won ten Nigar awards in his career. He died on this day in 2006 in Lahore due to a heart attack.—APP

NE China
univ launches
training course
for Pakistani
employees

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Liaoning Petrochemical College held the launching ceremony of a training program in March for Pakistani employees of Shandong Zhongyang Group to study in China, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. Yu Zhongdang, the college president, expressed his gratitude to the Department of Education of Liaoning Province, the Embassy of Pakistan in China, Shandong Zhongyang Group, and Tang International Education Group for their long-term support and assistance to the college. He also extended a warm welcome to all Pakistani students who participated in the training. He pointed out that the college's technical skills training for foreign employees of Chinese-funded enterprises and its full support for the construction of Shandong Zhongyang Group's Nigri-ano Petrochemical Industrial Park project are important measures for the college to deeply implement the spirit of the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Modern Vocational Education System Construction. It is a common practice at the college to implement Liaoning's three-year action for new breakthroughs in all-round revitalization and promote cooperation between vocational colleges and enterprises to expand overseas operations.—APP

Railways intend to revive
Safari Tourist Train

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways is planning to revive the 'Safari Tourist Train' to promote culture and beauty of Potohar Region which will commence its journey from Islamabad's historic Golra Station to Attock Khurd. "The Safari Train will commence its journey from Golra Station, traversing through Hasan Abdal, Attock, and Attock Khurd Railway stations. Notably, Attock Khurd boasts a rich historical legacy, housing the oldest railway museum," official sources told APP. They said that the basic purpose of the tourist train is to bolster tourism and acquaint travellers with the railway's ancient heritage while can play a key role in promoting tourism. The tourists will experience travelling through a beautiful landscape of Potohar, consisting of Margallah Hills, Sangjani tunnel and many bridges like Chablal Bridge, Haro Bridge, Ghazi Borotha and Attock Khurd bridges. They said the Safari Train will also pass through the old iron girder bridge on the Indus River between Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The Golra Station, steeped in British-era history, houses the sprawling Islamabad

Railway Museum, showcasing a treasure trove of railway artefacts, including ancient steam engines and heritage railway kitchens. Following this immersive heritage tour, the Safari Train will stop at the Attock Khurd's Station, offering passengers the opportunity to explore the captivating beauty and entertainment spots along the Indus River. The train itself has undergone a stunning makeover, both internally and externally, with meticulously designed interiors, delectable onboard cuisine, and arrangements for high tea. Luxurious seating arrangements and newly constructed washrooms add to the passengers' comfort and convenience, they added. The sources said the preparations for the Safari Train are in the final stages and likely to be completed next week, whereas the official date of the journey would be announced in due course of time. The departures of the Safari Train are scheduled every Sunday at 9 am, with return trips from Attock at 6:30 pm and the ticket prices vary according to the type of accommodation, with special discounts available for students from educational institutions.—APP

NPO to
organize
webinar on
'Industrial
Automation'
tomorrow

ISLAMABAD: The National Productivity Organization (NPO) is going to organize a webinar on "Industrial Automation on March 20 (Wednesday) tomorrow. Industrial automation involves the integration of electronic, mechanical and software systems to create a more intelligent and autonomous production environment, which is of great benefit to any industry, regardless of the sector in which it operates, said an NPO document shared here on Tuesday. The objectives of the workshop include increasing efficiency, productivity, accuracy, and quality in production while reducing human intervention in repetitive and routine tasks, and costing. The workshop will provide information about industrial revolutions, manual industrial practices merits and demerits, industrial automation techniques.—APP

Trade delegation
off to Kyrgyzstan

ISLAMABAD: A high-level trade delegation of Pakistan Tuesday left for Kyrgyzstan to foster close collaboration with private sector for boosting bilateral trade and exports between two countries. Talking to media prior to departure, the delegation head Meher Kashif Younis underscored the importance of prioritizing trade, economic relations and investment for mutual benefits of either sides. He stressed the need of exploiting the untapped potential of trade, adding that both the countries should make good use of the CPEC for attaining better connectivity to deeply explore each other markets. Meher Kashif, who is also an honorary Consul of Kyrgyzstan, said that the delegation would meet Kyrgyz private sector and hold a series of mutually beneficial talks in various sectors including agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and textiles "Joint business forums have been instrumental in strengthening collaborations, and we plan for more forums in the upcoming year to facilitate the participation of major companies, he said and asserted that Kyrgyzstan would provide comprehensive information on sectors like energy, agriculture and food production to the delegation for further bilateral trade and economic cooperation. He mentioned that Kyrgyz Ambassador Ulanbek Totuaev facilitated the delegation for arranging meetings with Kyrgyz businessmen and investors. Meher Kashif highlighted the significance of the quadrilateral trade transit agreement among Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. He commended initiatives such as the NLC operated route through Karakoram, reducing transit time significantly. Moreover, he mentioned the ongoing establishment of railway connections between China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, welcoming Pakistan's involvement through Afghanistan in this project. He 12,000 Pakistani students are pursuing higher education in Kyrgyzstan, contributing positively to cultural exchanges between the both countries.—DNA

Zong 4G offers free
Islamic Ringback tones


ZONG 4G
A NEW DREAM

FAISAL SHEIKH


ISLAMABAD 19th March 2024: In the spirit of Ramadan, Zong 4G, Pakistan's leading telecommunications provider, is delighted to announce a special promotion, offer-

ing free Islamic Ringback Tones (RBTs) and downloadable content for the entire holy month. This gesture serves to enrich the spiritual experience of our valued customers and welcome new users to the Zong family. Throughout Ramadan, Zong 4G users

can set the tone for the holy month with a complementary Islamic Ringback Tone. Users can explore a wide array of tones and choose the one that mers. We believe this offering will allow everyone to embrace the spirit of the holy month in a meaningful way.



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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of European Union Riina Kioka met with Justice Mansoor Ali Shah of Supreme Court of Pakistan to discuss judicial cooperation. —DNA

Survive on a budget

THIS month, the British Chancellor announced what should turn out to be the UK government's last full budget before the country's next general election. It had certainly been seen by many political commentators and many within his own party as the Conservatives' last bid to the electorate to let them cling onto power. Following worse than expected economic forecasts – and the news that the nation had just dipped into recession – the Tories' hopes for a big cash giveaway had been severely dashed. Much to the dismay of many of his party's hardline backbenchers, there was no way that Jeremy Hunt was going to follow the precedent set by his immediate predecessor, whose own mini-budget ignored the advice of the Office for Budget Responsibility, plunged the country into financial chaos, and forever sealed the reputation of his boss – Britain's shortest lived premier, Liz Truss – into the annals of moronic notoriety. Mr. Hunt did what he could, of course, to make people feel a little bit better about their fortunes as we languish in the last stagnant stages of a cost-of-living crisis that has blighted the lives of so many ordinary families. He cut two per cent from national insurance, a direct contribution taxpayers make (as a proportion of their incomes) to their pension and benefits rights. But he'd done exactly the same thing in his autumn statement less than four months earlier, and that had hardly boosted his party's popularity or set the British people's minds alight with gratitude at his munificence. His other major move was to announce that, in April 2025, the Treasury would rescind the tax-free arrangements currently in place for foreign nationals in the UK who claim non-domiciled status. This is a matter which might be seen as controversial – or utterly uncontroversial – as it is already a flagship policy of the opposition Labour Party, which is widely expected to be in power in a year's time anyway. It may however be considered of particular interest as the Prime Minister's own multimillionaire wife enjoys this non-domiciled tax status – although she started paying tax, on a purely voluntary basis, when this embarrassing fact was brought to light by the British press two years ago. There are those who might suppose that this fiscal gambit might plant a wedge between the premier and his chief finance minister. There are others, however, who suppose that Jeremy Hunt is Chancellor in name only, and that it's former Treasury boss Rishi Sunak himself who continues to hold the purse-strings of his administration. It remains to be seen whether this budget's last desperate (yet modest) political gamble with the country's finances and its immediate economic prospects will be enough to help Mr. Sunak's premiership survive. Yet some analysts have suggested that this budget doesn't represent a Tory ruse to hang onto power beyond the next general election, but is in fact a pseudo-suicidal strategy to regain it at the election after next, by saddling an incoming Labour government with the curse of major spending cuts, and effectively scuppering from the outset their hopes for the regeneration of public services and green industries in the UK. Having been forced into a corner by the Tories' tax cuts – which for electoral reasons they've felt obliged to embrace – Labour are now faced with what the BBC's political editor described as the "headache" of working out how they can possibly pay for their core policy promises.

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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



Fascism and Regional Functions

ISSAN Nasrallah's talk about not wanting to "drag Iran into a war with Israel and the United States" and his insistence that Hezbollah would wage this battle alone, is highly indicative. It wouldn't be surprised to see people commenting that they "Wish he cared as much for what remains of Lebanon's interests as he does the interest of the Islamic Republic!" Quoting an "Iranian source," Reuters has reported that the Secretary-General Hezbollah made these remarks to Quds Force Commander General Esmail Qaani during their meeting in Beirut in February... Nasrallah reportedly added: "This is our battle." Last month's meeting was reportedly the third between the two men since the events of October 7, all which have dealt with the risks of a broad Israeli attack on the party, and by extension, Iran's foothold in Lebanon and the region. The atmosphere on the Lebanese-Israeli border is doubtlessly unsettling, especially amid the "war" of statements and bellicose speeches being made as the two sides "bargain with fire." More than that, the role that Iran has assigned to the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden has entered a new phase, considering the news of American-Iranian meetings in Muscat that The New York Times reported on last week, claiming that the two sides discussed security in the Red Sea and attacks by Iranian proxies on American bases in both Iraq and Syria. The newspaper reported that the "indirect" Muscat talks – which were not announced at the time – had been requested by Tehran and held on January 10. Omani officials conveyed the messages of Iranian and American delegations, who were sitting in separate rooms. The Iranian delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani, while the American delegation was led by National Security Council coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to ramp up his political-military rhetoric, stressing the "inevitability" of an assault on Rafah... the final refuge of the people of Gaza after the "war of displacement" claimed over 30,000 lives. In turn, Western "rejection" of the offensive does not seem to reflect any real determination to prevent it and the humanitarian disaster that several bodies have warned would ensue from it. Even the criticism of Netanyahu personally by President Joe Biden, and Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (the highest-ranking Jewish official in Washington) calling for Netanyahu's departure after snap elections, have not come with serious threats. Worse, Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader in the Senate, outbid Schumer in his defense of Israel, attacking Biden and criticizing his Democratic colleague. On a related note, amid the "ambiguity" of the US administration's stance on the "scenario" of the coming hours and days in the Gaza Strip, some have presented a different reading of Washington's decision to set up aid facilities on the central coast of the Gaza Strip. They see it as a substitute for the vital Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings... and thus as evidence that the US is unwilling or unable to prevent the attack on Rafah!

How can the US justify ban on Tik-Tok?

Qamar Bashir



Firstly, social media activists are leveraging their online platforms to raise awareness about the potential negative implications of the ban. They are mobilizing their followers to participate in online campaigns, petitions, and digital protests aimed at voicing their opposition to the proposed legislation. These activists are utilizing the very social media platforms targeted by the ban to amplify their message, highlighting the importance of freedom of expression and the role of social media in facilitating public discourse and activism

THE seemingly invincible global leader, champion of democracy and media freedom, and a beacon of technological innovation, the USA finds itself facing an unexpected threat not from rival armed forces or cutting-edge inventions, but from an unlikely source: TikTok. This seemingly harmless app, devoid of political, religious, or violent content, has captured the hearts of users across all age groups. With its short, light-hearted videos, TikTok has become a source of joy, excitement, and healthy competition for millions worldwide.

The recent vote in the US House of Representatives targeting the Chinese social media platform TikTok on March 13 is not only disconcerting but also disheartening and, quite frankly, concerning. It's particularly perplexing coming from a country that prides itself on being the torchbearer of democracy and constantly lectures the world on the importance of press and media freedom. This sudden shift in stance, where a purely apolitical and harmless social media application like TikTok is deemed a threat to national security, political integrity, and cultural values, stands in stark contrast to the unabated support for US-based social media giants like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. On the contrary, the United States has expressed deep concern over recent reports of internet slowdown in Pakistan, highlighting the indispensable role of a free and open internet in fostering economic growth, facilitating education, and enabling effective communication. It has urged Pakistan to intensify efforts in investing in infrastructure to meet the escalating demands of the digital age and unequivocally condemned any cyberattacks aimed at disrupting internet access. Furthermore, the US has called upon governments worldwide to refrain from actions that impede internet freedom, emphasizing its pivotal role in safeguarding democracy. It has underscored the adverse impact of such disruptions on business and education, emphasizing the urgent need for swift action to restore normalcy. While the USA has been advocating for freedom and openness in media and technology worldwide, it has taken a contradictory stance at home by moving to ban TikTok across the entire country. This decision comes amidst claims that the harmless and relatively insignificant application poses a threat to US national security, undermining its values and even its military prowess. The move, led by both elected Republicans and Democrats, reflects a significant departure from the country's image as a bastion of free enterprise. The legislative body's decision to pressure ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, into selling the app within 180 days or face removal from Apple and Google's app stores has raised concerns and garnered attention internationally. By banning a social media website, the US is limiting in-

dividuals' ability to exercise their freedom of speech and expression on that platform. This action suppresses diverse viewpoints, stifles open discourse, and restricts access to information, all of which are fundamental to a healthy democracy. This vote comes into direct confrontation with the first amendment passed by the US on December 15, 1791, as part of the Bill of Rights. During the American Revolution (1775-1783), the revolutionaries were motivated by principles of liberty, democracy, and individual rights. After the establishment of the United States as a sovereign nation, there was a growing concern among the Founding Fathers about the potential for abuse of governmental power and infringement upon individual liberties.

Accordingly, the First Amendment was drafted to address these concerns and to enshrine fundamental freedoms essential to a democratic society. It protects the freedom of speech, including the right to express opinions, ideas, and beliefs without censorship or government interference. This provision is fundamental to a democratic society, allowing for open discourse and the exchange of diverse viewpoints. The First Amendment safeguards freedom of the press, ensuring that the media can operate independently and report on matters of public interest without fear of government reprisal. A free press plays a crucial role in holding the government accountable and informing the public. While the bill passed by the congress but pending approval by the US Senate, the US social media activists, civil society organizations, pressure groups, and political parties are advocating in favor of tiktok and are engaging in coordinated efforts to oppose the ban. Firstly, social media activists are leveraging their online platforms to raise awareness about the potential negative implications of the ban. They are mobilizing their followers to participate in online campaigns, petitions, and digital protests aimed at voicing their opposition to the proposed legislation. These activists are utilizing the very social media platforms targeted by the ban to amplify their message, highlighting the importance of freedom of expression and the role of social media in facilitating public discourse and activism. Secondly, civil society organizations and pressure groups are employing various advocacy tactics to lobby lawmakers and influence public opinion. They organize rallies, forums, and public events to educate the public about the implications of the ban on democratic values and individual rights. These groups are engaging in direct lobbying efforts, meeting with legislators, submitting written testimonies, and conducting media outreach to convey their concerns and advocate for alternative policy solutions. Lastly, political leaders who are engaged to capitalize the movement against banning Tiktok are making legis-

lative maneuvers and coalition-building to oppose the ban within the halls of Congress and the Senate. They are challenging the proposed legislation through parliamentary procedures, such as filibustering, amendments, and procedural delays. Additionally, political leaders are using their platforms to publicly denounce the ban, framing it as a threat to constitutional freedoms and democratic principles and are mobilizing their constituents and leveraging their institutional power to sway public opinion and pressure lawmakers to reconsider or reject the proposed ban.

Under pressure for many months, ByteDance has already made some gestures, such as a billion-dollar investment to have American user data stored by a third party in the US. But the suspicions of Beijing-led opinion manipulation during this election year, also raised during the vote, need to be substantiated. Yet the House hastily passed the bill, without any tangible evidence being presented to the elected representatives. The vote on the bill has created some unexpected alliances, bringing together left-wing Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, libertarian Republican Senator Rand Paul, and former President Donald Trump. Ocasio-Cortez and Paul, motivated by substantive arguments, joined forces against the bill, while Trump, who had previously criticized TikTok, changed his stance, arguing that targeting the app could benefit other social media platforms he views as hostile to him.

China swiftly responded to what it perceived as aggressive interventionism, expressing disappointment with the decision and accusing the US of going against principles of fair competition and international trade rules. While China refrained from directly criticizing internet censorship, it made clear its stance on the matter. The popularity of the Chinese platform has undoubtedly raised concerns among legislators, especially regarding content control and its potential impact on young users. ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, has attempted to address some of these concerns by investing in storing American user data domestically. However, suspicions of Beijing-led manipulation, particularly during an election year, persist without concrete evidence, leading to swift passage of the bill in the House. Despite passing the House, the bill still faces a hurdle in the Senate, where representatives have signaled their intent to defend principles like freedom of expression enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Thus, the outcome remains uncertain, with the Senate yet to weigh in on the matter.

*Former Press Secretary to the President
Former Minister to the
Embassy of Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRB*

Americans are losing faith in the UN, but the world still needs it

Thomas Weiss

These have consistently found that around 60 percent of US respondents are usually favourable to improved multilateral cooperation of all sorts. Views about the world organisation reflect evaluations that are an inch deep but a mile wide. Americans do not actually have less or more confidence in the UN these days. Rather, their sentiments mirror a well-known ahistoricism, which is at least as pronounced for the United Nations as for the nation's own past. We could call it an inverse Alzheimer's disease, in which short-term experiences are retained...

ONLY one-third of American citizens believe that the United Nations is doing a good job, according to a February Gallup Poll. That's down from last year when 39 percent expressed confidence in the global body. And it's far from the all-time high of 58 percent in 2002. This is hardly surprising. The current paralysis in the UN Security Council over Ukraine and Gaza has dominated media coverage. The UN has also shown more general powerlessness in addressing climate crises, growing humanitarian crises, and the tail-end of a deadly pandemic.

These findings remind me of polls asking whether the United States is going in the right direction. Poor results supposedly suggest that US President Joe Biden's administration is to blame. The country certainly is not headed in the right direction if one is concerned about attacks on democracy, reproductive rights, and gun availability. However, the Biden administration is not responsible, any more than the UN is responsible, for the lamentable ills in world politics and the inability to address myriad threats to human survival with dignity. The answers in the latest Gallup poll reflect an absence of knowledge about the UN system's limitations and the impact of its worldwide activities. The latest results, for instance, should be tempered by the half-century of largely contradictory data from the annual Chicago Council on Global Affairs surveys. These have consistently found that around 60 percent of US respondents are usually favourable to improved multilateral cooperation of all sorts. Views about the world organisation reflect evaluations that are an inch deep but a mile wide. Americans do not actually have less or more confidence in the UN these days. Rather, their sentiments mirror a well-known ahistoricism, which is at least as pronounced for the United Nations as for the nation's own past. We could call it an inverse Alzheimer's disease, in which short-term experiences are retained and highlighted, while the contexts that crafted these memories have slipped away or were ignored in the first place. To wit, it is essential to recall that the latest know-nothing version of "America First" was not invented by Donald Trump and his nativist followers. Rather, the isolationist slogan emanated from the proto-fascist trio of Henry Ford, Father Coughlin, and Charles Lindbergh, who sought to keep the US out of World War II. That version collapsed

after Pearl Harbor. What followed? The establishment of the United Nations and the system of satellite functional organisations reflected the clear recognition by former US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and then-Vice President Harry Truman about why Washington required international cooperation. The creation of the "United Nations" was not in San Francisco in June 1945, but rather in Washington, DC, on January 1, 1942, when 26 (and later 44) countries signed the Declaration by the United Nations.

Most observers are unaware that the UN was initially founded as a military alliance to defeat fascism, which entailed a parallel commitment to multilateralism as the standard operating procedure during the war. The goal was also to guide post-war peace and prosperity through an institution with the same name. The 1940s in many ways represented the pinnacle of enthusiasm and support for global intergovernmental governance. The tumultuous US-UN relationship in the 20th century was documented by the late Edward Luck in *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organization 1919-1999*. The rollercoaster ride intensified in the 1990s and has continued since then. Shortly after the 1991 Gulf War and the allied efforts in Iraqi Kurdistan, "renaissance" was ubiquitous in media and academic analyses. Apparently, there was nothing that the UN could not do. By 1994, however, there was nothing that it could do to halt the murder of a million people in Rwanda. From that nadir, 1999 witnessed contrasting interventions by the international community in East Timor and Kosovo, with and without UN approval. Following Washington and London's decisions in March 2003 to wage war in Iraq without explicit Security Council approval, the world organisation once again confronted widespread disillusionment. Either there was nothing that the UN could do to thwart US hegemony, or there was nothing it could do to enforce decisions against the rogue regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The ups and downs have continued with humanitarian paralysis in Syria accompanied by efforts to isolate Bashar Al Assad's regime for using chemical weapons, the responses (positive and negative) to regime change in Libya, and the unequal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most embarrassing recent illustrations of the UN's ineffectiveness were the Security Council's inability to react to Russian aggression against Ukraine and Israeli retaliation

against Hamas in Gaza.

However, the General Assembly did overwhelmingly condemn Moscow's war (six times to date, usually with some 140 affirmative votes) and the International Criminal Court has indicted Vladimir Putin. A similarly challenging and confusing public relations puzzle has arisen since the October 2023 attack on Israel and the disproportionate Israeli response in Gaza. Once again, the UN Security Council experienced paralysis, but the General Assembly did succeed in a vote against Israeli and US positions, with margins comparable to earlier ones against Russia.

General Assembly resolutions do not have the same potential enforcement impact as Security Council decisions, but they nonetheless reflect the weight of world public opinion. They also verify the fact that it is a limited number of member states that are responsible for the inaction—and not all countries or the world organization's Secretariat. It is often said that citizens get the governments they deserve; and states the UN they deserve. As the UN approaches its 80th birthday next year, it's worth calling attention to the circumstances of its actual birth, during the 1942-45 United Nations Alliance. The end of World War II—like World War I and the Napoleonic wars before it—resulted in yet another experiment in international organisation after rampant nationalism and going-it-alone were exposed as empty vessels. Today, armed conflicts no longer represent the only threat to human survival and justice. Collaboration is required to address what former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan aptly called "problems without passports."

So, how full or empty is the UN glass? It is important to pause before becoming despondent over the most recent numbers about negative US attitudes toward the world organisation. The UN system's shortcomings are legion—indeed, much of my own analytical career has been devoted to outlining problems and prospects. But "no" remains the clear reply to the question posed in my 2018 book's title, *Would the World Be Better*. The proverbial bottom line is clear: without more robust multilateralism, especially in the form of universal organisations like those launched during and after World War II, nations and their citizens will not reap the benefits of trade and globalisation, discover nonviolent ways to meet security challenges, alleviate poverty and address environmental degradation.

Briefs

Cipher case: IHC seeks advocate...

FROM PAGE 01 regarding the conduct of the trial, the defense stressed the importance of upholding the principles of fair trial as enshrined in Article 10-A. They raised concerns over the timing and conduct of the trial, suggesting potential infringements on the defendants' rights. The court, while acknowledging the complexity of the case, underscored the need to ensure a transparent and equitable legal process. Chief Justice Amir Farooq emphasized the significance of cross-examination and expressed a commitment to upholding the defendants' rights throughout the proceedings. Furthermore, the court deliberated on the status of the government-appointed lawyers and sought clarification on their standing in the case. The defense reiterated concerns over the timing of the trial and highlighted challenges faced during the proceedings.

US urges Taliban to...

FROM PAGE 01 civilian lives during the strike in Afghanistan," said Vedant Patel, State Department's principal deputy spokesperson. "We urge the Taliban to ensure that terrorist attacks are not launched from Afghan soil, and we urge Pakistan to exercise restraint and ensure civilians are not harmed in their counterterrorism efforts. And we urge both sides to address any differences," he added. The Afghan Taliban had claimed that two air strikes carried out inside Afghanistan by Pakistani forces had killed eight people in the war-torn country. Patel said that Washington remains committed to ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a "safe haven for terrorists who wish to harm the United States or our partners and allies". When asked to elaborate US stance on Pakistani strikes in Afghanistan, the spokesperson said: "Any loss of civilian life is troubling and heart-breaking to us, and so we want to make sure that when some of these operations are being conducted, that every step possible is being taken, that it's the perpetrators that are being held to account, and that it's not civilians who are being impacted."

Pakistan denounces...

FROM PAGE 01 Peoples League (JKPL) as 'unlawful associations.' It also denounced the decision to "extend the ban on Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) (Mohd. Yasin Malik faction) for five more years". Last week, the India home ministry declared the Yasin Malik faction of the JKLF as an "unlawful association" and designated the JKPL as a banned group for five years "for abetting secession", according to an Indian newspaper. The report added that the ministry also declared four factions of the JKPL - of Mukhtar Ahmed Waza, Bashir Ahmad Tota, Ghulam Mohammad Khan and Aziz Sheikh led by Yaqoob Sheikh - as "unlawful associations" for alleged involvement in inciting terror in the region. According to an Indian newspaper, the decision came hours before the dates for elections to the Lok Sabha, the Indian parliament's lower house, were announced. The move was made under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). In its statement today, the FO noted that with the fresh notifications, a total of 14 political parties "have become outlawed in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK)". "The affiliates of these parties are also facing persecution," it added.

US envoy Blome calls on FM...

FROM PAGE 01 Ambassador Blome noted the U.S. governments support for Pakistan's work with the IMF to complete its current Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). Ambassador Blome underscored his commitment to expanding further U.S.-Pakistan economic cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

PM extends support to javelin thrower Nadeem

PM Shehbaz Sharif announced an award worth Rs2.5 million for Arshad Nadeem

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday praised Pakistan's ace javelin thrower Arshad Nadeem for achieving a historic feat of winning a silver medal in the World Athletics Championship 2023. During a meeting with Arshad Nadeem, the world famed javelin throwing athlete, the prime minister praised his efforts to clinch the silver medal despite scant resources. His achievement made the nation proud, he added. The prime minister announced an award worth Rs2.5 million for Arshad Nadeem. The meeting was attended by Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Minister of State for IT and Telecom Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Romeena Khurshid Alam MNA and Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, a member of Punjab Assembly. The prime minister said that there was immense



talent in the country in sports which required to be groomed. He also underlined the need of focusing on promotion of sports in the rural areas. Arshad Nadeem apprised the prime minister of his sports career and achievements. He said that he started his career during 2012 and participated in the Youth festival afterwards, he participated in different world events

in various categories and represented Pakistan. He termed his meeting with the prime minister as very constructive and highlighted various measures to promote sports in the country.

Earlier, India's Neeraj Chopra had also urged sponsors and the Pakistan government to support Nadeem. Last year at the World Championship in Hungary, Nadeem created history for the country by becoming the first athlete to claim silver medal with a throw of 87.82 metre, just below India's Neeraj Chopra who won gold with a throw of 88.17m. During the event, he also qualified for the Paris Olympics. However, last year he missed the Asian Championship, Asian Games and Asian Throwing Championship because of fitness issues. Arshad's personal best throw is 90.18 metre which he managed at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. The javelin throw event in the Paris Olympics will be held at the France's biggest venue Stade de France. The qualifying round will be held on August 6 with the final to be conducted on August 8. Arshad finished fifth in the Tokyo Olympics with a throw of 84.62m in the final.

Pakistan expected to shine at T20 WC 2024: Bishop Former Windies cricketer was impressed with the talent on show during PSL 9

DUBAI: Former Windies cricketer and renowned commentator Ian Bishop was impressed with the talent on show during the recently-concluded Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine. Taking to X, formerly Twitter, Bishop said that PSL 9 showed that the Pakistan should be a formidable team at this year's T20 World Cup. Bishop also congratulated Islamabad United for winning the title for the third time in their history. "The talent on show suggests Pakistan should be a formidable team at the ICC T20 CWC 2024. They have several wonderful bowling options and key players who have been part of the CPL in the Caribbean," Bishop said. Islamabad claimed their third PSL title, beating Multan Sultans in the final



last night, after emerging victorious in 2016 and 2018 and have become the most successful team in the tournament's history. The thriller was decided on the last ball when Hunain Shah came into bat with

one run required off the final ball. The youngster smartly identified the gap at point and hit the ball for four. Earlier, Sultans posted 159-9 in their 20 overs after winning the toss and opting to bat. A 40-ball 57

by Usman Khan and 26 by captain Mohammad Rizwan led the way for Sultans. However, Sultans lost five wickets for just 13 runs and slipped to 127-9. Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim started with figures of 5-23 while Naseem grabbed 3-32. Iftikhar Ahmed brought Multan back in the game with whirlwind 20-ball 32 not out with three sixes and as many fours, notching 31 in the last two overs. United also lost their way as they slipped from 121-4 to 129-7 but Wasim held his nerves with the tail and scored 17-ball 19 to help them cross the finish line. For the champions, Martin Guptill top-scored with a 32-ball 50 with three sixes and four boundaries. Azam Khan scored a 22-ball 30 with a six and four boundaries.

CA postpones series with Afg over women rights

SYDNEY: Cricket Australia Tuesday announced its decision to postpone its upcoming men's series against Afghanistan over deteriorating human rights for women and girls in the country. "Over the past 12 months, CA has continued to consult with the Australian government on the situation in Afghanistan. The government's advice is that conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are getting worse. For this reason, we have maintained our previous position and will postpone the bilateral series against Afghanistan," the board said in a statement. The development comes as the Kangaroos were set to take on Afghanistan's men's side in a three-match T20I series scheduled to take place in August this year. This is the third time that the Australian board has declined to play against Afghanistan citing human rights concerns as previously the Kangaroos withdrew from a three-match One-Day Internationals (ODI) series in January 2023 which was set to be played in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Cancellation of the series then had irked Afghan players and fans alike who expressed their dismay at the Australian board's decision. Before that, a one-off Test match was also cancelled before the two sides which was to be played in Hobart, Australia in 2021. Reiterating its support for the inclusion of women and girls in cricket around the world, Cricket Australia has stressed that it would "continue to actively engage the International Cricket Council (ICC) and work closely with the Afghanistan Cricket Board to determine what actions could be taken to support the resumption of bilateral matches in the future". It is pertinent to know that despite refusing to play bilateral matches, Australia have continued to play Afghanistan in the ICC events with their thrilling World Cup 2023 being the recent most memorable clash. - Agencies

Imad Wasim opens up on his future in cricket

ISLAMABAD: Following his brilliant performance in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 final, Islamabad United's all-rounder Imad Wasim said he is fit and can play for another four to five years. "I think I'm happy playing cricket, I'm fit and trying to contribute as much as possible. I've four-five years of cricket left in me," Imad said after the match. Commenting on the enthralling final, Imad stated that the United should have achieved the total an over earlier and lauded Hunain Shah for displaying nerves of steel. "We should have finished the match one over earlier. Hunain Shah kept his nerves and smashed a boundary on the last ball of the inning." Notably, the left-arm spinner had a brilliant outing for the United in the blockbuster final against 2021 champions Multan Sultans, becoming the first bowler to take a five-wicket haul in the tournament's final. At the back of his bowling exploits, the two-time champions United managed to restrict the Sultans on 159/9 in the allotted overs. Imad Wasim had a dream start to his bowling spell as he removed in-form opener Yasir Khan (6) on the third delivery of his first over. He was then hit for a six by David Willey (6) but hit back on the next delivery by casting the batter. He then conceded a mere six runs in his next over before being brought back into the attack by Shadab Khan in the 12th over of the innings. The left-arm spinner struck straightaway, removing the hard-hitting batter Johnson Charles (4). Coming back into the attack for his final over, Imad Wasim put Islamabad United in complete control with a ruthless bowling display. He dismissed Khushdil Shah (11) and Chris Jordan (0) to complete his five-wicket haul before Abbas Afridi got run out in the same over, bringing Sultans down to 127/9 in 17 overs. -Agencies

Germany confirm friendlies before June 2024

BERLIN: Hosts Germany will take part in two friendly matches against Ukraine and Greece in June, the team announced on Tuesday. The matches will be held days before the start of the European championships on home soil. Ukraine will face Germany in Nuremberg on June 3 before taking on Greece in Moechengladbach four days later. Euro 2024 will begin on June 14 with Germany locking horns with Scotland in their first Group A match. "We have to prepare for different styles and systems of opponents ahead of the Euro (2024)," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said in a statement. "Ukraine and Greece are two fighting, passionate teams and we had problems with such opponents lately." Nagelsmann, who took charge after the sacking of Hansi Flick in September 2023, registered a win and a draw during a trip to the US in October. - Agencies

No excuses as Rizwan lauds IU after PSL 9 triumph

ISLAMABAD: Multan Sultans captain Mohammad Rizwan opened up after his side lost the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine final by two wickets against Islamabad United on Monday in Karachi. Islamabad claimed their third PSL title after emerging victorious in 2016 and 2018 and have become the most successful team in the tournament's history. "If the match goes to last ball, you can't really point out any flaw. Credit to Imad for picking a fifer and scoring those crucial runs," Rizwan said. "When you have momentum then you want to just keep playing but the gap [after the Qualifier] breaks the momentum, it isn't an excuse but we can say they [Islamabad] played really well. "I'm not quite satisfied with my batting, I'm always available for Pakistan to bat any position. "Congratulations to Islamabad and it was fun to play tonight in front of a packed house." The thriller was decided on the last ball when Hunain Shah came into bat with one run required off the final ball. The youngster smartly identified the gap at point and hit the ball for four. Earlier, Sultans posted 159-9 in their 20 overs after winning the toss and opting to bat. A 40-ball 57 by Usman Khan and 26 by captain Mohammad Rizwan led the way for Sultans. However, Sultans lost five wickets for just 13 runs and slipped to 127-9. Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim started with figures of 5-23 while Naseem grabbed 3-32. Iftikhar Ahmed brought Multan back in the game with whirlwind 20-ball 32 not out with three sixes and as many fours, notching 31 in the last two overs. United also lost their way as they slipped from 121-4 to 129-7 but Wasim held his nerves with the tail and scored 17-ball 19 to help them cross the finish line. For the champions, Martin Guptill top-scored with a 32-ball 50 with three sixes and four boundaries. Azam Khan scored a 22-ball 30 with a six and four boundaries. Meanwhile, Shadab Khan reacts after Islamabad United win trophy Islamabad United captain Shadab Khan was over the moon after his side won the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine after beating Multan Sultans by two wickets on Monday in Karachi. Islamabad claimed their third PSL title after emerging victorious in 2016 and 2018 and have become the most successful team in the tournament's history. "The sign of a best team is that they win even without playing a perfect game. I would like to thank the owners for backing me and how they supported me throughout my journey. There was a lot of hard work and belief behind winning this trophy so this trophy means a lot to us," Shadab said after the match. "I was a batter at the start [of my career], wanted to utilize my abilities as a batter by batting up the order, it helps team more if I bat at fourth or fifth. "I was struggling while bowling but I have tried to fix the technical issues and I'm hopeful there will be further improvement in my bowling. When I perform as a bowler, it benefits the team a lot." - DNA

Naqvi provides update about new Pakistan coach

PCB will knock at every door to ensure that the Champions Trophy is held successfully in Pakistan

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: Pakistan's cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi announced that the national team's new head will be roped in within the next ten days. With the T20 World Cup in the United States and Caribbean islands just a few months away, Mohsin admitted that it was a race against time for the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to bring in the head coach and finalise the rest of the coaching staff. It is understood that the PCB has been looking for a foreign coach after letting Mickey Arthur go in the wake of Pakistan's World Cup failure last year, But Naqvi said that the Board

will now bring in the "best possible" person, either foreign or local, to take charge of Pakistan's misfiring team ahead of the assignment in the Americas. "I assure you that we will appoint the head coach within the next one week or ten days," Naqvi told reporters here at the National Bank Stadium on the sidelines of the PSL final between Multan Sultans and Islamabad United. Naqvi refrained from disclosing any details about the new appointment stressing that leaked and false information forced Australia's Shane Watson to drop out of the race for the post of Pakistan coach. "Some false reports (about the appointment of

the coach) caused a lot of harm to Pakistan cricket," he said. Naqvi said that Pakistan's top cricketers will be attending a boot camp in the hills of Abbottabad from March 25 and he would want that they are accompanied by the new coach. The PCB chairman also spoke on a variety of other issues, stressing that Pakistan will

leave no stone unturned in its bid to host next year's ICC Champions Trophy despite all odds. But he avoided talking about the elephant in the room - India who have flatly refused to send their team to Pakistan in the past - saying that PCB will knock at every door to ensure that the Champions

Trophy is held successfully in Pakistan. Last year Pakistan were forced to adopt a so-called hybrid model to host the Asia Cup after India refused to play here. Most of the games including the final were moved to Sri Lanka as a few relatively insignificant games were held in Pakistan. There are fears that the Champions Trophy could suffer a similar fate but Naqvi said that he is not thinking about it. "We are just thinking about having the Champions Trophy in Pakistan," he stressed effectively saying that PCB will cross the bridge when it comes to it. Naqvi said he had a meeting with Jay Shah, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) kingpin in Dubai on the

sidelines of an ICC moot last week but refrained from giving any details of the interaction. He said that the PCB will carry out extensive development work at the three premier stadia of the country in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi in the lead up to the Champions Trophy. He also hinted at downsizing the PCB, which many fear is sinking under its own weight. When asked about whether he would carry out major changes in the PCB, Naqvi said: "There are 900 people (working for the PCB) to manage 11 players." Naqvi said that to make the PCB financially viable, he would need to carry out appropriate steps.



Imran acquitted in two cases

FROM PAGE 01

statements in the cases filed against the PTI founder," he further argued. The judicial magistrate asked the counsel if Khan had been acquitted in cases before, responding to which he said: "PTI founder had been acquitted in several cases even earlier." Following the arguments by the former premier's counsel, the court reserved the verdict, which was announced later. Khan, the only prime minister to be voted out of his office, is currently imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail as he serves several sentences in the Toshakana, un-Islamic marriage, and the cipher cases. A failed assassination attempt was also made on Khan's life in November 2022 when he was leading an anti-government rally in Wazirabad. He sustained bullet injuries in his leg. Earlier, Panjtoha also filed a petition in the court regarding the production of his client for the hearing. The court, however, rejected the plea citing security concerns. "Who will be responsible if something happens on the way while bringing PTI founder to court?" the judicial magistrate remarked. The lawyer argued that Khan has been appearing at the court on his own earlier too. "It is the government's job to provide security," he said, adding that PTI founder's legal team wanted to give their arguments in his presence. "Attendance on bail would have been necessary," the judicial magistrate maintained, rejecting the plea.

Security czar seeks review of...

FROM PAGE 01

official notification regarding the ban. Stressing the need for a charter on "do's and don'ts", the info minister said that there should be talks between the political parties that which "red lines" should not be crossed on the social media platform. He expressed his annoyance over allegation against women, abuses, misbehaviour and smear campaign against martyrs' sacrifices on the social media. Besides a complete suspension of internet on the polling day, netizens have been facing sporadic disruptions and hindrances in accessing the social media platform despite different courts' orders for the resumption and uninterrupted access to the masses, Geo News reported earlier. In addition to this, human rights activists and civil society organisations had also sought immediate resumption of X in a joint statement expressing profound concern over the increasing instances of internet shutdowns and social media platform blocking on March 13. Calling out the "arbitrary blocking of platforms", the rights activists and civil society organisations had launched a campaign #InternetKholo to draw the new incumbent government's attention towards the matter for restoration of X. "These actions not only infringe upon the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and access to information but also set a troubling precedent of throttling genuine political discourse including plurality of voices in the country," the statement had read. The statement had also criticised Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for continuous silence and failure to furnish any reasons for its actions and exceeded its mandate to block an entire internet platform.

Court Notice

عدالت عالیہ کوئٹہ میں مقیم جسٹس اعجاز الحسن نے ایک فیصلے کے تحت پاکستان کرکٹ بورڈ (PCB) کے خلاف ایک نوٹس جاری کیا ہے۔ نوٹس کے مطابق PCB نے ایک ایسوسی ایشن کے طور پر رجسٹریشن کی ضرورت نہیں سمجھی اور اس لیے اس کی قانونی حیثیت کو چیلنج کیا گیا ہے۔ نوٹس میں کہا گیا ہے کہ PCB کو اپنا رجسٹریشن کی ضرورت سمجھنی چاہیے اور اسے اس کے لیے تمام اقدامات اٹھانے چاہئیں۔

Briefs

Erdogan signals 'final' offensive against PKK terrorists

ANKARA : President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Türkiye would "complete unfinished business" with terrorist group PKK and its offshoot YPG in northern Iraq and Syria by this summer. "We will completely guarantee the security of our Iraqi border by this summer and will definitely complete our unfinished business in Syria," he said at an iftar meal, a dinner to mark the breaking of the daily fast for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, with a group of Turkish soldiers in the capital Ankara. "Our goal is to deliver a Türkiye completely free from the dark shadow of terrorism to our children, with a bright future and luck," Erdogan said his government provides all kinds of support to soldiers to pursue their challenging struggle against terrorist groups and will continue to do so. Noting that Türkiye has begun to see results from its strategy to dry up terrorism at its source within and beyond the borders, Erdogan highlighted success in using armed drones, domestically produced arms and ammunition and national weapons to target and eliminate terrorists.

"As a result of our operations, we will not allow these hired killer gangs, who are now gasping for breath, cornered and on the verge of extinction, to revive and become a burden on our nation again. Regardless of whose project it is, we will not allow the establishment of a terrorist state beyond our southern borders," he said.

With a nod to the current shortcomings of the global system, Erdogan mentioned past experiences that showed the limitations of international alliances and organizations in maintaining global peace. He emphasized the need for domestic and national defense industries to ensure Türkiye's self-sufficiency. It launched three successful counterterrorism operations since 2016 across its border in the region to prevent the formation of a terror corridor and enable the peaceful settlement of residents: Olive Branch in 2016, Euphrates Shield in 2016, Olive Branch in 2018 and Peace Spring in 2019 – operations that the U.S. had opposed.—APP

UK closer to passing Rwanda asylum law

LONDON : British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's contentious bill to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda moved closer to becoming law on Monday after his government rejected all the proposed changes from the upper house of parliament. Under the Rwanda plan, asylum seekers who arrive on England's southern coast in small, inflatable boats would be sent to Rwanda, but so far no one has been deported because of ongoing legal challenges. The House of Commons voted to overturn the 10 proposed amendments suggested by the unelected lawmakers in the House of Lords, including ones that sought to ensure the legislation was fully compliant with domestic and international law and to exempt people if they worked with British armed forces. The legislation, which attempts to end the legal blocks by declaring Rwanda a safe country and to disapply parts of Britain's human rights law, will now return to parliament's upper chamber for votes on Wednesday. If passed unamended, it could become law as early as this week. This would still mean it could be weeks, at the earliest, before any deportation flights leave for Rwanda. While the bill seeks to prevent British courts hearing arguments based on whether Rwanda is a safe country, anyone selected for removal may still be able to lodge individual legal appeals. Sunak has invested significant amounts of political capital in the Rwanda policy and hopes if deportation flights leave before an election expected later this year, it will help reverse fortunes of his Conservative Party which is heavily trailing in opinion polls.

UN chief warns against 'sequel to 'Oppenheimer'

Humanity cannot survive a sequel to Oppenheimer: Guterres

NEWS DESK

UNITED NATIONS, United States: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres invoked Oscar-winning film "Oppenheimer" on Monday as he warned that the world faced the highest risk of nuclear war in decades. At a Security Council session called by Japan, Guterres said that the biopic about the morally conflicted father of the atomic bomb "brought the harsh reality of nuclear doomsday to vivid life for millions around the world." "Humanity cannot survive a sequel to Oppenheimer," Guterres said. "We meet at a time when geopolitical tensions and mistrust have escalated the risk of nuclear warfare to its highest point in decades," he said. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons as he warns the West against its support for Ukraine, which Moscow invaded more than two years ago. Without naming Putin, Guterres said, "Nuclear saber-rattling must stop." "Threats to use nuclear weapons in any capacity are unacceptable," he said. Elsewhere in the world, tensions surrounding

nuclear-armed North Korea have continued to rise and Iran has been enriching uranium closer to the level needed if it decides to build an atom bomb. Israel, the Middle East's only nuclear-armed power albeit an undeclared one, has been at war since an October 7 attack by Hamas militants. Guterres called on the United States and Russia to resume negotiations, at a standstill since the Ukraine war, on a successor to the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty which expires in early 2026. He also called for progress on other initiatives including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 2021 but has little practical effect as no nuclear-weapons states are party to it. "Investments in the tools of war are outstripping investments in the tools of peace. Arms budgets are growing, while diplomacy and development budgets are shrinking," Guterres said. The United States, the only country to have used nuclear weapons in warfare, said it would work on one area with ally Japan, whose cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by

atomic weapons in 1945. The United States as well as France said they would join Japan in a coalition to push through the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, which would ban production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium, the key ingredients in nuclear weapons. Most nuclear states have already stopped production. Discussions on a treaty have been blocked by Pakistan, which believes it would fall behind rival India and which enjoys diplomatic support from China. "To forestall a potential arms race, we need to see an end to the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, and continue pursuing negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty," said the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield. Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, who led the meeting, vowed that Tokyo "will further increase international and political attention" toward the treaty. Kamikawa also called for work to ensure that nuclear weapons are not placed in space. The United States said last month that Russia was developing a system to send nuclear weapons to space,

EU sanctions on Israeli settlers 'important but belated'

MADRID: The European Union's agreement to impose sanctions on Israeli settlers involved in violent acts against Palestinians is "an important but belated decision," Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares. "We would have liked to make the decision to impose individual sanctions on illegal Jewish settlers a month ago, but consensus could not be reached at that time. Now consensus has been reached at the table. Slowly but surely, other countries are coming closer to our position," said Albares, speaking at a press conference following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels. Albares emphasized the vital need for food aid in the Gaza Strip, where Israel is continuing its attacks, saying Spain will continue its aerial aid deliveries but stressed the necessity of allowing aid to be delivered by land. "We renew our call for an immediate cease-fire for the delivery of humanitarian aid, the unconditional release of hostages and unimpeded delivery of aid," he said. He also proposed inviting his Israeli counterpart Israel Katz to the next EU foreign ministers' meeting, noting that other EU countries also view this positively. "There should be a meeting with Israel for an exchange of views on humanitarian aid. The partnership council we have allows for this, and it could be a very good opportunity to exchange views with Israel. We insist on the possibility of achieving peace through dialogue," he added.—DNA

placing nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction in outer space," Kamikawa said. "Even now, Japan firmly believes that outer space must remain a domain free of nuclear weapons," she said.

Kosovo accepts US proposal on Serbian dinar

Representatives of Serbia and Kosovo to meet in Brussels as part of dialogue process to discuss Kosovo's ban on using Serbian currency

BELGRADE : Kosovo's President Vjosa Osmani announced that her country has accepted part of a US proposal on the use of the Serbian dinar in the country. On Feb. 1, Kosovo adopted the euro for cash payment transactions despite concerns expressed by ethnic Serbs living in the country's north. Osmani told the media during a visit to the municipality of Lipljan that there is agreement on part of the proposal that was presented by the US Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, Gabriel Escobar, when he was in Kosovo last week. However, there is no agreement on the second part, she said. "It is very positive that the international community, led by the US, agrees that there will no longer be dinars in circulation in Kosovo, and with their help, we have achieved that from now on all remittances and financial aid coming from Serbia will be in euros and not in dinars," said Osmani. She added that the dinar issue should be resolved as soon as possible because it creates a big problem for Kosovo. According to Osmani, Kosovo is considering ways to guarantee that aid sent from Serbia to the Serbian community in Kosovo does not fall into the wrong hands. "Now the second part, for which there is still no agreement, but I am hopeful that we will reach that point very soon, is how we should make sure that any financial aid that comes from Serbia does not go into the hands of people who have abused, that they were corrupt and took the money maybe on behalf of the citizens, but they used it for corruption and organized crime, and for that part, a plan is still being drawn up that will involve the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, including law enforcement ones," said Osmani. The country's central bank announced the decision on Jan. 18, saying currencies other than the euro can only be used in Kosovo for physical safekeeping or bank accounts. The decision triggered outrage because ethnic Serb communities in Kosovo had been using the dinar, the official currency of neighboring Serbia, at both state and commercial institutions. Many local Serbs have an attachment or even allegiance to Serbia. The parties on Tuesday will meet in Brussels as part of the dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina. Escobar meanwhile expressed hope that the Kosovo government would be flexible at the meeting in Brussels. He said the US has problems communicating with Prime Minister Albin Kurti.

He noted that this problem is not only faced by the US but also by other partners such as the European Union, NATO, the UK, Albania and North Macedonia. Western countries including the US, France, Italy, Germany and the UK have urged Kosovo to halt the implementation of the currency regulation.—Agencies

EU, Philippines resume stalled trade negotiations

BRUSSELS: The European Union and the Philippines said that they would resume negotiations on a free trade agreement as the EU seeks to tap into Asia's faster economic growth and gain access to critical raw materials. Free trade negotiations stalled in 2017 over EU concerns about the human rights record of then Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte, who was succeeded in June 2022 by Ferdinand Marcos Jr. EU trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis said the bloc welcomed the "positive change of direction" taken by the Philippines' new administration, while encouraging further progress on human and labor rights. The European Union is the Philippines' fourth largest trade partner. Trade in goods was worth 18.4 billion euros (\$20 billion) in 2022 and 4.7 billion euros (\$5.1 billion) in services in 2021. A trade deal could increase trade by 6 billion euros, Dombrovskis said. The EU has targeted agreements with southeast Asian countries and has accords with Singapore and Vietnam and is in negotiations with Indonesia and Thailand. The EU is eyeing Filipino raw materials such as nickel, copper and chromite that it needs for its green transition and for which it is currently heavily reliant on China. Philippine Commissioner for Trade Alfredo Pascual said his country wanted to secure capital and know-how from EU companies to engage in more domestic processing. His country already benefits from the EU's tariff-free GSP+ system for developing countries, but aims to rise to upper middle-class income status, when GSP+ would no longer apply.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A street vendor selling colorful lamps in the Federal Capital. —ONLINE

Kim oversees 'super-large' rocket launcher drills

Pyongyang has broken with much of its inter-Korean policy in recent years and ramped up weapons testing

NEWS DESK

PYONGYANG : North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has overseen live-fire drills involving "newly-equipped super-large" multiple rocket launchers, a day after South Korea and Japan reported the country's launch of several short-range ballistic missiles, its first such test in about two months. The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the drills were aimed at testing the "real war capabilities" of 600-millimetre (23 inches) multiple rocket launchers. The exercises also involved simulating an aerial explosion of a shell at a predetermined altitude above the target, KCNA said.

"They fully demonstrated their excellent crack-shot artillery marksmanship and prompt and thorough combat readiness," KCNA said. Kim, who has overseen multiple tests in recent years as he pursues his plan to modernise North Korea's military, said the rocket launchers would provide the "core central striking means" in war preparations. "The destructive offensive means possessed by our army should more thoroughly fulfil their missions to block and suppress the possibility of war with the constant perfect preparedness to collapse the capital of the enemy and the structure of its military forces," Kim told the troops, according to KCNA. Seoul's military announced on

Monday it had detected the launch of "multiple short-range ballistic missiles" from North Korea. The super-large multiple rocket launcher, referred to as KN-25 by Seoul and Washington, is a short-range ballistic missile, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency. Kim Jong Un punches the air as he watches a screen. A military officer with him appears to be clapping his hands in excitement. Both are smiling. Kim watched the proceedings on a screen and appeared delighted with the outcome [KCNA via KNS and AFP] North Korea is banned from testing ballistic missiles under long-running sanctions over its nuclear weapons programme. "The Kim regime's one-upman-

ship aims to show strength to its domestic audience, suggest costs on the Korean Peninsula for Seoul's international security cooperation, and warn Washington against increasing pressure on Pyongyang," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, wrote in emailed comments about the latest tests. Images published in state media showed Kim, dressed in a black leather jacket, watching the rocket launcher drills with his generals. In one picture, he looked like he was cheering as he celebrated the tests' apparent success by punching the air with his fist. Pyongyang has broken with much of its inter-Korean policy in recent years, scrapping a military pact

with its neighbour and declaring South Korea a hostile enemy state. It has also ramped up weapons testing, launched a submarine and put its first spy satellite into space. Kim has also stepped up his rhetoric, talking about war preparations and readiness. When asked about the threat posed by the multiple rocket launchers, Seoul's defence minister, Shin Won-sik, said that if Pyongyang fires a large number of conventional missiles against South Korea, it would "constitute a war" and prompt strong retaliatory attacks. Monday's ballistic missile test was North Korea's second this year after Pyongyang launched one it said was tipped with a manoeuvrable hypersonic warhead on January 14.

35 percent increase in South Sudan: report

JUBA: The number of people affected by violence in South Sudan surged by 35 percent in the last three months of 2023, the United Nations reported.

The UN Mission in South Sudan, or UNMISS, documented 233 incidents of violence affecting 862 people. Of that, 406 were killed, 293 were injured, 100 were abducted and 63 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence, it said in a report released Monday. It was a 35 percent increase in the number of victims reported from the previous quarter. South Sudan is to hold elections later this year, the first since a 2018 peace deal between President Salva Kiir and his former rival, Riek Machar, that ended a five-year conflict that killed hundreds of thousands. Violence caused by ethnic tensions and disputes over resources such as land has increased in various parts of the country in recent months, particularly in the oil-rich region of Abyei. The head of UNMISS, Nicholas Haysom, said it is "doing all it can to prevent violence and build peace in the affected areas" and urged the South Sudan government to intervene and "resolve underlying grievances and build peace." It said it has conducted at least 10,000 peacekeeping patrols by land, air and boat over the past year.—APP

Musk defends ketamine use for mental health

WASHINGTON : Elon Musk has defended taking prescribed ketamine to treat his "negative frame of mind," suggesting that his use of the drug is good for Tesla's investors. In an at-times tense interview with former CNN host Don Lemon, Musk said that he finds the anaesthetic helpful when he is suffering from a "negative chemical state." Asked if he thought he had ever abused the drug, Musk, who owns X and runs Tesla and SpaceX, said he did not think so and that he only takes a "small amount" once every other week or so. "If you've used too much ketamine, you can't really get work done and I have a lot of work – I am typically putting in 16-hour days. That's normal for me," Musk said. "I can't really get worked because I can't get my work done," he added. Musk also dismissed the suggestion that his drug use could affect his government contracts or the perceptions of investors on Wall Street. "Tesla is worth about as much as the rest of the car industry combined, from nothing. That's pretty good. We had the best-selling car on Earth last year. So from investors' standpoint, if there is something I'm taking, I should keep taking it," he said. Musk added that he had discussed his use of ketamine, which can be prescribed by doctors to treat depression and pain, in the past because he thought it could help other people. The 52-year-old billionaire also discussed meeting former United States President Donald Trump in March, which he said came about after an impromptu visit by the Republican candidate to his friend's house.—APP

AstraZeneca to buy Fusion Pharma in \$2 billion

SYDNEY : AstraZeneca said on Tuesday it will buy clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company Fusion Pharmaceuticals Inc for about \$2 billion in cash to boost its oncology portfolio. The drugmaker will pay \$21 per Fusion share, a premium of more than 97% to the US-listed company's closing price on Monday. AstraZeneca will also pay a non-transferable contingent value right of \$3 per share, taking the combined transaction value to about \$2.4 billion. London stock rises as AstraZeneca drugs gets FDA nod-Fusion, which is developing "next-generation" radioconjugates (RCs) to treat cancer, will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of AstraZeneca, with operations continuing in Canada and the US, it said. RCs have emerged as a promising modality in cancer treatment over recent years, AstraZeneca said.—APP

Briefs

Pak ranked 2nd most polluted country in 2023

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Like many South Asian countries Pakistan has been facing an alarming surge in pollution indicators with the country having one of the worst air quality in the world. As per IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, Pakistan maintained the second worst air quality in the year 2023 with an average PM2.5 concentration of 73.7 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³). IQAir measures air quality levels based on the concentration of lung-damaging airborne particles known as PM2.5 which shouldn't exceed 5µg/m³ Health Organisation (WHO). As per the report, the PM2.5 levels in Islamabad rose to their highest ever levels recorded in the city's seven-year history to 42.4µg/m³. Meanwhile, Lahore, which was recorded as the world's most polluted city in the world in March 2023, has also witnessed an increase of over 20µg/m³ in its PM2.5 levels which have reached 99.5µg/m³ with the city's monthly average of PM2.5 level reaching 251µg/m³ in November last year leading to the courts directing the government to impose a "smog emergency" in the provincial capital. "Every city in Pakistan included in the 2023 report measured concentrations above 30µg/m³, at least six times the recommended WHO annual PM2.5 guideline," the report said.

Hong Kong passes tough security law

HONG KONG: Hong Kong has passed a tough security law which authorities say is necessary for stability, but which critics fear will further erode civil liberties. Article 23 targets new offences like external interference and insurrection, and penalties include life sentences. It was fast-tracked through its final stage by the city's pro-Beijing parliament in less than two weeks. Article 23 expands on a controversial national security law (NSL) earlier imposed by China. That law already criminalises secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces in Hong Kong. But Hong Kong's leader John Lee has said Article 23 is also necessary to guard against "potential sabotage and undercurrents that try to create troubles", particularly "ideas of an independent Hong Kong". He hailed its passing as "a historic moment Hong Kong people have been waiting for over 26 years". China's Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang earlier said swift enactment of the new legislation would protect "core national interests" and allow Hong Kong to focus on economic development. - Agencies

PPP issues tickets from Balochistan

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on Tuesday issued party tickets to candidates from Balochistan for the forthcoming Senate elections. Sardar Umar Khan Gorgage, Mir Changez Khan Jamali, Mir Tariq Masoori, Ijaz Baloch, and Kiran Baloch had been issued party tickets. Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, among others, distributed the party tickets to the candidates. Few days back, the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) sought applications from candidates for the Senate elections. PPP leader Nayyar Bukhari said: "The applications can be submitted until March 14." Bukhari had asked the candidates willing to contest the elections to send their applications to Zardari House in Islamabad and Bilawal House in Karachi." Bukhari said: "The applications should be sent under the name of the PPPP." A bank draft of Rs 100,000 should be attached in the name of the PPPP with the application.

Pakistan greatly values its ties with Bahrain: President

President said that Pakistan and Bahrain enjoyed excellent relations, which needed to be further strengthened in the areas of mutual interest

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan attaches great value to its fraternal ties with Bahrain which are based on shared religion, culture and history. He highlighted the need to translate the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Bahrain into a mutually rewarding economic partnership. The President expressed these views while talking to the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain, General Sheikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. The Ambassa-



dor of Bahrain to Pakistan, Mr Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Abdul Qader, was also present during the meeting. Welcoming the visiting Commander, the President said that Pakistan and Bahrain enjoyed excellent relations, which needed to be further strengthened in the areas of mutual interest. He stated that it was his firm belief that Pakistan would grow stronger as it had immense potential to become a prosperous country. During the meeting, the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain felicitated the President on assuming the office for the second time and expressed the hope that Pakistan would move forward under his leadership. He said that both countries enjoyed excellent defence cooperation and expressed his gratitude for the supportive role of the Armed Forces of Pakistan. He also reiterated Bahrain's continued support to Pakistan. General Sheikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa extended an invitation to the President to visit Bahrain. The President thanked the Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain for his visit and felicitations.

Russia claims advances in east as Kyiv awaits Western support

MOSCOW: Russia said Tuesday that its troops had made gains in eastern Ukraine, building on recent advances against Ukrainian forces in critical need of Western aid. Facing a difficult situation on the front lines, Kyiv has responded with an increasing number of incursions and attacks on Russian territory bordering Ukraine. Some of these incursions were carried out by Russians who volunteered to fight in pro-Ukrainian units, which Putin has called to "punish." "On the Avdiivka front, units of the 'Center' grouping of troops liberated the village of Orlivka," the Russian defence ministry said. It is the latest in a string of gains for Moscow, which has built on the capture of Avdiivka a month ago. Avdiivka's seizure had forced Ukrainian troops to withdraw to defensive lines along Tonenke, Berdychi and Orlivka. The Ukrainian army has not addressed the potential seizure of Orlivka. But Kyiv has acknowledged a difficult situation on the battlefield and urged the West to keep up and deliver on its promises of support. European deliveries have fallen behind, and its industrial capacities remain limited. Kyiv has urged the US Congress to unblock a \$60 billion aid package, which has been stalled due to political infighting. President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday told US Senator Lindsey Graham that it was "critically important" for the US to make a swift decision. "We are at a critical moment for the future of the armed conflict," Graham told reporters after his meeting with Zelensky. Kyiv has intensified its attacks on Russian territory, with shelling and incursions in the regions of Belgorod and Kursk. In the past week these attacks killed 16 people and wounded nearly a hundred in the region of Belgorod, its governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Speaking at a meeting of ruling party members, he also

announced the evacuation of thousands of children from areas at risk. "We are evacuating a large number of villages, and now we are planning to evacuate about 9,000 children because of the shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces," Gladkov said. The surge in strikes took place ahead of elections that saw Putin win a predictable fifth term as president, after running against no real opposition. "I am proud that the residents of the region did not succumb to the difficult situation and that many more people came to the polling stations than ever before," Gladkov said. Putin addressed the border assaults, which have marred his re-election week, in a meeting with his FSB security services. He claimed Russian troops inflicted "heavy losses" on units that he said were made up of regular Ukrainian soldiers, foreign mercenaries and pro-Ukrainian Russian fighters. "About these traitors... we must not forget who they are, we must identify them by name. We will punish them without statute of limitations, wherever they are," Putin said, calling them "scum." Ukraine-based militias — made up of Russian citizens who oppose Moscow's offensive and have taken up arms for Kyiv — have claimed to be behind previous incursions into Russian territory. One of them is the Russian Volunteer Corps. Its head of staff, identified as Aleksandr, gave an interview on Ukrainian television, denying heavy losses. "There are losses, but absolutely not of the scale claimed by Putin or the defense ministry," he said. On the naval front, Ukrainian forces claim to have destroyed more than two dozen Russian ships since the conflict began in February 2022, including a military patrol boat earlier this month. - Agencies

Yemen slams UNSC for serving US interests

FOREIGN DESK

SANA'A: Yemen has denounced the United Nations Security Council's condemnation of its pro-Palestine maritime operations in the Red Sea, saying that the world body is "dangerously" serving US interests and supporting the genocide in Gaza. In a statement on Tuesday, the Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said the UN Security Council condemns Yemen's Red Sea operation while it "shamefully" fell short of condemning Israel's "daily massacres" against women and children in Gaza since the war began on October 7. "The UN Security Council's statement concerning Yemeni operations in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea reflects dangerous subservience to criminal US interests, and at the same time confirms support for the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza," the statement read. It came after the UN Security Council on Monday condemned "in the strongest terms" Yemeni strikes against Israeli-linked ships as well as US and British assets in the Red Sea and demanded that all such attacks "cease immediately." Council members reiterated the importance of the "full implementation of Resolution 2216" and subsequent res-

olutions that call for an end to the violence in Yemen and to all unilateral actions that threaten the political process in the country. "It would have been better for the UN Security Council to stop America from supplying weapons to the usurping Zionist entity, because of which thousands of massacres have been committed against people of Gaza," the Yemeni statement said. It reiterated that Yemen's maritime operations in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea are closely connected to unfolding developments in Gaza, conducted for humanitarian reasons, and enjoy solid support of the Yemeni nation and all freedom-loving people worldwide. "The operations of the Yemeni Armed Forces will continue, and will not stop unless the criminal Zionist aggression against Gaza stops and the siege on the territory is lifted," the statement concluded. Yemen has been conducting missile and drone operations against Israeli vessels, those heading for the occupied territories' ports, and the British and American warships that have been dispatched to the Red Sea to confront the Yemeni strikes. The Red Sea operations began when Israel launched its devastating war on Gaza after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm into the occupied territories. The strikes have been seeking to pressure the Israeli regime into stopping its war against Gaza which has so far killed more than 31,600 Palestinians. The maritime attacks have forced some of the world's biggest shipping and oil companies to suspend transit through one of the world's most important maritime trade routes. Tankers are instead adding thousands of miles to international shipping routes by sailing around the continent of Africa rather than going through the Suez Canal.

Defence Minister engages with naval chief on maritime challenges



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif visited Naval Headquarters Islamabad and called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf. Upon arrival at Naval Headquarters, the visiting dignitary was received by Chief of the Naval Staff and was presented guard of honour. The Defence Minister was also introduced to the Principal Staff Officers at Naval Headquarters. During the meeting, matters pertaining to Regional Maritime Security milieu and operational readiness of Pakistan Navy were discussed. Naval Chief apprised the Defence Minister on roles, capabilities and future modernization plans of Pakistan Navy. He briefed the

minister on recent acquisitions of state-of-the-art platforms and equipment to ensure an invincible seaward defence of the country. Later on a detailed briefing was presented by Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) on the prevailing maritime environment, challenges being faced by Pakistan Navy and response by Pakistan Navy to meet the challenges. At the end of the briefing recommendations were given to the Defence Minister for capability enhancement of PN and promotion of maritime sector (Blue Economy) for revival of the national economy. The Defence Minister appreciated the importance of Pakistan Navy to safeguard maritime interest of the country. The Defence Minister assured that his Ministry will make all efforts to meet requirements of Pakistan Navy despite the prevailing economic constraints.

Asif deems PTI 'unnamed'

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Federal Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Tuesday deemed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) "unnamed." Speaking to a private news channel, Asif said: "The PTI will continue to cause uproar in the assembly. Our job is to do legislation, which we will continue to do." "The PTI is handed over to the lawyers. Some of them [lawyers] became senators, and others became members of the National Assembly," Asif said. Few days back, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Khurram Dastgir said that his party was emerging victorious in the vote recount. Hitting out at the opponents, Dastgir said: "Victory is acceptable to them [political opponents] from the constituency from where they win. But from the constituency where they lose, they cause an uproar of rigging".

Tunisia-Libya border crossing closed

DNA

TUNIS: Tunisia and Libya have closed a major border crossing at Ras Jdir due to armed clashes, Tunisian state TV and Libyan authorities said. Libya's interior ministry said in a statement on Tuesday that "outlaws" had attacked the border, which sees a large flow of Libyans often going to Tunisia for medical treatment and trucks with goods coming in the opposite direction. "This action carried out by these outlaw groups will not be tolerated, and legal measures and the most severe penalties will be taken against those involved," the Tripoli-based ministry said, without giving further details. Libya has had little peace since a 2011 uprising and is split between eastern and western factions, with rival administrations governing each area. Unverified footage on social media showed a burning vehicle at Ras Jdir and people running, with the sound of gunfire. The ministry said on Sunday it had deployed security forces at the border to combat smuggling and insecurity. Tunisia's Tataouine Radio said late on Monday that Tunisia closed the crossing for the safety of citizens going to Libya.

Gaza hunger warnings grow as hopes build for ceasefire

Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the latest negotiations but it was "too early to announce any successes"

NEWS DESK

GAZA STRIP: Efforts to hammer out a temporary truce in Gaza intensified Tuesday after months of war that have devastated the Palestinian territory and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine. While a UN-backed assessment said 300,000 people in Gaza's north would face famine by May without a surge of aid, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said everyone in Gaza was now in need of humanitarian aid. UN human rights chief Volker Turk blamed Israel for the hunger crisis, telling reporters in Geneva they were blocking aid and conducting the conflict in a way that "may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war." Israeli troops on Tuesday pressed an assault on Gaza's biggest hospital, which they allege is being used for military purposes.

US-Philippines alliance is 'ironclad': Blinken

WEB DESK

MANILA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has assured the Philippines, a key Washington ally, of US support amid heightened tensions with China. He reiterated America's "ironclad" security commitments to the Philippines during a visit to Manila on Tuesday. Friction has grown between Manila and Beijing in recent months over competing claims in the South China Sea. "These waterways are critical to the Philippines, to its security, to its economy," Mr Blinken said. "They're also critical to the interests of the region, the United States and the world," he added, speaking at a joint press conference with Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo. "That's why we stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defence commitments, including under the mutual defence treaty." Manila and Washington are "committed to elevating" their alliance further, Mr Manalo said.

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