



Islamabad POST

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President Asif Ali Zardari for expanding Pak-Japan cooperation

Detailed News On Page-08

No amnesty for terrorists, says Mohsin Naqvi

Detailed News On Page-08



Michael Clarke concerned about Imad absence

Detailed News On Page-06



'Complete falsehood'

Donald Lu rubbishes cipher theory

Says Pakistan, Iran gas pipeline project not feasible; admits Pakistan facing serious threats from terrorists; advocates intense economic engagement with Pakistan

NEWS DESK / DNA

WASHINGTON: US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu on Wednesday termed the allegations against him – which formed the crux of the 'cablegate' cipher controversy – by former prime minister Imran Khan as a "conspiracy theory, lie and complete falsehood". Lu is the diplomat whose supposed warning to former Pakistan Ambassador to the US Asad Majeed was the subject of a cipher sent by the envoy to Islamabad. It was the same document that the PTI founder used to allege a US conspiracy to oust his government in 2022. Imran is currently on trial for mishandling the same confidential document. This matter is often raised during US State Department news briefings by journalists from both Pakistan and the US. The department consistently refutes these allegations as baseless. Testifying today before a sub-committee of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, at a hearing titled 'Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan Relationship', Lu was questioned about the allegations and his assessment of them. In response, Lu said: "I want to be very clear on this point. These allegations – this conspiracy theory – is a lie. It is a complete falsehood. I have reviewed the press reporting related to this, what is called

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Polls 'rigging'

Imran moves SC to form judicial commission

He also requests suspension of federal and Punjab governments

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan Wednesday moved the Supreme Court, requesting the formation of a judicial commission to "inquire, audit and examine" the manner and process of the February 8 general elections held in the country. The politician, who remains incarcerated at the Adiala jail

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RIYADH: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) meets Prince Mohammad bin Salman during his visit to Saudi Arabia. – DNA

President approves dismissal of Mazahar Naqvi

In a surprise move in January, Justice (ret'd) Naqvi had stepped down from his post following misconduct allegations

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday greenlit the dismissal of Supreme Court (SC) Justice (ret'd) Mazahar Ali Naqvi, who was found guilty of misconduct by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) earlier this month. The Ministry of Law and Justice issued an official notification for the judge's removal. "Consequent upon recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council of Pakistan under Article 209(6) read with Article 48(1) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 and

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Unity in Action

COAS, MBS align on key regional issues

HRH Prince Mohammad Bin Salman highlighted that KSA and Pakistan have historic brotherly and strong relations, and both countries have always stood up for each other

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) visited Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on an official visit. During the visit, COAS called on Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, The Crown Prince and Prime Minister of KSA; HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Defence Minister of KSA; His Excellency General Fayyadh Bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of General Staff (CGS) Saudi Armed Forces and Engineer Talal Abdullah Al Otaibi, Assistant Minister of Defence of KSA and other senior military leadership. Wide ranging issues of mutual interest, including regional peace and security, bilateral defence & security cooperation came under discussion. HRH Prince Mohammad Bin Salman highlighted that KSA and Pakistan have historic brotherly and strong relations, and both countries have

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Final review of SBA with IMF concludes

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday reached a staff-level agreement on the second and final review of the 9-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) for the final tranche of US\$1.1 billion in April. "Upon the approval of the IMF's Executive Board, Pakistan will have access to SDR 828 million (around US\$1.1 billion)," IMF team leader Nathan Porter said in a press statement on the conclusion of a six-day talks between Pakistan and the Fund's officials. An IMF team, led by Nathan Porter, visited Islamabad from March 14-19, 2024, to hold discussions

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Punjab to provide 20,000 bikes to students

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: "The provision of bikes to students is a revolutionary scheme under Chief Minister's Youth Initiative, said Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, who witnessed the signing of an MoU between Transport Department and Bank of Punjab for the provision of 20,000 bikes to students on easy monthly instalments. Secretary Transport Ahmed Javed Qazi and President Bank of Punjab Zafar Masood signed the MOU. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said, "19,000 petrol and 1,000 electric bikes will be given to the students free of interest in monthly instalments." She explained, "The monthly installment of petrol bike will be Rs 5000, whereas it would be less than Rs 10,000 for the e-bike."

PTI spox blasts Naqvi Urges instant removal of ban on 'X'

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PTI Spokesperson came down hard on the fake Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi for his statement pertaining to the suspension of social media platform 'X', demanding an immediate restoration of the social media platform. PTI Spokesperson urged instant removal of the unjustified and unconstitutional ban on the social media platform 'X' and said that it was the old habit of Sharifs and Zardari mafia to use traditional and social media for their negative propaganda under the guise of media legislations. He said that the fake government of form-47s and its bogus ministers' non-serious statements regarding the closure of social media platform 'X' were making mockery of the so-called democratic system.

Targeting CPEC

Gwadar: '8 BLA terrorists' killed after failed attack

CPEC is the future of Pakistan and we will not allow any harm to it under any circumstances, the CM added

STAFF REPORT

GWADAR: After a group of gunmen stormed the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) Complex on Wednesday, security forces acted swiftly and foiled the fierce attack and killed "eight terrorists" belonging to outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Geo News reported citing sources. Eyewitnesses said that they heard multiple explosions after firing in the complex which houses passport office, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) office, and other government offices. An explosion was also heard before the firing, police officials told the media, adding that the entire area was cordoned off by security personnel. A clearance operation is underway at the facility in the security personnel's presence. Meanwhile, Makran Division commissioner confirmed the incident and number of slain terrorists. Reacting to the development, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah condemned

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Cross-border terrorism will no longer be acceptable: PM

PM says Pakistan wants to live peacefully with neighbouring states

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday stressed that Pakistan will no longer tolerate cross-border terrorism following the Mir Ali attack in North Waziristan which martyred seven army soldiers. "If the soil of a neighbouring country is used for terrorism then it will not

Continued on Page 06

Two terrorists neutralized in operation

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The security forces on Wednesday killed two terrorists and injured two others after an intelligence based operation in North Waziristan District of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the military's media wing said in a statement. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), an intense fire exchange took place between the army troops and the terrorists during the conduct of the operation.

Continued on Page 06

PM Shehbaz underscores need to enhance bilateral ties with UK

The Prime Minister highlighted the governments priorities, in particular the importance of navigating through the economic challenges facing the country



ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received the British High Commissioner, H.E. Jane Marriott, for a courtesy call at the Prime Ministers House. The Prime Minister thanked British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Foreign Secretary Lord David Cameron for their messages of felicitations on his re-election and said he looked forward to working closely with the UK leadership to further strengthen relations between the two countries. The Prime Minister said Pakistan and the UK had longstanding,

Continued on Page 06

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Punjab CM says

Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar” project to fulfill basic need of low-income group

The Chief Minister was briefed that the Board of Revenue has identified 117 sites across Punjab, which will be inspected and finalised immediately

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: “Home is the basic need of every family, ‘Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar’ project will fulfill this very basic need,” said Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while chairing a review meeting on the construction of 100,000 houses for the low-income people. She directed to urgently complete the site selection process in 6 major cities of Punjab for the purpose. These cities include

Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Sargodha and Rawalpindi. Chief Minister said, “Select sites keeping in view all the basic amenities. If spaces available, construct these houses in city centres, otherwise choose the nearest places to ensure public convenience.” She added, “Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar Project would be a landmark success, where people would get all the facilities to live happily.” The Chief Minister was briefed that the Board of Revenue has identified

117 sites across Punjab, which will be inspected and finalised immediately. Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Former Senator Perwaiz Rashid, Provincial Information Minister Azma Zahid Bukhari, Chief Secretary, SMBR, Chairman P&D, Secretaries Housing, Finance, Commissioner Lahore, DG LDA, DG PHATA, Project Director Punjab Affordable Housing Programme and other senior officers concerned attended the meeting.

Minister promises targeted steps for University issues

DNA

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi has said that result-oriented steps would be taken to address problems confronted by universities. He was talking to a delegation of the Teaching Staff Association in the Civil Secretariat here on Wednesday. The delegation apprised the minister about the problems of universities urging him to take steps for resolving the issues.

IG Punjab prioritizes police force health welfare

LAHORE: Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar is committed and actively busy for the health welfare of police employees and their families and in this regard, an MOU has been concluded between the Punjab Police and a well-known private health welfare organization (Lahore Lines Welfare Organization). In a ceremony at the Central Police Office, IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar and Chairman of the private organization Muhammad Danish Siddique signed the MOU. Under the MOU, special concessions will be provided to police employees in the treatment of eye, dental and other diseases. Spokesperson of

Punjab Police said that under the MOU, the families of police martyrs will be given cornea transplant and phaco cataract surgery free of charge in hospitals of private organizations. While the cornea donation will be provided on priority basis by private organization for the treatment of the serving employees, the surgical expenses will be borne by the police department. The spokesperson of Punjab Police further said that 50% discount will be provided to the families of police martyrs in any surgical procedure of eyes and Dental treatment, similarly, 25% discount will be provided to in-service employees on eye and dental surgical procedures. Both

the organizations will take joint measures in connection with the special awareness campaign and community education regarding the treatment of eye diseases. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar thanked the private organization for providing support in health welfare of police employees. Chairman of the private organization Muhammad Danish Siddique said that high quality corneas imported from Sri Lanka will be used for the treatment of police personnel. Additional IG Welfare Riaz Nazir Gara, DIG Welfare Ghazi Muhammad Salah ud din, AIG Welfare Amara Shirazi, DSP Welfare Nadeem Siddique and other officers were present on the spot. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Major General (Retd) Hafeezur Rehman called on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja.—DNA

Dr. Maqbool urges provinces to harmonize food business rules

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has called upon the provincial governments to harmonize rules related to food businesses. In separate letters addressed to each chief ministers of Punjab, KPK, Sindh and Balochistan, Dr. Siddiqui highlighted the need for uniformity to ensure food safety and quality nationwide. The minister said the existing disparities in regulations and enforcement mechanisms among provinces and federal agencies have resulted in inconsistencies, inefficiencies and potential gaps in ensuring the safety and quality of food products available to consumers nationwide and for import and export purposes.

Capital calling: IMF backs uniformed Tobacco tax

IMF has asked Pakistan to impose uniform excise rates on both local and foreign cigarette manufacturers

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Capital Calling, an Islamabad-based think tank, has welcomed the reports that International Monetary Fund (IMF) has asked Pakistan to impose uniform excise rates on both local and foreign cigarette manufacturers. It also appreciated former health minister Dr Nadeem Jan calling for a 50 percent increase in taxes on cigarettes to make them harder to access for the masses. The think tank has endorsed the minister's statement rubbing the propaganda that rise in taxes will lead to smuggling of cigarettes, resulting in a loss to the national exchequer. According to estimates, cigarette prices are the cheapest in Pakistan compared to other regional countries, it said. The reports on IMF recommendations mention that it has suggested applying a consistent excise rate

in one slab to all domestically produced cigarettes, regardless of the manufacturer's origin. It means local and multinational manufacturers will face no discrimination in taxes. Currently cigarettes are taxed in two tiers, which is resulting low collection of taxation from the cigarette industry. Furthermore, the IMF has also proposed subjecting e-cigarettes to taxation similar to traditional tobacco products, citing comparable health impacts. This recommendation is strictly in line with the guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO), said Dr Hassan Shehzad, from International Islamic University. He said due to the two-tier system, multinational companies manage to place their cigarettes in lower tier which results into reduction in cigarette prices. The objective of these recommendations is to ensure equitable taxation across cigarette products, regardless of their source. The think tank stated that it

is estimated that the government has faced Rs567 billion loss due to influence of the international tobacco companies. It said there is dearth of research to measure the damage that smoking has done to the society. The survey conducted to assess this damage are highly tilted towards economics, hence offering no solutions as to how to bring down smoking in the society. Similarly, there is no concrete media strategy to counter smoking and its psychological impacts. It said majority of smokers are in their thirties and there is a need to think about this age group formulating policies. The institutions formed to counter smoking suffer from lack of coordination and vision; hence, fast losing their relevance. Capital Calling has demanded a reset of the mechanism to counter tobacco and fully implementation of IMF recommendations for uniformed tax on tobacco products, thinking of it as a right step to take.

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حکومت پنجاب



National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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

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



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Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
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MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of the legal reforms committee in Islamabad.—DNA

Govt to introduce online land record service: Ch Salik

Overseas Pakistanis are Ambassadors of Pakistan, there problems should be resolved on priority basis: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain has said that the Government is all set to launch an online land record service for overseas Pakistanis to mitigate their difficulties with regard to transfer of properties and attract foreign inflows. He said this while talking to a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Com-

merce and Industry headed by its President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari. Former President ICCI, UBG and Secretary General FPC CI Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Chairman Founder Group Khalid Iqbal Malik and former executive member ICCI Saeed Khan, were included in the delegation. Initially, the delegation extended heartfelt congratulations to Chaudhry Salik Hussain on his appointment as Federal Minister. The Minister added that his Ministry has started work on

the project with NADRA and other relevant institutions and that DHA will be onboard initially. He elaborated that the services may be offered through the offices of community welfare attaches in foreign missions of Pakistan in countries with substantially large Pakistani diaspora. He went on to say that Business Community will be given representation in different Boards in the Ministry. President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that over-

seas Pakistanis are valuable asset of Pakistan and Ambassadors of the country, therefore their difficulties should be resolved on priority basis. He added that overseas Pakistanis have always played a vital role in the development of the country which is highly praiseworthy, therefore paramount attention should be paid to protect them from any kind of exploitation at home or abroad. At this stage he made some significant proposals for enhancing foreign remittances and imparting

necessary training to the workforce in various trades so that they can get attractive salary packages. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari added that Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be ready to lend its support to the Ministry in enhancing skill development of the workforce in different trades. Appreciating the suggestions of the ICCI President said that his Ministry will try its level best to enhance the standard of vocational training and certification in consultation with all the stakeholders.

Ramazan Kitchen' provides cooked food

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Ramadan Open Kitchen of Muslim Hands Pakistan, a non-profit organization, is fully active in providing hygienic cooked food to over 250 poor and deserving families daily in the surroundings of the federal capital. In the middle and poor population of the city, Muslim Hands Open Kitchen continues to provide nutritional cooked meals to the neediest communities, playing its part in fighting hunger and enhancing food security among communities. "We are engaged in helping people with care," said Muslim Hands Country Director Syed Zia ul Noor, adding, "We are distributing cooked meals on a daily basis at the door steps over



250 poor and needy families through Muslim Hand Ramadan Open Kitchen while donors from United States, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Europe and other countries are fully cooperating to help the poor and deserving families

for Ramadan open kitchens and ration packages." Zia Ul Noor said Muslim Hands also started Ramadan Open Kitchen in other cities of the country to support needy persons for a good cause. This Ramadan, he said Muslim Hands is set to distrib-

ute 10,000 cooked meals to the most vulnerable communities in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. He said, "This initiative underscores our steadfast commitment to achieving zero hunger and promoting Better Nutrition and Health for all."

PEC announces seed funding scheme

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) Innovation and Entrepreneurship Committee (ICE) has invited engineering startups to submission of business proposals under its 'Seed Funding Scheme for Engineering Startups'. The business proposals addressing key challenges and opportunities in the engineering sector with a focus on sustainable technology development in Agri-tech and Smart-tech are sought from the engineers. About the thematic areas for this scheme, the official of PEC said that the themes for the proposals are Agri-tech and Smart-Tech. Agri-tech is crucial to enhance productivity, efficiency, and sustainability in the sector of agriculture such as food security, environmental sustainability, and increasing demand for agricultural products, integration of technology in agriculture continues to evolve, offering new opportunities for innovation and improvement in farming practices. It also emphasizes the adoption of waste-to-product and waste-to-energy approaches to reduce environmental impact. Smart-tech plays a pivotal role in modern society, revolutionizing various sectors with its efficiency and innovation. From enhancing communication through interconnected devices to optimizing resource management. Smart-tech fosters convenience, sustainability, and economic growth. By harnessing data-driven insights and automation, Smart-tech not only streamlines daily tasks but also paves the way for a more interconnected and sustainable future. About the eligibility, the official informed that the interdisciplinary team led by PEC registered engineers will be eligible to submit proposals and the startup must have a capital investment of at least PKR 300,000. The product/solution must directly address one of the thematic issues. —DNA

Tractor assembling grew by 77 percent in 07 months

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Tractor assembling in the country during first 07 months of current financial year increased 77 percent as compared to the assembling of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-January, 2023-24 about 27,835 tractors were locally assembled as compared to the assembling of 15,725 tractors of the same period of last year. According to the provisional quantum indices of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) for January, 2024 released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the manufacturing of machinery and equipment during the period under review grew by 80.11 percent. On month on month basis, the local tractors production grew by 164.76 percent

as about 4,117 tractors were locally manufactured in January, 2024 against the manufacturing of 1,555 tractors of the corresponding month of the last year. However, the automobile manufacturing decreased by 46.21 percent as compared to the manufacturing of the same period of last year. The output of the Large Scale Manufacturing Industrial (LSMI) sector witnessed an increase of 1.48 per cent during the month of January 2024 compared to the same month of last year, it reported. On a month-on-month basis, the production in January also showed 0.03 percent growth over the output of December 2023. Overall the LSMI showed a decline of 0.52 per cent during July-January 2023-24 when compared with the same period of last year, according to PBS data.

Brutal to raise energy costs even more

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that increasing electricity, gas, and oil prices would be cruel. Further price hikes will also increase the risks for the government as the opposition can use this situation to create chaos in the country. Mian Zahid Hussain said that continued price spikes can lead to a political crisis, which will be dangerous for the economy, stabilizing steadily. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that instead of increasing the burden on the people, the direct tax system should be improved, and tax should also be collected from non-tax-paying sectors. The business leader said that in a country where setting up and running an industry is the most challenging task and playing with plots is the easiest and most profitable, the increase in production and exports is self-deception.

AIOU starts mailing of books

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has begun dispatching books to 60,000 students who are enrolled in the matriculation program for Semester Spring 2024. According to Director Admissions AIOU, the process of dispatching books to matric program students will be completed by the end of this week. Additionally, the process of delivering books to 80,000 students enrolled in FA will commence next week. To ensure that all academic tasks are completed within the specified time-frame and to avoid any complaints from students, Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, has strictly instructed all departments to follow the academic calendar. This is the first time in the university's history that semester admissions are underway, and the delivery process of books to students has already begun. It is pertinent to mention that the University has also introduced a "Computerized Tracking System" for information regarding delivery of books. The students can easily enter their roll number or admission fee challan number and track all the delivery steps of books at the AIOU website. In case of non-receipt or delay of the textbooks, the students are instructed to approach the nearest post office.—APP

9th class first annual examination 2024 commences

RAWALPINDI: The 9th class first annual examination 2024 commenced on Wednesday in Rawalpindi Division and the Rawalpindi Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RBISE) has finalized all the arrangements for the exams, said Controller of Examinations, RBISE, Professor Sajid Mahmood Farooqi. He informed that the roll number slips of all the private candidates had been uploaded on the website of the board www.biserawalpindi.edu.pk and also sent to the addresses given on the admission forms of the candidates. The roll number slips of the regular candidates had also been uploaded on the portals of their institutions, he said. All the regular candidates should collect their roll number slips from their institutions, he said adding, 406 examination centers had been set up for the Ninth First Annual Examination 2024. Foolproof, effective, and comprehensive arrangements had been made for the exams, he added. According to a RBISE spokesman, the Chairman Education Board, Rawalpindi, Mohammad Adnan Khan, Controller of Examinations Professor Sajid Mahmood Farooqi, and other board officers were conducting surprise raids on a daily basis across the division and checking the first annual 2024 matriculation examination centers.—APP

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Briefs

1008 flats and 500 houses ready for workers in Islamabad zone 5

ISLAMABAD: The Workers Welfare Fund (WWF) is an attached department of Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development had completed labour complex at Zone-V including 1008 flats and 500 houses ready for registered workers of twin cities Islamabad and Rawalpindi. An official source told APP, he said that they are trying day and night to solve all the problems of the workers. Labor complexes in Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad are the link of this chain. It may be noted that Workers Welfare Labor Colony Phase-I Consisting of 1476 kanals of land including 1008 flats and 500 houses all the flats and houses will be allotted to industrial workers. A mosque, industrial home, community center and utility store have been built in the colony. To a question, he said that one million people were to be sent abroad under various agreements this year, which target has been completed. Similarly, remittances have also increased significantly.—APP

DG PNCA emphasizes spiritual significance of calligraphy

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Director General (DG) of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Muhammad Ayoub Jamali has said that calligraphy is a beautiful art form deeply rooted in Islamic scripture. Talking to APP, DG PNCA said that the ability to write calligraphy using the same tools available when the Quran was written centuries ago is a unique and cherished skill. He shed light on the history and importance of calligraphy with special reference to a month-long calligraphy exhibition in PNCA. Creative calligraphy pieces of prominent artist and calligrapher Azeem Iqbal were also showcased at the month-long exhibition. Talking to APP, Azeem Iqbal said that the exhibition is not just a fleeting experience, it is a journey that extends throughout the month of Ramadan. Appreciating PNCA for providing platform, he said that calligraphy, a centuries-old decorative ornamental handwriting art, hails from the Greek civilization. The word 'calligraphy' is a combination of two Greek words 'kalli' (beautiful) and 'graphia' (to write). Since the advent of Islam, its holy book, the Quran, was written on different mediums. Calligraphers of that era used many writing styles to transcribe the manuscript of the holy book. Since then, this particular art has associated itself with spirituality and is the most popular form of design arts in the Muslim world. After acquiring the status of the noblest of all arts, it has been adorned on the ceiling, exterior, interior and domes of all famous mosques, shrines.—APP

Smuggling, mis-declaration destroying Steel Industry

PALSP is the leading Association working for the revival of the local steel industry by engaging Govt as well as leading players of local steel industry. Adding, the steel melting industry is the back-bone of steel industry which is facing multiple challenges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Association of Large Steel Producers has raised alarms over the resumption of large-scale smuggling, mis-declaration & under invoicing of steel from Iran. In an SOS letter to finance minister, PALSP urged that smuggling, mis-declaration and under-invoicing are destroying the local steel industry, which is being perpetrated in most organized manner. 'Our steel industry is fighting for sheer survival due to massive PKR depreciation, highest financial costs, highest power rates coupled with significant increase in input costs. As a result, many steel mills have shut down their operations and the remaining are working at a small fraction of their capacities and many more are on the verge of closure.' PALSP is the leading Association working for the revival of

the local steel industry by engaging Govt as well as leading players of local steel industry. Adding, the steel melting industry is the back-bone of steel industry which is facing multiple challenges. To find an alternative to survive in these difficult times, key players of long steel industry are diversifying into exports of non-ferrous products (copper ingots) to China, and this segment emerged as the 5th largest exporting sector with exports touching USD 1.350 billion in 2023-24. One of the members of the PALSP is the largest exporter of copper and many more are pursuing similar targets. PALSP fears that in case unchecked smuggling continues by organized mafias, this would severely damage the exporting ability of copper products and at the same time would endanger their survival. PALSP warned that due to the economic downturn construction activity is at a grinding halt, and the steel demand is at the lowest

possible level. In this situation, the resumption of smuggling of steel with full might is an alarming development, which is going to create further devastation for the steel sector as well as our economy. PALSP raised concerns and stated that perpetuation of smuggling & misdeclaration at such a massive scale is a question mark for those authorities who are deputed at the Customs Check Posts / borders and are mandated to stop any kind of wrongdoings. 'In 60s, when there was no melting industry, at that time Govt allowed import of re-rollable scrap and the menace of re-rollable was added in the Import Policy Order. Afterwards, Pakistan's largest public sector steel mill was established in the country and at the same time large number of steel melting industry was established here. After passage of over 7 decades, lacunas in the definition of re-rollable scrap in IPO is being abused for import of large-scale steel products - steel

plates in different shapes, sizes and forms - products that are the closest substitutes of billets, mis-declared and are brought here in the garb of re-rollable scrap. In Feb 2024, official scrap import data shows that over 20,000 MT of steel plates that are re-usable without melting were imported by fraudulently mis-declaring the same as re-rollable scrap through different border points in Baluchistan, especially Taftan. Since a lot under-invoicing is done, so that actual quantity could be much higher than the officially declared quantities. This activity is being perpetrated due to negligence & inertia on the part of Commerce Ministry by not making necessary correction in the definition of re-rollable scrap in IPO and on the other due to connivance of all those departments in this activity, who are mandated to stop smuggling, mis-declaration and under-invoicing.

OGRA determines RLNG price

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) in accordance with the Policy Guidelines of the Federal Government has determined the Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) prices for sui companies with effective from March 1st, 2024 as under: 'The increase in RLNG prices is due to increase due to increase in the cost of supply. The RLNG price notification for the month of March, 2024 is readily available at OGRA website www.ogra.gov.pk.

Brutal to raise energy costs even more

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that increasing electricity, gas, and oil prices would be cruel. Further price hikes will also increase the risks for the government as the opposition can use this situation to create chaos in the country. Mian Zahid Hussain said that continued price spikes can lead to a political crisis, which will be dangerous for the economy, stabilizing steadily. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that instead of increasing the burden on the people, the direct tax system should be improved, and tax should also be collected from non-tax-paying sectors. The business leader said that in a country where setting up and running an industry is the most challenging task and playing with plots is the easiest and most profitable, the increase in production and exports is self-deception. He added that development is only possible if capital is diverted to industry and agriculture and industry is not prioritized over all other sectors. Agriculture needs to be prioritized after industry while bringing the big landowners into the tax net can generate at least five billion rupees. Mian Zahid Hussain said that black money in Pakistan is kept in the form of plots, land, buildings, gold, dollars, and banknotes of large denominations.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kuwait to Pakistan presenting a gift to the player of the UAE football team on the occasion of the diplomatic football league. —DNA

World Water Day to be observed on March 22

ISLAMABAD: Like other parts of the world, World Water Day will be celebrated on March 22 in Pakistan to raise awareness about the water crisis. The theme for World Water Day 2024 is "Water for Peace," underscoring the pivotal role water plays in fostering stability and prosperity worldwide. Since its inception in 1993, World Water Day has been observed on March 22, following the United Nations General Assembly's declaration. On this day, the UN and its member nations dedicate efforts to implementing UN recommendations and advancing concrete activities to address global water challenges. According to the United Nations, over 3 billion people worldwide rely on water sources that traverse national boundaries. Despite this, only 24 out of 153 countries with shared water resources report having cooperation agreements with their neighbors. As the impacts of climate change intensify and the global population expands, it is imperative that we unite in safeguarding and conserving our most precious resource. By prioritizing the balancing of human rights and needs, water can serve as a stabilizing force and a catalyst for sustainable development. World Water Day serves as a platform for the United Nations to raise awareness about critical water-related issues and inspire collective action to address the water and sanitation crisis. This year, the Task Force of UN-Water Members and Partners is coordinated by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).—DNA

Tax Bar vows to strengthen collaboration with China

DNA

LAHORE: The newly elected President of Lahore Tax Bar Association (LTBA), Shahbaz Siddique pledged to implement a series of initiatives aimed at promoting strong and mutually beneficial cooperation between Pakistan and China in the taxation field. Recognizing the importance of collaboration between the two countries, he aims to leverage this partnership to drive economic growth and development.

With the acceleration of the second phase of the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), there is a growing need for effective tax policies and regulations that support these investments. In an exclusive interview with China Economic Net, Shahbaz highlighted the significance of a robust tax

framework to ensure transparency, fairness and ease of doing business for both Pakistani and Chinese companies. He noted that the collaboration between Pakistan and China in taxation holds great potential, including exchange of expertise, investment and trade, double taxation avoidance and digital taxation. The two countries regularly engage in bilateral discussions and agreements to enhance economic cooperation, which may include tax matters. He said that Pakistan can learn from China's experiences in tax reform, administration and dispute resolution. LTBA plays a crucial role in promoting tax laws in Pakistan by facilitating communication among tax professionals and advocating for effective tax policies that benefit both taxpayers and the government. The President is committed to

addressing the current challenges faced by Pakistan in working with China in taxation such as different tax systems, language and cultural barriers, legal and regulatory harmonization.

One of the key initiatives that Mr. Shahbaz plans to implement is establishing a dedicated online platform for knowledge sharing and exchange among tax professionals from both countries. The platform will serve as a hub for sharing best practices, discussing challenges and exploring opportunities for collaboration on tax matters. Furthermore, the association intends to organize bilateral tax conferences, exchange programs, joint research and publications, training and capacity building, policy advocacy, etc. These events will provide valuable opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of each other's tax systems and foster meaningful connections.

Operation against price hike, 15 arrested

ISLAMABAD: The ICT administration has continued crack down against price hike in the Federal Capital with an aim to ensure fair access to daily essentials and maintain order in markets, including Ramadan Bazaars. On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon, all Assistant Commissioners and Magistrates, are leading these operations against the price hike and profiteer mafia. In line with this initiative, inspections were conducted at 302 different locations including three Ramadan Bazaars which were set up by the district administration by Magistrates to curb the price hikes and arrested eleven accused while fines of Rs 94,000 were also imposed to the violators, said the ICT Spokesman, Dr Abdullah Tabassum.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Yemen to Pakistan Mohammad Motahar Alashabi, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.—DNA

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Gaza: Fake empathy

GAZA is teetering on the brink of famine. At least twenty-seven children, including many newborns, have perished due to the severe shortage of essential nourishment, particularly baby milk. Additionally, hundreds of adults and elderly individuals have lost their lives as a result of Israeli attacks while waiting for aid trucks at various drop-off locations throughout Gaza. The most recent incident occurred on March 19 in central Gaza, where "Israel" fired at hungry people rushing at food trucks at a food distribution (death trap) site. Yet, the international community is impotent to pass a UN Security resolution to compel "Israel" to allow entry for food trucks. And yet, the Biden Administration had pleaded on November 3, 2023 for "Israel" to allow "immediate increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza." In the same press conference, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on "Israel" to "do more to protect Palestinian civilians."

As of November 3, there was no starvation in Gaza, and the death toll was less than 8,000. Here we are in the fifth month, the number of killed has surged by 400 percent, with 20,700 women and children killed, and 2.4 million humans facing famine. Since Blinken urged "Israel" to protect civilians, the number of Palestinian children killed in Gaza has surpassed the total from all world conflicts in four years. Was Blinken sincere on November 3 when he called on "Israel" to (kill less) civilians and increase humanitarian aid to Gaza? Or was he trying to subdue regional and international outrage against Israeli atrocities? The result is self-evident. The Biden Administration was buying time for "Israel" on two fronts: Firstly, leveraging the genocide to pressure Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia, into rewarding "Israel" with normalization in exchange for halting the slaughter. Biden, as well as Blinken, are obsessed with outdoing Donald Trump by orchestrating the largest prize in normalization between the Zionist state and a major Arab country.

For the Biden Administration, the lives of Palestinians were deemed expendable in his pursuit of delivering Saudi Arabia to "Israel". The US wielded its veto power at the UN Security Council as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with Saudi officials. Consequently, Saudi Arabia featured prominently in Blinken's numerous visits to the region during the final three months of 2023. However, once Saudi Arabia decided to shelve the normalization file, it was almost missing from the itineraries of high-level American officials. This week Blinken is reviving his attempts of visiting Saudi Arabia, again, to find ways to appease Netanyahu for a temporary pause in his genocide. While the world watches famine creeping in on Gaza, the Biden Administration is pulling out all the stops to exploit Palestinian suffering and reward "Israel" for its crimes.

In response to earlier failures in American efforts to placate Netanyahu with the Saudi normalization, (spoiled) "Israel" grew even more obstinate and bolstered the arrogance of its racist government coalition by rebuffing US calls for ceasefire and barring adequate number of aid trucks from entering Gaza. In this context, Biden's decision to dispatch the 7th Transportation Brigade (Expeditionary) to construct a floating pier in Gaza could be interpreted as essentially waving a white flag to Benjamin Netanyahu and his lobby in Washington.



Demographic winds of change

IN October 2023, the joint statement issued after the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh vowed to explore cooperation on key partnership priorities on both sides. The idea was to strengthen regional market integration, sustainability and decarbonization, digital transformation and inclusivity, and people-to-people ties. Going unmentioned was how Asia's aging population and how it can impact this relationship adds another dimension to this already comprehensive equation.

As the tides of demographic change sweep across Asia, the implications for the Middle East are profound and multifaceted. With Asia's population aging rapidly, the dynamics of labor markets, economic ties and investment opportunities between the two regions are poised for transformation. Countries like China and South Korea stand as stark examples of this trend, with China's birth rate plummeting by 81 percent and South Korea's by an astonishing 86 percent from 1950 to 2021, underscoring the magnitude of the demographic transformation. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue has been a step in this direction. A voluntary and nonbinding intergovernmental consultative process, it has engaged seven countries of labor destination (Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and 11 countries of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam). Its regular observers include the International Organization for Migration, the International Labour Organization, the private sector and civil society.

In this era of demographic flux, the dialogue between aging Asia and the Middle East takes on new dimensions, inviting reflection, collaboration and innovation to chart a course toward a future where demographic diversity is embraced as a source of strength and resilience in an ever-changing world. How Asia and the Middle East adapt to these demographic winds of change will define their economic landscapes and pave the way for deeper collaboration and engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

Learning from China's innovation initiative...

Qamar Bashir



Unstoppable China, eyeing for top position on the innovation ladder, has adopted the concept of New Quality Productive Force that marks a significant shift from traditional growth models towards a more sustainable and innovative approach. Unlike previous paradigms where quantity and quality often took precedence, this groundbreaking endeavor places innovation squarely at the center stage. The emphasis now lies on the development of new technologies, processes, and business models to drive efficiency and spur growth. Recognizing transformative potential of scientific and technological...

UNDER the dynamic leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has steadfastly maintained its position as the world's second-largest economy since 2010. President Xi's visionary approach and relentless drive have propelled China's economic ascent, earning him a reputation as an unstoppable force. With his sights set on securing the top spot in the global economy, President Xi recognizes that innovation is the key to unlocking this ambition. Hence, his unwavering emphasis on developing "New Quality Productive Forces" marks a monumental shift in China's economic strategy, aimed at cultivating fresh sources of growth and advancing high-quality development. Since its introduction in 2023, the concept of new quality productive forces has commanded considerable attention and support, finding prominence in critical discussions and policymaking forums. Positioned as the paramount objective of the government's agenda for 2024, it underscores China's unwavering dedication to accelerating the adoption of innovative, high-quality production methodologies. President Xi's leadership in championing this transformative initiative reaffirms China's commitment to shaping the future of global economic progress through innovation-led growth.

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, the significance of fostering a culture and ecosystem of innovation cannot be overstated. Beyond mere technological advancements, innovation serves as the cornerstone for a nation's prosperity across multiple fronts. Economically, it fuels productivity, enhances competitiveness, and cultivates high-skilled employment opportunities, thereby propelling sustainable growth. Moreover, innovation breeds adaptability and resilience, enabling countries to navigate unforeseen challenges with agility and fortitude. Furthermore, it acts as a beacon, attracting both investment and top-tier talent, thereby nurturing a virtuous cycle of progress. Yet, the impact of innovation transcends the economic realm, permeating into social spheres such as healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability, where it catalyzes transformative change and elevates living standards for all. In essence, a robust culture and ecosystem of innovation lay the foundation for a nation's ascent towards unparalleled success and enduring prosperity.

In the fiercely competitive arena of global innovation, certain nations perennially establish themselves as frontrunners. According to the 2023 Global Innovation Index, Switzerland, Sweden, the

United States, the United Kingdom, and Singapore reign as the world's foremost innovative economies. Notably, China distinguishes itself as the sole middle-income economy within the GII's top 30, securing the 12th spot, closely trailed by Japan at 13th. Israel, making a significant resurgence, reclaims its position within the GII's top 15, ascending two ranks to secure the 14th position. Unstoppable China, eyeing for top position on the innovation ladder, has adopted the concept of New Quality Productive Force that marks a significant shift from traditional growth models towards a more sustainable and innovative approach. Unlike previous paradigms where quantity and quality often took precedence, this groundbreaking endeavor places innovation squarely at the center stage. The emphasis now lies on the development of new technologies, processes, and business models to drive efficiency and spur growth.

Recognizing the transformative potential of scientific and technological innovation, efforts are directed towards cultivating new industries, models, and growth drivers. Emphasis is placed on fostering original and disruptive innovation, with a keen eye towards its timely application across specific industries and industrial chains. Moreover, initiatives aimed at expediting the green transformation of growth models underscore China's commitment to environmental sustainability, aligning with global goals such as carbon peaking and neutrality.

Furthermore, China's pursuit of high-quality development hinges on comprehensive reforms aimed at reshaping the economic landscape and science and technology management systems. By addressing bottlenecks that impede the development of new quality productive forces, China seeks to create a conducive environment for innovation-led growth. In tandem with these initiatives, China is committed to nurturing a virtuous cycle of education, science, technology, and talent. By enhancing mechanisms for talent training, introduction, utilization, and mobility, China aims to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of driving forward the development of new quality productive forces.

At the heart of this initiative is the commitment to achieving High-Tech, High-Efficiency, High-Quality production. This framework aims to harness technologically advanced methods, minimize waste, and deliver goods and services of unparalleled quality. As the new government in Pakistan is trying to navigate its path towards economic development, there's much to glean from China's remarkable

transformation. Just as China shifted its focus from quantity to quality and from quality to innovation, Pakistan can adopt a similar approach to drive progress with a view to propel itself from 88th position out of 132 economies as per Global Innovation Index (GII) by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) amongst the top 15 countries.

Though the target is formidable but not impossible provided we are able to prioritize the production of high-quality goods and services over sheer quantity which will enhance Pakistan's global competitiveness and position itself as a hub for excellence. Embracing rigorous quality standards across industries, investing in research and development, and fostering a culture of innovation are crucial steps that Pakistan can take to emulate China's trajectory.

Pakistan can do this by excelling in knowledge and technology outputs, creative outputs, and business sophistication, though challenges persist in infrastructure, human capital and research, and institutional development. Despite these hurdles, Pakistan's strengths in mobile application creation, high-tech imports, and domestic market scale underscore its growing innovation potential.

Pakistan can draw invaluable lessons from China's experience by investing heavily in innovation and technology-driven initiatives. By fostering an ecosystem that nurtures entrepreneurship, supports research and development, and encourages collaboration between academia and industry, Pakistan can unleash its potential for innovation-led growth. Embracing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure can catalyze economic transformation and propel Pakistan onto the fast track of development and progress.

Pakistan can emulate this strategy by prioritizing strategic reforms that streamline bureaucratic processes, improve regulatory frameworks, and create an enabling environment for business growth. Additionally, investing in critical infrastructure projects such as transportation networks, energy systems, and digital connectivity can unlock new avenues for economic development and enhance Pakistan's competitiveness on the global stage. By embracing strategic reforms and infrastructure development initiatives, Pakistan can pave the way for accelerated growth, job creation, and improved living standards for its citizens, mirroring China's remarkable journey towards prosperity.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)
Former Press Minister at Embassy
of Pakistan to France
Former MD, SRBC

Is the US divorcing netanyahu? or is it democratic 'cope' ?

Alastair Crooke

Liberal democrats and radical Zionism were pursuing divergent paths. The answer for the Likud Party seemed to be a pivot to the Evangelical constituency in the US – and since most were Republican, a shift too to the GOP as the main patron. (In 2007, 51% of Protestants in the US identified with evangelical churches.) It was seen as a bold and controversial move by the Israeli Right at the time. But from the Likud perspective, it started to pay off – as in the case of the fraught move of the US Embassy to al-Quds

SENATOR Schumer (who represents a state with more than 20% of the US Jewish population) delivered last week a pointed speech on the Senate floor excoriating Netanyahu as a major obstacle to peace in the Middle East and calling for new leadership in "Israel". Schumer was unsparing in his criticism: "The Netanyahu coalition no longer fits the needs of Israel after 7 Oct" ... "The world has changed – radically – since then, and the Israeli people are being stifled right now by a governing vision that is stuck in the past."

The address was widely circulated to the White House and Jewish donors and interest groups (including reportedly AIPAC) before delivery. The speech, therefore, was read from an agreed text and intended to signal a major shift in the US stance. It was "sold" in mainstream US media as landing a "bombshell" onto "Israel", warning that it risked "losing" the US (and much of the world). However, was it truly a divorce "decree nisi" between the US and Netanyahu? Undoubtedly, many, if not most, reform and liberal Jews in NY and beyond, would agree wholeheartedly with Schumer's stance. Taken together, they represent a core Democratic constituency. But, if Schumer's words constituted a statement of intended divorce, the reality is that "the couple" has been estranged and leading separate lives, for many years.

Years back, Netanyahu saw the writing on the wall as the Democrats in the US turned increasingly woke, just at the point at which Netanyahu, the Likud, and the Israeli polity were marching rightward toward fundamentalist Zionism. The woke ethos of seeking redress (positive discrimination) for historic identity and racial

discrimination and the demand for restitutive social justice clearly were at odds and a threat to the Zionist world of special rights for one population group (Jews) over another (Palestinians) sharing the same land. Liberal democrats and radical Zionism were pursuing divergent paths. The answer for the Likud Party seemed to be a pivot to the Evangelical constituency in the US – and since most were Republican, a shift too to the GOP as the main patron. (In 2007, 51% of Protestants in the US identified with evangelical churches.) It was seen as a bold and controversial move by the Israeli Right at the time. But from the Likud perspective, it started to pay off – as in the case of the fraught move of the US Embassy to al-Quds. The Democrats were not the patrons here; it was the Evangelicals (for Christian Biblical motives). In this light, Schumer's speech was less a bombshell in "Israel" than in the US. The paths of Likud and Western Liberalism had long diverged. What Schumer was proclaiming was the divorce of US liberals from "Israel" as it is today, (and not the imagined, rosy-tinted world of two decades earlier). The horrors of the Gaza war have exposed that "liberal Zionism" is now an oxymoron. It is also exposing the impotence of the secular-liberal approach to a problem (in the talk of security reform of the PA, two-state solutions, Saudi embrace/normalization... etc.) that is becoming evermore eschatological; driven by fear; hatred, and Biblical injunctions to kill as mandatory command under Halachic Law. There is a psychological block in the West to admitting that Biblical compulsions can override "rationality". Of course, the unsaid element to the

Schumer address is that the Democratic Campaign managers were spooked in Michigan by the size of the "uncommitted" protest vote against Biden's support for Israel's war aims.

Netanyahu, it seems, is to be the scapegoat for the entirety of "Israel", which – right or wrong – overwhelmingly supports the Cabinet war aims in Gaza and Lebanon. Schumer's finger-pointing effectively absolves Biden of his initial error in embracing Netanyahu and declaring that the US "has Israel's back". As one analyst noted:

"Biden knows that Netanyahu is representing a mainstream position on the war and that the president is mostly bluffing for domestic benefit. Biden has a game he's playing, and that is criticism of Bibi ... It reduces some of the flames.""

Additionally, Schumer's speech intentionally absolves the "liberal" West for having colluded, over two decades, in "Israel's" deliberate blocking of any prospect for a Palestinian State coming into being, and it avoids the issue of why the Biden Administration goes on sending bombs and munitions to the Israeli military.

Netanyahu may have played a central part in the recent transformation of "Israel", but this is not all his Netanyahu. These dynamics were perfectly visible during the Ariel Sharon era, too. Interestingly, even Senator McConnell picked up on these points, "The Democratic Party doesn't have an anti-Bibi problem: It has an anti-Israel problem." However, as usual, the insight is clouded by party politics: McConnell spies the opportunity for the GOP to seize "the card" of Israel from the Democrats!

— Source: Al Mayadeen English

Briefs

Brazilian police indict Bolsonaro for fake COVID certificate

BRASÍLIA : Brazilian police have recommended that Jair Bolsonaro be prosecuted for forging his COVID vaccination certificate. The federal police indictment was released by Brazil's Supreme Court on Tuesday, following an investigation that began last year. The probe is one of several potential cases that the far-right politician faces following his term in office which ended in December 2022. Bolsonaro, who has previously said he was not vaccinated, has been under investigation since last year over suspicions that he ordered aides to falsify his health record in order to allow him to travel internationally. During his presidency he came under fire for dismissing the severity of the pandemic. The federal police said in a 231-page report that Bolsonaro and 16 other people had plotted to issue "the false certificates to obtain undue advantages" as the virus raged.—APP

WHO: Cholera outbreaks linked to climate change

GENEVA : Cholera outbreaks worldwide are deeply linked to climate change, a World Health Organization (WHO) official said that after a meeting of a key advisory group on immunization. Dr. Kate O'Brien, the WHO's director of immunization, vaccines and biologicals, spoke at a press conference of the organization's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization, known as SAGE. "I think we do have to acknowledge the cholera outbreaks that are ongoing are deeply linked to climate change in emergency situations, conflict situations, and we have raised the alarm on cholera," said O'Brien. "It's not only about vaccines; certainly it's not the first line of defense for cholera. Cholera is a disease around clean water and clean sanitation. And vaccines are a method to prevent disease when it's around." O'Brien also said the world was currently gearing up for measles outbreaks. "With outbreaks going on, climate change, populations on the move and humanitarian crises, the prevention of disease through immunization couldn't be more important than it is now," she said. She said immunization programs have shown that resilience to diseases is at the heart of responding to new pathogens, "in particular pathogens like we've all just experienced, the COVID disease." She said the SAGE group had recently reviewed new tuberculosis vaccines and several TB vaccines are in the pipeline to prevent adolescent and adult disease.—DNA

EU agrees to cap tariff-free Ukraine farm imports

KYIV : The European Union has agreed a provisional deal to cap duty-free agricultural imports from Ukraine. The agreement was reached on Wednesday as member states and lawmakers extended a policy of tariff exemptions on many Ukrainian farm products. However, after farmers engaged in protests across the bloc against the cheap imports that were hurting their own sales, limits were placed on the duty-free import of some items. The tariff exemptions, first granted in 2022, will be extended for a further year to June 2025. But several grains as well as eggs, poultry, honey and sugar were added to a list of products with import "safeguards" intended to prevent cheap imports from flooding the EU market. Tariffs will be applied on these products if imports exceed the average levels of 2022 and 2023. The European Commission had suggested using 2021 - when Ukrainian exports were not limited by war - as the benchmark.—Agencies

New Palestinian PM maps out his vision for a path to peace

It will require reunification—and reforms—across the Palestinian territories, says Mohammad Mustafa

As I step into the role of prime minister-designate of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) under excruciating and unprecedented circumstances, I am acutely aware of the monumental challenges that lie ahead. The Palestinian people find themselves at yet another critical juncture, facing a tragic confluence of crises that are testing our resilience and ingenuity, qualities we have proved we possess in abundance time and time again. There are, however, at least a couple of differences this time: the injustices are more horrific than ever, and they are on global display. At this pivotal moment, Palestinians and the international community are more galvanised and determined to create real change than perhaps ever before. It is therefore imperative that we chart a clear path forward to stop the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is time we were given a fair chance at realising our collective aspirations for justice, freedom, security, peace and prosperity—fundamental rights that Palestinians have been denied for 76 years. Foremost among our priorities is

addressing the dire situation that has transpired since October 7th. The devastation wrought by the continuing Israeli bombardment and deprivation (on top of years of siege) has left our people in Gaza in ruins, with unimaginable human suffering. The statistics are staggering, and the personal stories behind them are devastating. In less than six months, more than 30,000 people have been killed in Gaza, at least 13,000 of them children. On average, ten children every day lose at least one limb, and more than 17,000 are now considered "unaccompanied", or without a parent. At least 70,000 people are injured and 1.7m—75% of the population of the Gaza Strip—have been internally displaced. Over 60% of housing units have been destroyed or damaged, the education and health systems have completely collapsed, and food and water insecurity have reached catastrophic levels. Nothing can justify the hell that the people of Gaza are experiencing. Nor, for that matter, can anything excuse the deterioration that is occurring at the same time in the West Bank. As settlers ramp up violence and the occupation's restrictions continue to make it difficult to pay salaries and live stable lives, the pressing security and economic situations have again become



impossible to ignore. Immediate action is needed to end this suffering. Our priority, therefore, will be to continue to work with regional and international partners to secure an immediate and permanent ceasefire and lead a humanitarian relief campaign to help our people in Gaza. In parallel, we aim to establish an independent, competent and transparent agency for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction and an internationally managed trust fund to raise, manage and disburse the required funds. The siege must end, and the Palestinian people of Gaza (and the West Bank) must be allowed to live and thrive. Crafting a proactive blueprint is essential. This blueprint must not only tackle the immediate crises we face, but also pave a path for a sustainable and prosperous Palestinian state that allows for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, a cornerstone

for peace and stability in the region.

To realise this vision we must bring together various parties and voices that are committed to the principles and frameworks established by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Acknowledging the complexities on the ground, we must forge a non-partisan, technocratic government that can gain both the trust of our people and the support of the international community. This government will foster the engagement of all Palestinian factions and parties in a constructive dialogue at the PLO level. The aim should be to reach a consensus on how to bring about peace, an independent Palestinian state and the democratic governance of our institutions. Central to this vision is the reunification of our institutions and laws across Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem under cohesive governance, facilitating economic integration and ensuring freedom of movement and access (until the establishment of a permanent territorial link). This vision has been the international consensus and the only accepted way forward to lasting peace and stability, yet its implementation remains long overdue. The incoming Palestinian govern-

ment is determined to undertake all necessary internal reforms to gain the trust of our people and to succeed in the enormous tasks ahead. We will undertake comprehensive reforms that include improving financial controls and transparency, streamlining the bureaucracy, strengthening the rule of law, safeguarding the independence of the judiciary, fighting corruption, upholding human rights and freedom of expression, empowering civil society and oversight bodies, and preparing for elections. To be clear, we will pursue a policy of zero tolerance towards corruption and full commitment to transparency. An effective and accountable government is crucial not only for garnering international support and credibility but, more important, for gaining the trust of our own people. The scepticism that greets declarations of reform may be understandable given the history of our governance. But I am committed to showing progress and accountability. My government's measures will include putting together a credible and professional cabinet and establishing a Transformation Office tasked with charting the required reforms and implementing them in co-operation with civil-society groups and international organisations with relevant experience.

Youths kill 15 in South Sudan in latest clash

JUBA: Unidentified youths shot dead 15 people in South Sudan's Pibor region, including its commissioner, a senior official said on Wednesday, in the latest flare-up of violence in the country. Civil war in South Sudan, erupting two years after the country won independence from Sudan and fought largely along ethnic lines between Dinkas and Nuers, caused hundreds of thousands of deaths between 2013 and 2018. The shooting happened on Tuesday when the commissioner of Boma County in Pibor was returning from a visit to a village. "The commissioner with his team went to Nyat village and on his return he was ambushed and 15 people were killed including the commissioner," Abraham Kelang, information minister of Greater Pibor Administrative Area. Kelang said the attackers were suspected to be youths from the region's Anyuak community. Among the dead were Boma's deputy army commander, government officials and the county commissioner's bodyguards, Kelang said. Since the 2018 peace deal, routine clashes among a patchwork of armed groups have continued to kill and displace large numbers of civilians. The Greater Pibor Administrative Area is among those affected.—dna

Pope urges end to wars in Ukraine, Middle East

WEB DESK

VATICAN CITY : Pope Francis on Wednesday issued a fresh call for peace through negotiation as he deplored the bloody conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and once again limited his public speaking at his weekly audience in St Peter's Square due to lingering health issues. "We should never forget that war is always a defeat, we cannot continue in war, we should make all efforts to mediate, to negotiate an end to the war, let's pray for this", the pontiff said in brief remarks at the end of the audience, citing "martyred" Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. The 87-year-old Francis, who has mobility problems and has been suffering in recent weeks from colds and bouts of bronchitis, once again skipped reading most of his pre-prepared texts for the audience. He delegated the task to an aide, telling the faithful he was still forced to limit his public speaking. Earlier this month, Pope Francis had told that Ukraine should "show the courage of the white flag" and open talks with Russia, but his deputy Cardinal Pietro Parolin clarified in an interview that Russia should first halt its aggression. "Many young people, many young people go to die (in war). Let's pray the Lord to give us the grace to overcome this madness

of war, which is always a defeat," the pope said during his weekly audience in St Peter's Square. He did not specifically mention Ukraine or any other conflict zones, but said he had earlier received a rosary and a copy of the Gospels that belonged to a man killed on an unspecified war front. He told the faithful he still had "a bit of a cold". Meanwhile, Pope Francis's suggestion of negotiations with Russia to bring an end to the war - his use of the words "white flag" drawing particular scorn - reiterating that the country would never surrender. In a recent interview, Francis used the term "white flag", repeating the words of a journalist, which some read as a call to surrender. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded to the pope without naming him in his nightly address Sunday. Praising Ukrainian chaplains on the front line, Zelenskyy said: "This is what the church is - it is together with people, not two and a half thousand kilometers away somewhere, virtually mediating between someone who wants to live and someone who wants to destroy you. Our flag is blue and yellow. Under it, we live, die, and triumph. We will not raise any other flags." He thanked Francis for his prayers for peace and urged him to visit Ukraine. The pope's remarks were made in an interview with Swiss broadcaster Radio Television, recorded in February, part of which was released Saturday.

Ukraine's FM to visit India next week

NEW DELHI : Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, will visit India next week as Kyiv looks to build support for its peace plan, two Indian officials aware of the matter said, the first visit by a top Ukrainian leader since Russia's invasion over two years ago. New Delhi, which has traditionally had close economic and defence ties with Moscow, has so far refused to criticise Russia for the February 2022 invasion, instead stepping up purchases of Russian oil to record levels. Kuleba's visit comes at the invitation of his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, after a telephone call between the leaders of the two nations at the beginning of the year, said one of the officials. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity. Ukraine's peace plan, as presented by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, calls for removing all Russian troops, restoring Ukraine's 1991 post-Soviet borders and a process to make Russia accountable for its actions. Apart from talks with Indian officials, Kuleba is also set to "review the India-Ukraine inter-governmental commission", one of the officials said, referring to a panel charged with keeping up the two nations' economic, cultural and technological ties. India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. One of the officials said a formal announcement of the visit was expected next week. Ukraine says shocked US has not yet passed aid package. Indian media first reported it on Tuesday. Ukraine has also pitched for New Delhi to help rebuild its war-ravaged economy, inviting investment from Indian companies at a January business summit in India.—DNA

French regulator hits Google with 250 mn euro fine

PARIS : French regulators said Wednesday they were fining Google 250 million euros (\$272 million) for breaching an agreement on terms for paying media companies for reproducing their content online. France's Competition Authority said in a statement the fine was for "failing to respect commitments made in 2022" and accused it of not negotiating in "good faith" with news publishers on how much to compensate them for use of their content. Google and other online platforms have been accused of making billions from news without sharing the revenue with those who gather it. To tackle this, the EU created a form of copyright called "neighbouring rights" that allows print media to demand compensation for using their content. France has been a test case for the rules and after initial resistance Google and Facebook both agreed to pay some French media for articles shown in web searches. In 2022, French regulators accepted commitments from Google to negotiate fairly with news organisations. Under the agreement, the US tech giant has to provide news groups with a transparent offer of payment within three months of receiving a copyright complaint.—APP

Rural clinic aids Zimbabweans priced out elsewhere

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

Saudi Arabia plans \$40bn push into AI

BENGALURU: Saudi Arabia's government plans to create a fund of about \$40 billion to invest in artificial intelligence, the New York Times reported on Tuesday, citing three people briefed on the plans, according to reports. Representatives of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund have discussed a potential partnership with US venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz and other financiers in recent weeks, the newspaper reported. Andreessen Horowitz and PIF governor Yasir Al-Rumayyan have discussed the possibility of the US firm setting up an office in Riyadh, according to the report. PIF officials also discussed what role Andreessen Horowitz could play and how such a fund would work, the newspaper said, adding the plans could still change. Other venture capitalists may participate in the Kingdom's AI fund, which is expected to commence in the second half of 2024, the newspaper said. Saudi representatives have indicated to potential partners that the country is interested in supporting a variety of tech start-ups associated with AI, including chip makers and large-scale data centers, the report added. PIF and Andreessen Horowitz did not immediately respond to requests for comment. In February, PIF's Al-Rumayyan pitched the Kingdom as a prospective hub for AI activity outside US, citing its energy resources and funding capacity. Al-Rumayyan had said the Kingdom had the "political will" to make AI projects happen and ample funds it could deploy to nurture the technology's development.—DNA



ISLAMABAD : Khurshid Ahmed Khan Marwat Chief Commissioner Regional Tax Office Islamabad receiving the Shield from Khurshid Barlas founder Chairman Pakistan association of exhibition industry during the meeting at his office and Fahad Barlas convener exhibition was present at the occasion.—DNA

WHO raises alarm on Gaza children's dire hunger crisis

Margaret Harris, a representative from the WHO, emphasized the urgent need for nutritional intervention to save these young lives

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON : The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a dire warning, saying that a growing number of children in Gaza are teetering on the edge of death due to severe hunger. Margaret Harris, a representative from the WHO, shared distressing observations from the ground, saying that, "What doctors and medical staff are telling us is more and more they are seeing the effects of starvation; they're seeing newborn babies simply dying because they [are] too low birth weight." Speaking to journalists in Geneva, Harris emphasized the urgent need for nutritional intervention to save these young lives. The war-ravaged region is seeing a surge in dangerously underweight pregnant women seeking medical attention, she said. Harris highlighted the perilous complications arising from malnutrition during pregnancy, a situation she attributes solely to the ravag-

es of war. "Prior to the conflict, Gaza's health system was robust, and malnutrition was virtually unheard of. The current medical crises are entirely a consequence of human actions," she asserted. In response to this humanitarian emergency, the WHO is actively setting up emergency malnutrition stabilization centers to aid the most vulnerable in Gaza. However, the initiative is facing significant challenges due to security concerns and persistent impediments to aid access. The United Nations Children's Fund says more than 13,000 children have been killed in Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip. "We've managed to establish a center in the southern part of Gaza and are planning for another in the north. Yet, without safe passage and access to bring in supplies, our efforts are constrained. A ceasefire is imperative to facilitate aid delivery," Harris explained. The sense of desperation is palpable, according to Harris, who stressed the necessity of allowing substantial aid into Gaza.

When that happens, the relief supplies "will be absorbed like sand", she said. The World Bank issued a stark warning as over half of Gaza's population is facing "the imminent threat of famine." The institution urgently called for concerted efforts to prevent loss of life. "With more than half the population of Gaza on the brink of famine—including children and the elderly—the World Bank Group calls for urgent action to save lives," it said. "We join the international community in calling for immediate, free, and unimpeded access of medical supplies, food and life-essential services through all available means at speed and scale to the people of Gaza." Since the onset of war on October 7, the Israeli regime has enforced a stringent siege on Gaza. The devastating genocidal campaign has resulted in over 31,800 Palestinian deaths. With much of northern Gaza reduced to rubble, aid organizations are cautioning that the majority of residents are now grappling with extreme hunger.

Israel defies top UN court, sparks controversy: SA FM

CAPE TOWN : South Africa's foreign minister has said that Israel is setting a precedent for leaders to defy the top UN court. Speaking in an interview, Naledi Pandor also said that Israel is carrying out a campaign of starvation in Gaza. South Africa has hauled Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over its genocide in Gaza, infuriating Israel and drawing US censure. Pandor said that Israel had defied a January interim ruling by the ICJ that it should take action to prevent acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip. "The provisional measures have been entirely ignored by Israel," Pandor said at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace during a visit to Washington. "We're seeing mass starvation now and famine before our very eyes," she said. "I think we, as humanity, need to look at ourselves in horror and dismay and to be really worried that we have set an example," she added. Pandor said that Israel's actions may mean other nations believe that "there's license - I can do what I want and I will not be stopped." She said that South Africa's post-apartheid democracy was "merely practicing what is preached to us every day" by the West. "The ICJ has not been respected. And the day an African disrespects (it) I hope we don't go to that leader and say 'Listen, you're out of bounds - because you're an African, we expect you to obey,'" she said. South Africa has called on the UN court in The Hague to order measures for Israel to stop "widespread starvation" triggered by its war in Gaza. The United Nations has warned that Israel could be using starvation as a weapon in its genocidal war against Gaza by blocking the desperately needed aid into the war-battered strip.—APP

Briefs

Ireland's PM Varadkar resigned

DNA

LONDON: Ireland's prime minister, Leo Varadkar, has announced he will step down from that office within weeks as soon as his Fine Gael party chooses a successor. Varadkar announced Wednesday he is resigning immediately as head of Fine Gael, which is part of a coalition government. That sets in motion a leadership race, akin to a primary in the U.S. system. "I am resigning as president and leader of Fine Gael effective today, and will resign as taoiseach as soon as my successor is able to take up that office," Varadkar said in an emotional speech in Dublin. He said his reasons for stepping down are "both personal and political." "It has been the most fulfilling time of my life," Varadkar said, choking up. But he said he believes his center-right party will do better in upcoming elections under a different leader, who would take office sometime after the March 31 Easter holiday. Now 45, Varadkar was the youngest ever elected to the role of taoiseach, or prime minister, when he took office, first from 2017 to 2020 and again since late 2022. A doctor whose father is originally from India and mother is Irish, Varadkar is Ireland's first biracial prime minister. He is also the first openly gay person to hold the top office in once-staunchly Roman Catholic Ireland.

Chairman PTA meets state minister for IT

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Maj General (R) Hafeez Ur Rehman met with State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja today. The meeting, centered around matters including 5G spectrum auction, enhancing connectivity nationwide, and enhancing growth within the telecom industry. During the meeting, Chairman PTA emphasized on the importance of collaboration between PTA and MoITT to enhance the provision of digital services across the country. He affirmed PTA's commitment to providing comprehensive support to the Ministry in its endeavors to drive digital transformation in the country. The meeting also marked the first official visit of Chairman PTA, to the newly appointed Minister.

RCCI to launch plantation drive at Potohar triangle

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) is going to launch a large-scale plantation and clean-up campaign to build a green belt around Potohar Triangle, Soan Bridge and along the banks of Nallah Lai. The plantation and cleanliness drive aimed to build green belt around this area to increase the scenery of the city. President Chamber and Chairman RWMC Saqib Rafiq, giving details, said that under the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz, Green Punjab Initiative 2024-27, all the relevant agencies, especially the Forest Department, PHA, started a large-scale plantation campaign in Rawalpindi. The project will not only beautify the city but will add to environment of the vicinity. In this regard an event has been planned on 21st March 2024 at 12:00 noon (Potohar Triangle Soan Bridge) to launch the activity, he added. Youth especially school students and civil society, local dignitaries, business community and chamber members are being involved in this campaign, he added. He said that if every citizen plants only four trees and patronized it, one billion trees can be planted in the next two years.

Asif Zardari for expanding Pak-Japan cooperation

President said that both countries had been enjoying long-standing relations, which needed to be further cemented for the mutual benefit of the two sides



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has called for expanding the scope of bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Japan across a wide spectrum of areas, especially trade, investment, economy, culture and people-to-people contacts. He said that Pakistan was a huge market and Japanese businesses should benefit from the economic opportunities by investing in diverse sectors. The President expressed these

views while talking to the Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, Mr Mitsuhiro Wada, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Talking to the Ambassador, the President said that both countries had been enjoying long-standing relations, which needed to be further cemented for the mutual benefit of the two sides. He highlighted that Japan had been a key development partner of Pakistan that had been supporting Pakistan's socio-economic development in different sectors under the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). He further said

that Pakistan had a huge population and could send trained workforce and professionals to help Japan fulfil its requirements for human resources. The President said that Japanese automobile companies, based in Pakistan, should enhance production to export their products from Pakistan. He stated that the Japanese banks should also be encouraged to come back and initiate their operations in Pakistan. The President reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to overcome its current socio-economic challenges.

The Japanese Ambassador said that Pakistan had a strategic location and a huge population, and Japanese companies were interested in these potential areas. He called for further strengthening the existing bilateral cooperation for the mutual benefit of the two countries. He informed that the export of Pakistani mangoes to Japan was growing. The Ambassador also termed the visit of former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to Japan as successful, saying that the young generation of Pakistan could play a strong role in making it a prosperous country. Mr Mitsuhiro Wada warmly congratulated the President on becoming the President for the second time and conveyed the regards of the Japanese Emperor His Majesty Naruhito. The President thanked the Ambassador for the felicitations and asked him to convey his warm regards to the Emperor of Japan. He also fondly recalled his visit to Japan and meeting with the former Emperor of Japan, His Majesty Akihito. He thanked the Japanese Government for its support to Pakistan in the aftermath of the devastating floods in 2022. Later, the Ambassador of Yemen to Pakistan, Mr Mohammad Motahar Alashabi, also called on President Asif Ali Zardari and felicitated him on assuming his office. During the meeting, the President said that Pakistan and Yemen enjoyed excellent bilateral relations based on shared bonds of religion, culture and values. Both sides emphasised the need for further increasing mutually beneficial cooperation. The President also thanked the Ambassador of Yemen for felicitations.

No amnesty for terrorists, says Mohsin Naqvi

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has emphasized the necessity of preemptive action against terrorism rather than merely reacting to incidents post-facto. Presiding over a meeting of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NECTA) in Islamabad on Wednesday, he underscored the importance of swiftly neutralizing terrorist elements and their accomplices. During the meeting it was decided to restructure the NECTA on modern lines and bring it on the front in the war against terrorism. The meeting also paved the way for a forthcoming session of the Coordination Committee of the National Action Plan, scheduled for the following week, with Minister Naqvi slated to chair the proceedings. Minister Naqvi left no room for ambiguity, declaring a firm stance against granting amnesty to any terrorist organization. He stressed the imperative of promoting Pakistan's national narrative as a counterweight to the extremist ideologies perpetuated by terrorists.

Mine collapse in Balochistan kills 12

QUETTA: As many as 12 miners have died and eight have been safely rescued after a coal mine collapsed in Balochistan's Harnai District area trapping 20 people inside. The development comes after Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti had taken notice of the incident while directing the authorities to carry out rescue and relief operations after a mine, located in Harnai's Zardalo area, had collapsed owing to a gas explosion. According to the chief mines expert, the ensuing rescue efforts resulted in eight miners being rescued alive along with the recovery of 12 dead bodies. The official further said that the mine had been "sealed" following the culmination of the rescue operation. Earlier, reacting to the incident, PM Shehbaz Sharif had expressed grief over loss of life in mine collapse. - DNA

SC grants bail to suspects involved in May 9th

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted bail to five suspects involved in May 9 violence and stated that the authorities concerned were not arresting the "real terrorists" but are after those who take out political rallies. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail made these remarks during hearing of bail petitions of suspects allegedly involved in vandalising and attacking the state property on May 9. A number of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers and others were arrested after protests broke out across the country following Imran Khan's arrest in the Al-Qadir Trust case. A three-member bench, headed by Justice Mandokhail, and comprising Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Musarat Hilali conducted the hearing of the plea seeking post-arrest bail. The apex court approved the bail in exchange for surety bonds of Rs50,000 each. It also directed the trial court to give a verdict without getting influenced. The petitioners, Owais, Saifullah, Nasrullah, Kamran and Waqas, were accused of attacks and vandalising between May 9 to 10. During the proceedings today, Justice Mandokhail highlighted the lapses in investigations and spoke about the provisions of terrorism in the first information report. "Do you know in what circumstances the anti-terrorism clauses are invoked?" he questioned. He then gave examples of terror incidents, saying that the Army Public School tragedy and attack on lawyers in Quetta can be categorised as such. "Fight your political game in the political arena, don't fight political battles in the courts," he said. Justice Mandokhail added that when a weapon is not recovered, then the relevant provision cannot be added in the FIR. Justice Rizvi then said that all the witnesses were police officers. "The witnesses can also be policemen, but the evidence should be shared," said Justice Hilali. At this point, Justice Rizvi said the accused were also charged for firing, however, no weapon was recovered and no policemen were injured. To this, Justice Mandokhail said that the investigating officer was making up stories.

He then added that the authorities concerned aren't catching the "real terrorists" but are after those who took out a political rally. At this, the investigation officer said that the accused attacked the sensitive institutions after the arrest of their leader. Punjab government's counsel claimed that molotov cocktails were recovered from their possession and they also resorted to firing. "A head constable of Special Branch Lahore is also a witness," he added. "Should the former prime minister be considered a traitor on the statement of a head constable?" questioned Justice Mandokhail. Justice Rizvi then said that there was no evidence except the testimonies of policemen. Justice Hilali highlighted that there is no mention of the attack on the ISI office in the FIR. At this point, Justice Rizvi asked about the evidence against the accused and if they were identified from CCTV cameras. To this, the IO said that the CCTV cameras were damaged by the protestors. "This means there is no evidence against the accused but only police statements," said Justice Mandokhail. He questioned how did taking out rallies become terrorism.

Gaza: Death toll surges to 31,923

NEWS DESK

GAZA: The health ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday that the Israeli occupation army committed 10 massacres in different areas of the Gaza Strip during the past 24 hours, killing at least 104 civilians and injuring over 162 others, while a large number of victims are still under the rubble of bombed buildings or lying on roads. In a statement, the health ministry explained that the Israeli army killed and injured hundreds of civilians in different areas of Gaza during the past 24 hours, but only 104 martyrs and 162 wounded citizens were transported to hospitals. The health ministry added that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardment and shooting attacks, which started on October 7, climbed to 31,923 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 74,096 people. As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 166 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes, shelter centers and aid convoys, and massacre more civilians, mostly children

The health ministry added that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardment and shooting attacks, which started on October 7, climbed to 31,923 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 74,096 people

and women. A reporter for the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, killing and injuring hundreds of citizens. According to media sources, four civilians were martyred following an Israeli attack on a house belonging to the family of Issa in Thabet Zarie neighborhood, east of Rafah in southern Gaza, while two martyrs were evacuated from a street near Dar as-Salam Hospital in the north of Bani Suheila town in Khan Yunis. Local sources reported that director of the emergency committee Amjad Hat-hat was among the victims who were bombed at the Kuwait rotary in Gaza City as he was participating in the efforts to secure the delivery of aid to civilians. 24 civilians were also massacred and dozens were injured when the Israeli army bombed at dawn the refugee camps of Bureij and Nuseirat in central Gaza. Meanwhile, the Israeli army bombed an apartment building in the west of Gaza City and al-Daraj neighborhood in the east of the city, killing and injuring dozens of civilians. Two patients were also pronounced dead at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah after the facility ran out of oxygen supplies and fuel for power generators.

Khawaja Asif hopes for reconciliation with PTI

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Defense and Aviation Khawaja Asif Wednesday expressed his hopes for reconciliation with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and mustering support for privatization from Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Addressing the media outside the Parliament House, Kh Asif emphasized the importance of reconciliation in the overall situation of the country, stating that it is a sign of a good Pakistani. He lamented the burden imposed on the people by 24 types of taxes in electricity and gas bills, stressing that in principle, there should not be any such burdens. "We have imposed 24 types of taxes which have nothing to do with electricity or gas," stated Asif, highlighting the issue of tax evasion amounting to thousands of billions of rupees. He further pointed out that it's not the common poor man who steals, but rather the upper-middle class or above. Asif also drew attention to the theft of electricity and gas worth billions of rupees, stating that millions of people are being deprived of their rights due to such practices. He specifically mentioned the staggering amount stolen through cigarette taxes, amounting to 10 billion dollars.

Pak needs 'economic long march'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal has said that the country needed an 'Economic Long March' to move on a consistent path of development and prosperity. He urged opposition parties to play a positive role in Parliament so that the country could move forward to achieve the goal of economic stability effectively. He criticized a political party for making failed attempts to dent the country's talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), terming it 'Economic Terrorism.' Ahsan Iqbal was of the view that the financial matters of the country could not be sustained on loans permanently and stressed the need to increase production capacity, suggesting imposing an export emergency in the country. Last year, the Ministry of Planning set up a 5-Es framework consisting of Export, Energy, Equity, E-Pakistan and Environment, under which a comprehensive plan had been prepared for the implementation of the framework and suggestions from all the ministries in this regard to be sought.

Delhi world's 'most polluted' capital city

NEW DELHI: Delhi struggles with bad air round the year Delhi was the most polluted capital city in the world in 2023, a Swiss-based air-quality monitoring group has found. India, of which Delhi is the capital, was also ranked as the world's third-most polluted country after neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan, IQAir said. The country's air has worsened since 2022, when it was the eighth most polluted country, it added. Air pollution is a serious problem in several Indian cities. Experts say that rapid industrialisation coupled with weak enforcement of environmental laws have played a role in increasing pollution in the country. India has seen a lot of development in the past few decades, but poor industrial regulation means that factories do not follow pollution-control measures. Rapid construction has also contributed to rising levels of pollution. The report by IQAir said that India's average level of PM2.5 - fine particulate matter that can clog lungs and cause a host of diseases - was 54.4 micrograms per cubic metre. Globally, air that has 12 to 15 micrograms per cubic metre of PM2.5 is considered safe to breathe, while air with values above 35 micrograms per cubic metre is considered unhealthy. - Agencies

Finance Minister for strengthening economic ties with UAE

KHAYAM ABBASI



The Ambassador of UAE appreciated the measures being taken by the government to bring reforms in various sectors of the economy

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Pakistan, H.E. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salim Alzaabi, called on Minister for Finance & Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division today, to discuss matters regarding bilateral relations and economic cooperation between Pakistan and the UAE. Ambassador of UAE, H.E. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salim Alzaabi, extended felicitations to Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb upon his appointment as Minister for Finance and Revenue and expressed confidence towards further strengthening of economic ties between the two countries. Minister for Finance & Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, expressed sincere appreciation for the long-standing brotherly relations between Pakistan and the UAE, which are deeply rooted in shared history, culture, and faith. He emphasized the cherished nature of these traditional and longstanding relations. The Minister discussed the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in Pakistan, aimed at attracting investments from friendly countries in various sectors and highlighted the progress made with the government's privatization program, specifically mentioning the privatization of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). The Ambassador of UAE appreciated the measures being taken by the government to bring reforms in various sectors of the economy. Concluding the meeting, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing economic cooperation between Pakistan and the UAE.

Turkish ambassador calls on Finance Minister

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Dr. Mehmet Pacaci, called on Minister for Finance & Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division today, to discuss matters of mutual interest and further strengthening the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Türkiye. Ambassador of Türkiye, H.E. Dr. Mehmet Pacaci, extended felicitations to Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb upon his appointment as Minister for Finance and Revenue and expressed confidence towards further strengthening of economic ties between the two countries. Minister for Finance & Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, expressed sincere acknowledgment of the brotherly relations between Pakistan and Türkiye, which are deeply rooted in shared common faith, history, and cultural affinities. Highlighting the excellent political and social relations between the two countries, Minister Aurangzeb emphasized the necessity of translating these relations into robust economic and commercial collaboration to their full potential. He welcomed the signing of the Trade in Goods Agreement/Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) on 12 August 2022, as a positive step towards achieving the bilateral trade target of USD 5 billion in the medium term.