



Islamabad POST

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Zelensky urges air defenses against Russian Kyiv strikes

Detailed News On Page-07

Subianto wins Indonesia's presidency

Detailed News On Page-08



Murray beats dizzy Berrettini at Miami Open

Detailed News On Page-06



To fix ailing economy

Civil-military brass pledges 'tough decisions'

The pledge was expressed at an apex committee meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) – a civil-military forum established to attract foreign investment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The civil-military leadership has yet again reiterated their resolve to ensure the continuation of policies and take tough decisions to pull the country out of the economic crisis. The pledge was expressed at an apex committee meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) – a civil-military forum established to attract foreign investment. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and attended by former caretaker PM Anwaar Ul Haq Kakar, Army Chief General Asim Munir, members of outgoing and incoming federal cabinet, provincial chief ministers, and high-level government officials, according to an official statement issued following the huddle.

The apex committee underscored the need of continuing a consensual approach under SIFC to navigate the myriad of challenges being faced by the country. The civil-military body also vowed to ensure continuation of policies and take tough decisions in the larger interest of the country by setting correct economic priorities. Army Chief Gen Munir reassured the fullest support of Pakistan Armed Forces to backstop the economic initiatives of the government and ensured the provision of safe, secure and conducive environment to nurture the country's true economic potential, according to the communiqué. PM Shehbaz said that SIFC is the way forward under the challenging times and an iron resolve is needed to serve the country like never before. He urged the federal cabinet to join hands, keep political differences aside, and work as a cohesive team to keep the momentum of economic stability.

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'Targeting Gwadar aims to disrupt economic progress'

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif underscored that those who targeted the peace of Gwadar, Balochistan, aimed to disrupt Pakistan's economic progress and cause suffering to its people. He expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the security forces for their successful thwarting of the attack on Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) Complex. In a statement, he highlighted the exceptional bravery and professional prowess displayed by security forces in confronting attackers, emphasizing that such actions deserve the utmost praise. The Prime Minister conveyed deep respect for the security forces personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice during the operation against terrorists. He emphasized that these courageous individuals, who laid down their lives in the battle against terrorism, are upholding the integrity of Pakistan.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in a group photo with Chief Ministers of all the provinces. – DNA

Defence minister clarifies Islamabad not seeking armed conflict with Kabul

We cannot continue like this," he said, adding that Islamabad will be forced to retaliate if the TTP continues its attacks

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Days after Pakistan hit outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targets inside Afghanistan, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said that Islamabad does not want any "armed conflict" with Kabul. "Force is the last resort. We do not want to have an armed conflict with Afghanistan," Asif said while speaking to an American media outlet. The defence minister's remarks come as the neighbouring countries have experienced a spike in their already tense bilateral relations over increasing terrorist attacks by the TTP and other banned outfits, which are based in Afghanistan, inside Pakistani territory. On Monday, Pakistan carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) targeting TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group which is responsible for the March 16

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Imran concerned over worsening ties with Kabul

ADIL SHAHEEN

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan conveyed party founder Imran Khan's reservations about the deteriorating ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, lamenting "bad" foreign policy of government. The new PTI chairman, who was elected both times when the party held its highly contested intra-party polls, lamented the worsening of relations between

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APNS welcomes Mubashir Hasan as PIO

Hoped relation with media would be further strengthened



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The APNS welcomes and congratulates Mr. Mubashir Hasan on his appointment for the second term as Principal Information Officer (PIO). The APNS is confident that during his present tenure the problems of the print media would be addressed specially the distribution of ads on merit, timely clearance of dues

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Security forces gun down terrorist in Panjgur IBO

During the IBO, the troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in Balochistan's Panjgur district during which one terrorist was killed while two others sustained injuries, the military's media wing said in a statement issued on Thursday. As per the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the operation was conducted on

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Briefs

New Delhi CM Kejriwal arrested

Enforcement Directorate arrested him on liquor policy case

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI: Arvind Kejriwal LIVE Updates: A 12-member team of the Enforcement Directorate reached Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence with a search warrant in the excise policy case. The Delhi Chief Minister has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate. Mr Kejriwal has become the first sitting chief minister to be arrested in the history of Independent India and his party has said he will continue to hold the post. The Enforcement Directorate's action comes hours after the Delhi High Court refused to grant protection from arrest to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the liquor policy case.

Elahi broke four ribs in Adiala

This revelation came through a report submitted by the superintendent of Adiala

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The detailed medical report shedding light on PTI President Parvez Elahi's injuries sustained after a fall in Adiala Jail emerged on Thursday. According to the report, Elahi suffered four broken ribs as a result of the incident, which occurred in the jail's washroom. X-rays conducted within the jail premises confirmed the fractures. The incident was brought to light earlier in an anti-corruption court on Tuesday, where it was disclosed that the former Punjab chief minister had fallen in the jail's bathroom on March 17, resulting in a minor fracture.

Israel's war on Gaza

US unveils draft UN resolution seeking ceasefire

That alternative, focusing on support for a six-week truce in exchange for the release of hostages, had little chance winning approval

NEWS DESK

JEDDAH: The United States has circulated a draft UN Security Council resolution calling for an "immediate ceasefire linked to the release of hostages" in the Gaza Strip, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. The diplomat made his announcement while on a tour of the Middle East that will include a stop in Israel. Key Israel backer the United States has vetoed previous UN Security Council votes on the nearly six-month war, objecting as recently as in February to the use of the term "immediate" in a draft submitted by Algeria. In recent weeks, however, Washington has upped the pressure on its ally, while insisting that Hamas must immediately release the hostages seized by

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Canada confirms halting arms supply to Israel

FOREIGN DESK

OTTAWA: Canada will halt all arms shipments to Israel, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly's office confirmed Wednesday, a decision that has drawn the ire of Israeli leaders facing growing international scrutiny over the war in the Gaza Strip. The besieged Palestinian territory is facing a mounting humanitarian crisis, and months of

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Pakistan displeased with election-related comments in US Congress

Pak reaffirms commitment to Iran Pakistan gas pipeline project

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch Thursday said while Pakistan values its relationship with the United States, but there were several misunderstandings regarding Pakistan's election laws during the Congressional panel hearing a day earlier. "In the meeting of the American committee yesterday, there were several misunderstandings regarding Pakistani election laws," the spokesperson said during a FO's weekly press briefing today. A day earlier, Donald Lu, the US Assistant Secretary of State, appeared as a key witness at a hearing House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee titled 'Pakistan After the elections: Examining the future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US Pakistan relationship'. During the hearing, Lu called for an investigation into the electoral fraud claims, saying that the US is closely monitoring the probe into the rigging allegations. He also mentioned "undue restrictions on freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly" during the February 8 polls. Commenting on the matter pertaining to the sentencing of Dr Shakeel Afridi, the doctor who helped the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) locate Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, Baloch said Pakistan's stand on this issue is old. "He has been punished by a Pakistani court. Any exchange of prisoners is not discussed in media," she said.

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Sherman asks Lu to hear Imran at Adiala

DNA

WASHINGTON: US lawmaker and Congressman Brad Sherman has demanded US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Donald Lu meet with the incarcerated PTI founder at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail to hear his stance regarding his allegations against the US of ousting his government in 2022. Sherman's demand came during the hearing conducted by a subcommittee of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs that examined the future of democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan relationship, especially in the wake of general elections in Pakistan. During the Congressional hearing, when Sherman, who is also one of the committee members, asked Donald Lu what arrangements had been made regarding the sentence awarded to the PTI founder, he was told that the US had conveyed its reservations to the Pakistani authorities in this respect. Lu contended that he had no role in the ouster of the former Pakistani

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Business: BUSINESS CLASS PASSENGERS CAN ENJOY 2 BREAKFASTS FOR FREE IN A 5 STAR HOTEL.

9 Corona cases reported in KP

PESHAWAR : As many as nine cases of Coronavirus reported as Coronavirus once again started ringing the alarm bell, a report issued by the Health Department said here Thursday. According to the report issued here Thursday nine cases were reported in the province during one week. The health department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa conducted 79 Tests in the week time and among them six Coronavirus cases were reported in Peshawar and there were zero reports in Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Chitral Lower. However, three cases of Coronavirus were reported in Swat where they conducted 66 tests. The Health Department also issued prevention and control measures to all districts and people are advised to protect themselves from JN-1 by frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water and use of hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable. To opt for respiratory etiquettes through covering the mouth and nose while sneezing or coughing with the elbow, sick patients stay at home, rest and avoid crowds besides taking social distancing measures until recovery. — DNA

Secretary advocates climate change in curriculum

QUETTA : Secretary Forests Abdul Rauf Baloch on Thursday called for making subjects related to environment, climate change and protection of trees integral part of the national curriculum. "To save earth and protect environment, it is important to make climate change part of the curriculum so that our future generations understand the importance of forests and protect them," he said while addressing a seminar held at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University in connection with the World Forest Day. Secretary Forest noted that "This year, this day is being celebrated under the title of climate change. — APP

Ethiopian Airlines receives strong response in Pakistan

Ambassador highlighted the critical role being played by Ethiopia in "Look Africa and Engage Africa" policy by starting the Ethiopian Airlines operations in Karachi

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD : H.E. Jemal Bekir Abdula, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on Thursday visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and had a detailed discussion with its leadership on strengthening cooperation between trade bodies of the two countries. Upon his arrival at the ICCI, the ambassador was accorded warm welcome by the Islamabad Chamber's President H.E. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari and other office bearers of the chamber. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest including the needful initiatives for fostering business and trade connections between the two countries. On the occasion, the Ambassador highlighted the critical role being played by Ethiopia in "Look Africa and Engage Africa" policy by starting the Ethiopian Airlines operations in Karachi. "The Ethiopian Airlines in Pakistan is getting an overwhelming response and now we are working towards expansion of its operations to Islamabad and Lahore as well," the Ambassador noted.



He said steps were being taken to boost people-to-people and business-to-business relation between the two countries. "In the last one and half years, we have taken over 75-member business delegation to Ethi-

opia and facilitated arrival of 50-member trade delegation from Ethiopia in Pakistan," he said, adding the mainstay of the Ethiopian Embassy's endeavours was economic diplomacy that would ultimately connect the people of

two countries at grassroots level. He also announced to take another trade delegation to Ethiopia this year in May. H. E. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari lauded the Ambassador's role in bringing the people of two

nations close and called for the joint efforts to further strengthen the trade ties between the two countries. He assured the Ambassador of all-out support in mobilizing another trade delegation to Ethiopia this year

Pakistan stands united against Terrorism: Hashmi

ISLAMABAD : Khurshid Ahmed Hashmi, the central spokesperson for the Quaid-e-Azam Trust in Britain, stated that we are standing shoulder to shoulder with our armed forces in the war against terrorism, while strongly condemning the recent terrorist incidents in Waziristan and Gwadar. In a statement issued here yesterday, the central spokesperson for the Quaid-e-Azam Trust in Britain further said that the martyrs of our nation are the pride of our foreheads, and the nation is proud of the patriotic fervor shown by their families. The blood of our great martyrs will never go in vain, and these cowardly enemies of the state will face dire consequences for their heinous acts. They said that our armed forces are bravely confronting the highly organized proxy war, and by the grace of Allah, they will eradicate this cancer of terrorism. They further said that in this war against terrorism, the Overseas Pakistanis stand united alongside our courageous armed forces.—APP

World Poetry Day observed

DNA

ISLAMABAD : World Poetry Day was observed on March 21 across the globe including Pakistan to appreciate and support the poets and poetry around the world. World Poetry Day is an invitation to reflect on the power of language and the full development of each person's creative abilities. In her message on World Poetry Day, Chairperson Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) Dr. Najiba Arif said that poetry was a spiritual ability that harnesses the inner consciousness of an individual and making it more effective at both individual and social level. She said poetry is a platform for discovering the hidden possibilities of a person.

Naqvi orders crackdown against gas, electricity thefts

Minister gave instructions to the Agency to take strict legal action against those involved in electricity and gas thefts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday making a major decision, tasked Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to initiate a crackdown across the country against power and gas thieves. Chairing an important meeting at his office, the minister gave

instructions to the Agency to take strict legal action against those involved in electricity and gas thefts. The FIA officials informed the minister that special teams were already constituted to crack down on electricity and gas thieves on the past instructions given in the last meeting. Upon receiving a detailed report on Greece boat accident submitted by the

FIA officials, the minister directed that all the elements involved in this tragedy must be brought to justice. He also directed strict action against all the elements involved in human trafficking to curb this evil from the society. The minister also directed to further tighten the cordon against those involved in the Hundi/Hawala business.

Railways planning to run Special Trains on Eid

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan Railways is planning to run 'Eid Special Trains' on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr to cater to the rush and provide opportunities to celebrate the Islamic festival with their loved ones across the country. "The department has completed all the arrangements regarding Eid Special Trains to facilitate the passengers and the announcement would be made shortly," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. The official said that Pakistan Railways would not only advertise the schedule of the Eid Special Train in daily Urdu, and English newspapers but also disseminate it into social and electronic media. To celebrate Eid with their loved ones, he said the foreign nationals, students, government employees, and labours return home via trains, due to which, the department has run special trains every Eid. To a question, he said Pakistan Railways has earned Rs 55 billion in the first eight months of the current financial year 2023-24, despite facing a financial crisis due to floods in the monsoon season. During the first eight months of the last financial year (2022-23), the department earned Rs 37 billion, a historic increase in revenue during the same period of the current financial year (2023-24), he added. According to the data, he said that out of the revenue of Rs 55 billion, revenue was derived from passenger and freight trains while other sectors of the department also contributed to the total revenue. The department is expecting to generate revenues up to Rs 80 billion by the end of this financial year through the consistent efforts and hard work of the Railway workers, the official added. — DNA

Bugti elected as President PHF after congress vote of confidence



ARZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Tariq Hussain Masoori Bugti becomes elected president of Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) after getting vote of confidence here at the Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad on Thursday. Bugti, who was nominated by Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in his capacity as patron-in-

chief of PHF took the vote of confidence in Pakistan Hockey Federation Congress meeting and secured a total of 62 votes out of 93 who voted in favor of him. The representatives of Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) were also present in the PHF Congress. Speaking on the occasion, Tariq Bugti said he was grateful to Congress for showing confidence on him. I will inform the Prime Minister Sheh-

The representatives of PSB and POA were also present in the PHF Congress. Speaking on the occasion, Tariq Bugti said he was grateful to Congress for showing confidence on him

baz Sharif who is the Pattern Chief of Pakistan Hockey Federation about the development. Those trying to create a parallel federation will be questioned and would also be given a chance to straighten up their ways. The doors of the federation are open to everyone, he said. He was of the view that all PHF resources would be used for the promotion of the national game and a hockey tournament will be held in Quetta after Eid. The Congress session of Pakistan Hockey Federation was presided by PHF Chief Election Commissioner Chaudhry Riaz. A large number of other stakeholders including the four provinces participated in the congress meeting.

PRCS Chairman, Belgium envoy collaborate on humanitarian efforts

FAISAL SHEIKH


ISLAMABAD : The Chairman Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS), Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, held a significant meeting with the Ambassador of Belgium to Pakistan, Mr. Charles DELOGNE, at the Embassy of Belgium here on Thursday. This meeting marked a pivotal moment in the ongoing collaboration between Pakistan and Belgium in humanitarian efforts. The meeting provided a platform for both parties to deliberate on matters of mutual interest, particularly focusing on humanitarian aid and disaster management. Chairman Laghari expressed gratitude for Belgium's consistent support towards humanitarian efforts in Pakistan, highlighting the substantial partnership between the

two nations in addressing humanitarian challenges. During the discussions, Chairman Laghari provided insights into the current initiatives and prospective projects undertaken by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society, emphasizing the organization's dedication to serving vulnerable communities nationwide. He stressed the significance of international cooperation

and solidarity in effectively addressing humanitarian crises. Chairman Laghari specifically highlighted PRCS's anticipation of support from the Government of Belgium, particularly in the recovery phase following the devastating Monsoon 2022 floods. He also expressed a strong desire to bolster cooperation, particularly with the Belgium government and the

Belgium Red Cross, aiming to enhance collaboration in alleviating the suffering of vulnerable communities in Pakistan. During this event, Chairman Laghari invited Ambassador DELOGNE to visit the PRCS National Headquarters. Ambassador DELOGNE expressed gratitude to Chairman PRCS for the comprehensive information and insights provided regarding disaster management during the floods, noting the impressive execution. He praised the Pakistan Red Crescent Society for its relentless efforts, led by Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, in delivering assistance to those in need, especially during times of crisis. He recognized the indispensable role of humanitarian organizations like PRCS in mitigating human suffering and promoting resilience within communities.





PAKISTAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA REGULATORY AUTHORITY

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR INTERNET PROTOCOL TELEVISION (IPTV) DISTRIBUTION SERVICE LICENCE (FOR A PERIOD OF 10 YEARS)

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) invites applications under Section 19 of the PEMRA Ordinance 2002 (as amended by PEMRA Amendment Act 2023) from the companies registered with SECP interested in establishing & operating internet protocol television (IPTV) distribution service license meeting the eligibility criteria requirements in various zones and sub-zone/district/cities as laid down in PEMRA IPTV (Licensing and Operations) Regulation-2023.

Detail of the zones: Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Gujranwala, Karachi, Central, Faisalabad, Multan, Southern-I, Southern-II, Northern-1, Northern-II, Hazara, Western, Gilgit-Baltistan. The application form along with details of sub-zones/districts/cities where IPTV licenses are to be awarded through bidding and eligibility criteria, base price, bidding procedure, number of licenses etc. can be downloaded from the link <http://pemra.gov.pk/iptv.php>. A separate application is to be submitted for each zone and or sub-zone/district/cities.

The applicant company shall submit an application along with processing fee of **Rs. 50,000/-** (non-refundable) in the form of Demand Draft or Pay Order drawn in favor of PEMRA. A pre-bid conference/meeting is also scheduled at **11:00 am on 22nd April, 2024** at PEMRA HQs, Islamabad to educate the interested applicants and those who choose to attend about the bidding procedure and address the relevant questions/queries (if any). Interested companies/applicants may attend the pre-bid conference/meeting with prior registration at the link <https://bit.ly/iptvprebid> before **21st April, 2024**.

Only shortlisted firm/companies fulfilling the eligibility criteria shall be invited to participate in the bidding process for the award of IPTV licence at a date and time to be communicated later given by the Authority. Bidding will be held in the respective provincial HQ's for ease of interested applicants and general public. A company already holding an IPTV license for a particular zone will not be eligible for another license in the same zone and sub-zone/city/district.

The complete applications along with required documents must reach the address given below before close of office hours (i.e. 05:00 PM.) on **30th April, 2024**. The submission of applications or shortlisting shall not establish any right or claim of any applicant company whatsoever for grant of IPTV licence. The Authority reserves the right to accept or reject all or any application by recording reason in writing in the light of PEMRA laws. Incomplete applications and those received after the deadline will not be entertained and will be out rightly rejected.

Director General Licensing (IPTV/LRP)
PEMRA Headquarters
4th Floor, Mauve Area, G-8/1, Islamabad
Phone Nos. 051-9107162 & 051-9107158.

PID(1)5668/23

National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

March 01/Bosnia
National Day

March 03/Bulgaria
National Day

March 06/ Ghana
Independence Day

March 12 /Mauritius
National Day

March 17/Ireland
St. Patricks Day

March 20/Tunisia
Independence Day

March 21/Namibia
National Day

March 25/Greece
National Day

March 26/Bangladesh
National Day

March 27/Myanmar
Armed Forces Day

Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
Marriott.....051- 2826121
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Khazar Farhadov of Azerbaijan, along with his wife, graciously distributed essential food items among the underprivileged individuals at the Sundas Foundation. It's heartening to note that the Embassy of Azerbaijan consistently extends support by providing Ramadan packages annually to those in need in Pakistan. This act of kindness underscores the strong bond between Azerbaijan and Pakistan, characterized by mutual assistance, particularly during challenging times. Such gestures exemplify the spirit of solidarity and cooperation between our nations.—DNA

Int'l Day of Forests

PM Shehbaz calls for Green Pakistan initiative

He said Pakistan joined the global community in commemorating the International Day of Forests 2024. "This year's theme 'Forests and Innovations: New solutions for a better world,' highlights the need to harness technological innovations to address the growing threats to our forests"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday called upon the provincial governments, civil society and all the citizens to become partners of the government's quest for Green Pakistan. "Today is about investing in our future. I urge the nation to synergize their efforts in safeguarding this invaluable resource and ensure its effective stewardship for

our next generation," he said in a message on observance of International Day of Forests 2024. He said Pakistan joined the global community in commemorating the International Day of Forests 2024. "This year's theme 'Forests and Innovations: New solutions for a better world,' highlights the need to harness technological innovations to address the growing threats to our forests." The prime minister pointed out innovations could help sustainably restoring, protecting, managing, and using

the forests in the most efficient manner by hampering risks of deforestation, habitat degradation, and climate change. He said Pakistan's total area under forest cover was less than 5 percent, and around 1.5 percent of these forests were lost every year which had profound impacts on Pakistan's biodiversity, environment and agriculture. Being one of the most climate-impacted countries in the world, he said climate change events were becoming more frequent and massively

devastating for Pakistan, pointing to the urgent need to conserve our indigenous forests. "This has become critical to our survival as a nation." "Our government is embarking on the next phase of our ambitious Green Pakistan Initiative which was first launched by PMLN-led government in 2016 to improve forest cover and concerted efforts were made for conservation of biodiversity in Pakistan," he said adding in its next phase, the Green Pakistan Initiative aims to improve the forest cover, pre-

serve wildlife habitats and help carbon sequestration. "Given the important role that forests play in the environment, let us resolve to protect and conserve them." PM Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed the government's firm commitment to undertake all necessary steps to preserve and improve forest cover in Pakistan. "We will ensure that our crucial forest ecosystems all over Pakistan are protected as they are the lifeline of livelihood and environmental well-being of our nation," he remarked.

Pakistan Day sales compel buyers to shop for Eid-ul-Fitr

ISLAMABAD: With only a day in the celebrations of Pakistan Day, famous brands in the federal capital have started offering sales on dresses, shoes and other accessories to give an opportunity to the buyers for having good stock of required stuff at the advent of summer season. The trend of online shopping from the official websites of the famous brands is already in practice by a large number of people especially women in capital city while visiting the shops physically are still preferred by majority of the buyers. Sania Mushtaq, a house wife said, "I have visited different brands outlets to complete Eid shopping for my family taking advantage of this sale at the start of the summer season". "The online shopping facility offered by different brands, shopping marts and food outlets have made the lives of citizens quite easier but still visiting markets for buying clothes and shoes is a better option in terms of checking the sizes and quality of dresses and shoes, she said. Amina Usman, a government employee said "visiting markets for Eid shopping is a difficult task during the month of Ramadan however the attracting Resolution Day sales by brands offering up to flat 30 has compelled public to rush to the markets". "I always prefer visiting markets myself to shop for my family for any occasion instead of online shopping as visiting markets again and again for changing he purchased items is very annoying for me", she said. It has become a common practice for the brands, eateries and even the cab-hailing and salon services to offer good discounts on different occasions including New Year, Christmas, Independence Day, Pakistan Day, Eid festivals and Holy month of Ramadan etc. "The changing weather is always a time when we need to shop clothes, shoes and other accessories for ourselves and kids for the whole upcoming season and sale on such occasions are perfect time to do so", Shahid Khan, a businessman said. It is a good tradition that not only famous brands are offering discounts on dresses and shoes but also the famous online retailers of all the home, electronics and kitchen accessories are offering good discounts ahead of Pakistan Day, he observed.—DNA

Bilawal expresses sorrow

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has expressed sorrow over the loss of precious lives in the tragic incident at a coal mine near Harnai, Balochistan the another day. According to a press release issued from Bilawal House, Bilawal Bhutto PPP stand with the affected families in this difficult time and pray for their patience. He emphasized the urgent need for better safety measures in the coal mining industry and stressed that the protection and welfare of workers should always be prioritized. Bilawal Bhutto urged the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident and ensure strict enforcement of safety protocols in all coal mines.—APP

IFA Ramzan Sweep: Rs 178,000 fine imposed

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Director of Operations for the Islamabad Food Authority (IFA), Dr. Tahira Saddique on Thursday said that the Food Safety Teams had conducted a major operation and imposed fines totaling 178,000 rupees along with disposing of 350 kilograms of defective material. Talking to APP, she said that a robust initiative by the Islamabad Food Authority was in full swing, aimed at ensuring the safety of food throughout the capital city. In a recent operation, conducted at Iftar time, FSTs inspected 72 areas including Main Soha inn, Ghauri Town phase 4C, Ghauri Town phase 5B, F-8/2 Islamabad, G-10 Markaz, G-11 Markaz, Bani Stop, Golra Road, F-13, Islamabad, Khatam e Nabowa Chowk, Golra Road, E-13, Islamabad, Mehar Ali Chowk, Zaman Market, Tuesday Bazaar I-9/4 Islamabad respectively. During the inspection, Tahira said that the authorities issued 21 warning notices and provided essential instructions to 40 establishments to diligently adhere to safety protocols. Furthermore, swift action was taken against a bakery for substandard sanitation practices, resulting in its immediate closure. She said that the Islamabad Food Authority's proactive measures included the issuance of fines totaling Rs 178,000 to ten non-compliant vendors.—DNA

Pakistan's exports to China up nearly 5% in Jan-Feb 2024

ISLAMABAD: In January-February 2024, Pakistan's exports to China exceeded \$468 million, according to the data from the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), said Ghulam Qadir, Investment and Trade Counsellor of the Embassy of Pakistan in China. Ghulam Qadir told China Economic Net that Pakistan's exports to China increased by 4.96% year-on-year in January-February 2024, according to the GACC figures received by Pakistan. Pakistan's exports stood at \$468.47 million in the first two months of 2024, up nearly 5 percent from \$446.31 million in the same months of the previous year. He mentioned that there is a high demand for Pakistani textiles, leather products, seafood, and agricultural products in China, leading Pakistani exporters to capitalize on this opportunity to boost their exports to China.—APP

Chinese Company to invest in manufacturing facilities

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Shenzhen Herofun Bio Tech Co. Ltd. from China has expressed interest in investing in Punjab across various sectors, particularly in setting up manufacturing facilities for mobile devices, laptops, and tablets. According to Gwadar Pro, a delegation from the Chinese company visited Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT) and had a productive session with Dr. Suhail Saleem, Director General Investment and Trade and Deputy Manager Talha Tariq. Their visit aimed to explore potential investment opportunities for establishing mobile device, laptop, and tablet manufacturing facilities near Lahore. The meeting concluded on a positive note that the Chinese group will submit a formal proposal while PBIT committed to providing necessary support and facilitation throughout the process, the report added.—APP

Easypaisa and Unilever's Knorr Join Hands

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark collaboration, easypaisa, Pakistan's leading digital financial services platform, and Knorr, Unilever's biggest food brand, have joined forces to revolutionize the digital payments landscape. This strategic partnership represents a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to modernize and streamline the value chain for sampling initiatives, marking a significant step forward in leveraging technology to enhance convenience, accessibility, and affordability in digital payments.—APP

Belarus President to visit Pakistan: envoy

Belarus is an important country in Eastern Europe with which FTA is inevitable: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Belarus to Pakistan, Andrei METELITSA has said that the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko will soon visit Pakistan during which both the countries will ink several trade and economic agreements to strengthen the existing partnership. He said that the existing bilateral trade volume between Pakistan and Belarus is \$60 million, while the actual potential is much more than that. The Ambassador said this while talking at Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) at the invitation of President ICCI, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari. He said that Belarus is exporting heavy machinery along with Fertilizers, Agriculture equipment, Synthetic Filament Tow, Chemicals, malt extract etc. to Pakistan whereas importing textiles, rice, Citrus, leather apparel, leather footwear

and medical instruments. The envoy went on to say that he is well aware of the fact that Chamber Houses always play an important

role in promotion of ties among the countries and that his Embassy will be ready to cooperate with Islamabad Chamber of Com-

merce and Industry in identifying Belarusian and Pakistani businessmen with a coinciding interest and connectivity. On this occasion,

President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that Belarus is an important country of East-

ern Europe with which Pakistan's Free Trade Agreement is inevitable and that exchange of business delegations is needed to explore the untapped potential of both the countries. He said that in this regard, he will take the initiative to lead a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry to Belarus. Meanwhile, Secretary General of United Business Group, Zafar Bakhtawari and Chairman Founder Group, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Khalid Iqbal Malik, while discussing the nature and strength of economic relations between Pakistan and Belarus, said that private sectors of both the countries will have to come forward to strengthen trade ties. ICCI executive and representative of Belarus Chamber of Commerce and Industry Jurabek Kirgizbekov also shared his experiences for the needful. Chairman ICCI Khalid Iqbal Malik and Executive members Sheikh Mohammad Ejaz, Ch. Maqsood Tabish, Akhtar Hussain were also present in the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari presenting shield to Ambassador of Belarus H.E. Andrei METELITSA.

Briefs

Hustle, bustle
witnessing
in markets
during holy
Ramazan

ISLAMABAD: The various markets during holy month of Ramazan witnessing a large turnout of shoppers, where people are taking advantage of ongoing offers by prominent retailers especially in the food sector as they are shopping for much-needed grocery items to prepare the iftar fast-breaking meal. Shoppers in large are flocking to different markets and shopping malls from Sehri to Iftar enthusiastically to buy their chosen food products, said a report aired by a Private news channel. A vendor said that the top-selling items in the month of Ramazan are khajla, pheni and chickpeas as people prefer to eat these in sehri and iftar. A heavy rush of the faithful was witnessed in the mosques and markets during Iftar and Sehri, said an imam of a mosque, adding, special prayers were also offered for the prosperity and integrity of the country and the well-being of the people. The roads leading to popular markets and shopping malls are already jammed during the evening, said a traffic warden. A worker in a restaurant said that most of the hotels and restaurants become lively with customers after midnight as people are seen to be flocked in restaurants and hotels to enjoy the Ramazan meals. The trend of arranging Iftar and Sehri meals for friends and family at restaurants also become a trend as almost every restaurant and food chain all across the country is offering different deals at discounted rates during the holy month of Ramazan.—APP

University
takes action
against
harassment
cases

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In response to an incident of harassment involving a female student, the administration of Khyber Medical University has taken decisive action by dismissing a grade 18 officer from his position and demoting another staff member of grade 17. The university administration said the implementation of the Higher Education Commission's policy aimed at preventing incidents of harassment on campus was the basis for their actions. Dr. Brikhanah Jameel, Chairperson of the Harassment Cell at the university, disclosed that four cases of harassment had been reported at Khyber Medical University. Subsequent investigations and substantiated allegations led to the termination of employment for one grade 18 officer and the demotion of another employee of grade 17. The university administration has recommended stringent penalties for those found in violation of the policy. These penalties include suspension, dismissal, fines, withholding of degrees, and even the revocation of professional licenses. The proactive measures taken by Khyber Medical University underscore its commitment to ensuring a safe and conducive environment for all students and staff members.

Samson's Group, CDA join
hands for tree plantation drive

The event brought together stakeholders, environmentalists, and community members to plant trees and reaffirm their commitment to safeguarding forests and biodiversity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Samson's Group of Companies launches 'Samson's Million Tree Plantation Drive 2024', in collaboration with CDA, aiming to restore landscapes and combat climate change in Pakistan. The inauguration was held on the International Day of Forests, March 21st, 2024, at F-9 Park, Islamabad. Mr. Sami-ur-Rehman, Chairman of Samson's Group of Companies, Barrister Mansoor Shah, Chief of Corporate Affairs Samson's, Mr. Khazar Farhadov Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, Mr. Qaiser Khattak, Director CDA & Mr. Yaqub Ali, Deputy Inspector General Forests & Climate Change with other stakeholders inaugurated the ceremony by planting a tree on Jinnah Avenue Green Belt. Barrister Mansoor Shah, Chief Corporate Affairs, Samson's Group of Companies, emphasized the importance of tree planting and expressed gratitude to the CDA and all stakeholders, reaffirming the organization's commitment to environmental sustainability. We aim to plant over 1 million trees across Pakistan. Already we have planted 4000 trees in Phase 1 of our drive. It's Samson's commitment to sustainability, combating climate change, and making a more sustainable future. In light of the effects of climate change, it is the national responsibility of every citizen to work towards a greener Pakistan. Our strategy aims to help restore forests and protect natural habitats while promoting sustainable livelihoods. Mr. Qaiser Khattak, Director CDA praised the initiative by



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov along with CDA officials and officials of the SAMSON group planting a tree in the F 9 Park. The Samson group has planned to plant one million trees during its ongoing campaign of tree plantation. The tree plantation coincided with the International Day of Forests.—DNA

Samson's Group of Companies, restoring the role of trees in pollution elimination and the importance of emphasizing tree plantation in the country. Mr. Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan on the occasion highlighted the significance of initiatives like the Samsons Plantation Drive in promoting environmental sustainability and combating climate change. He emphasized the importance of collective action in preserving and

restoring forest ecosystems for the well-being of present and future generations. Mr. Yaqub Ali, Deputy Inspector General of Forests & Climate Change emphasized the crucial role of initiatives such as the Samsons Plantation Drive in promoting environmental conservation and combating climate change. He highlighted the importance of concerted efforts in reforestation and sustainable land management to mitigate the adverse effects

of deforestation and habitat loss. This event holds particular significance as it coincides with the International Day of Forests. As part of Samson's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments, tree planting activities were conducted to promote and support afforestation, with the goal of planting 1 million trees in Pakistan. Over 200 individuals, including diplomats from various countries, civil services officers,

members of civil society, and environmental enthusiasts, planted more than 4,000 saplings. The event showcased a collective dedication to enhancing the environment through tree-planting efforts, underscoring the global importance of the initiative. This activity was attended by the employees of Samson's Group of Companies. By actively encouraging employee involvement, Samson aims to inspire positive change in

communities and foster a philanthropy-driven culture. The event brought together stakeholders, environmentalists, and community members to plant trees and reaffirm their commitment to safeguarding forests and biodiversity. As the world observes the International Day of Forests, the Samsons Plantation Drive stands as a testament to the collective resolve to address environmental challenges and build a more sustainable future.

Pak urges justice for
Palestinians at Nowruz advent

Quoting the renowned Pakistani poet, Nasir Kazmi, Ambassador Akram his words captured the spirit of Nowruz, describing it as a festival of hope, joy, and blessings. He underscored the universal language of Nowruz, shared by diverse communities across Asia and Europe, uniting them through art, music, literature, and customs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Highlighting the world's pressing challenges of conflict and war, poverty, inequality, religious intolerance, and climate change, Pakistan called for justice for Palestinians' suffering in war-ravaged Gaza. Speaking at a special ceremony held at the UN headquarters in New York to celebrate the International Day of Nowruz, Ambassador Munir Akram said Nowruz isn't just about celebration; it's a time for reflection. "On this occasion, let's also pause to remember our brothers and sisters in Palestine, enduring ongoing tragedy and strife, as we strive for peace and justice for all, the Pakistani envoy added. The event was sponsored by Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Referring to the essence of Nowruz as a sym-

bol of nature's renewal and the resilience of the human spirit, he emphasized its importance as a moment for forgiveness, fresh beginnings, and embracing one another. Quoting the renowned Pakistani poet, Nasir Kazmi, Ambassador Akram his words captured the spirit of Nowruz, describing it as a festival of hope, joy, and blessings. He underscored the universal language of Nowruz, shared by diverse communities across Asia and Europe, uniting them through art, music, literature, and customs. In this regard, Ambassador Akram also quoted the Pakistan Prime Minister's message, extending greetings to those observing Nowruz. The Prime Minister, in his message, highlighted Nowruz as an opportunity to promote cultural synergies, unity, and inclusivity, thanking the Nowruz observing communities for their contributions towards building a better Pakistan. Reflecting on Pakistan's rich cultural

heritage, Ambassador Akram emphasized the deep-rooted connection between Nowruz and the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. He noted the significance of Nowruz, known as "Baharan" in Pakistan, particularly in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, where communities come together to celebrate. Ambassador Akram stressed Pakistan's commitment to fostering peace, solidarity, and reconciliation through the celebration of Nowruz. By cherishing Nowruz as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Pakistan reaffirmed its dedication to promoting values that transcend differences and foster harmony within and beyond its borders. Ambassador Akram concluded with an excerpt from the poem "Nowruz" by renowned Pakistani poet, Parveen Shakir, encapsulating the anticipation and hope associated with the arrival of spring.

Educational,
housing
projects
launched

ISLAMABAD: The Workers Welfare Fund (WWF) Balochistan has launched a series of welfare projects worth Rs 1.8 million to enhance living standards and educational opportunities for mine and industrial registered workers across the region. An official source told APP, the cornerstone of these projects was the establishment of a Girls High School with Staff Residences in Muslim Bagh, Balochistan, designed to provide quality education to the children of 5,605 mine and industrial workers, symbolizing a substantial leap towards gender inclusivity and educational accessibility in the area. Constructed over 63,000 square feet and with an investment of Rs.700 Million, the school and residences represent a beacon of hope for the future generation of Balochistan. SAPM Malik stressed ensuring that the project is completed within 24 months. He said that the former government also laid the foundation stone for 100 worker residence quarters in Muslim Bagh. This housing project, covering 5 acres and costing an estimated Rs.900 Million, will provide secure and comfortable homes for 100 families, directly tackling the housing shortage that plagues the workers' community. The project is set to be completed within 24 months.—APP

Pakistan Special Education
Initiative launched

ISLAMABAD: A UK-based organization has launched the Pakistan Special Education Initiative (PSEI) to support children with disabilities in accessing quality mainstream education and achieving important life milestones. PSEI, native to the UK's Education, Health, and Care Plan, aims to develop a screening system, provide resources for teachers to support students with special needs better, establish quality standards and training for school staff, and design a tailored Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) curriculum. Founded and funded by the CareTech Foundation, PSEI addresses the significant challenge in Pakistan, where an estimated 1 in 4 people face mental health or disability-related issues. With 60% of Pakistanis under 35, there's a growing need for mental health and SEND support in schools. Currently, many schools lack the expertise to properly support students with disabilities appropriately, leading to limited admissions and insufficient support. Partnering with CareTech Holdings Ltd., a leading social care provider in the UK and Middle East, PSEI has initially engaged five Pakistani schools to collaborate with five UK schools, facilitating knowledge exchange and access to specialist training resources. PSEI will introduce screening tools to identify children with SEND, offering tailored learning pathways and training for assessors. With an advisory board of local disability leaders and dedicated program management, PSEI is poised to make a significant impact. With the additional help of the COSARAF Foundation and five local schools, the Initiative seeks to empower a generation of young Pakistanis through SEND-confident and SEND-competent teachers. CEO Jonathan Freeman, MBE, emphasizes the Initiative's transformative potential and calls for local support to ensure its success.—DNA



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Potential for furthering Pak, Uzbekistan discussed

Ambassador Khalid Usman Qaiser, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Tajikistan discussed the current state of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, acknowledging challenges such as banking issues, air connectivity

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies organized a webinar titled "Connectivity between Pakistan and Uzbekistan: History, Prospects and Challenges" featuring distinguished speakers discussing various aspects of the relationship between Pakistan and Uzbekistan. Dr. Adam Saud, Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Science at Bahria University in his presentation on the historical context highlighted the evolution of relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, tracing back to the pre-Soviet era. He emphasized the slow but steady progress in bilateral relations despite geopolitical challenges, noting the similarities in culture, religion,

and political stances between the two nations. Dr. Saud also underscored the significant growth in trade relations and the recent initiatives to enhance connectivity between the two countries. Dr. Bokhodir Turayev focused on enhancing strategic relations and sustainable development between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. He discussed various initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation in sectors such as economy, trade, culture, and security. Dr. Turiye highlighted the importance of promoting sustainable economic growth, effective water management strategies, educational ties, healthcare reforms, and economic self-sufficiency through localized production. Dr. Melike Basbinar, Director of Uzbekistan-Turkey Cooperation

Center & Lecturer Tashkent State Transport University, provided insights into the historical connections between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, emphasizing the shared heritage and the significance of the Silk Road in fostering economic and cultural exchange. She discussed collaborative areas in modern life, including diplomatic ties, economic initiatives, educational partnerships, and cultural exchanges. Dr. Basbinar also addressed common challenges and proposed strategic approaches to overcome them. Ambassador Khalid Usman Qaiser, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Tajikistan discussed the current state of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, acknowledging challenges such as banking issues,

air connectivity, and visa-related concerns. He highlighted the importance of consistent engagement, resolving existing concerns, and maximizing the available opportunities for cooperation. Ambassador Khalid emphasized the need for close coordination, intelligence sharing, and understanding of mutual limitations. The panel discussion concluded with highlighting the deep-rooted religious, cultural, and political ties between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the growing trade and connectivity initiatives. They emphasized the importance of further people-to-people connections and academia-to-academia collaborations in strengthening bilateral relations.

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Washington key in stopping Rafah trigger

PALESTINIANS in the north of the Gaza Strip were forced to flee to the south after Israel launched its military operation in response to the Hamas-led attacks on the country on Oct 7. The continuation of the brutal Israeli offensive and its evacuation orders have now pushed more than 1 million people into a small corner in the southernmost part of Gaza, where the Rafah governorate has become a "pressure cooker of despair", as Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has warned. Despite there being nowhere left for them to go, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists a major military operation will be launched against Rafah, where the population density is now more than three times that of Tokyo. Before the war, Rafah was home to an estimated 275,000 people. The UN says that there are now more than 1.4 million people there, most of whom are taking refuge in tents and under tarpaulins or in whatever makeshift shelters they can make. UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric has warned an Israeli onslaught on Rafah would be "catastrophic". The European Union has said it is "very concerned" about the planned offensive, and called on Israel not to take military action that would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Rafah. Even US President Joe Biden has warned an assault on Rafah would be a "mistake". But despite all the strong opposition, Netanyahu has remained firm, insisting there is "no alternative".

"We cannot go around it; neither can we say 'we will destroy 80 percent of Hamas and leave 20 percent', because from that 20 percent, they will reorganize and take over the Strip again and – of course – constitute a new threat to Israel," Netanyahu said on Monday, saying that Israel was determined to eliminate the "remaining battalions (of Hamas) in Rafah and, of course, the 1.5 battalions in the camps in the center". Considering the reports that Israeli troops deployed 150-mm artillery guns in fields along the border with Gaza, a few meters apart, firing every 30 seconds in late 2023, and that it dropped hundreds of 2,000-pound bombs on Gaza with a density described by a former US defense intelligence analyst as "not seen since Vietnam", as well as its heavy reliance on lower-accuracy unguided munitions, the civilian death toll, which is already in the tens of thousands, will soar even higher. The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza will worsen once its new military operation begins because Israel, reported by Oxfam to be "deliberately" blocking aid to Gaza, will not allow more aid into it during its assault. If there is a power in the world responsible for the situation today it is the US, which has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on Gaza and has been the main munitions supplier to Israel. It was not until dissatisfaction with Israel became so evident in the US as to ignite a protest vote in Michigan with the message "No cease-fire. No vote" in late February that President Biden began to voice concerns. Netanyahu has said that "out of respect to the president" he will wait to hear the proposals from the US about the ways to protect the civilian population in Rafah before ordering the operation to go ahead.

The view on Hong Kong's new national security law

RESIDENTS of Hong Kong could be forgiven for a sense of déjà vu. A draconian new national security law (NSL), broad in scope and harsh in penalties, is trampling over basic rights. It first happened four years ago, in response to the extraordinary uprising that saw one in four people take to the streets to defend the region's autonomy and way of life. Beijing imposed the 2020 law upon the territory, demolishing any vestiges of its claim to run Hong Kong on a "one country, two systems" basis. That legislation, both vague and sweeping, claims jurisdiction over acts committed by anyone anywhere in the world. It introduced trials without juries. It is so stringent that a police chief said that even watching a documentary on the protests might breach the law. And yet it was still not enough. A second NSL has now been passed, at speed, by Hong Kong's own legislative council (LegCo), where any vestige of dissent has vanished: former LegCo members are among those already on trial under the 2020 law, along with the newspaper publisher Jimmy Lai, activist Joshua Wong, scholar Benny Tai and others. In all, thousands have been detained or prosecuted under it. The new NSL is even more punitive and far reaching: from this weekend, when it takes effect, treason, sedition and sabotage will be punishable with a life sentence. Jail terms for sedition will rise from two to seven years, or 10 if the perpetrator is found to have colluded with a foreign force. Detention without charge, currently limited to 48 hours, can be extended to 16 days. Simply owning old copies of the pro-democracy paper Apple Daily could breach the law on seditious materials without a "reasonable defence". Officials say the new law is needed to "plug loopholes" and prevent a resurgence of the unrest in 2019, which included violence sparked by the police's use of excessive force. But the new law, pushed through the LegCo, is as much a symbol as a tool, reinforcing the message of Hong Kong's submission. The Basic Law – the city's mini-constitution after handover – stated that the city would pass its own national security laws. But the first attempt in 2003 prompted such a backlash that officials gave up. It shaped resistance in Hong Kong; it also crystallised Beijing's determination to get the region under control. The legislation is a striking choice of priority as the city's economy continues to languish. Hong Kong faces growing competition from redeveloped mainland cities, and is seeing foreign companies decamp elsewhere as Beijing tightens its political grip. The EU is among those warning that the new law raises concerns about the city's future as a business hub. Many Hong Kong residents have already left, seeing little future there for themselves or their children. More are likely to follow. They deserve sympathy and need support, especially where they face intimidation: police have issued bounties for activists who left. Britain has a particular responsibility. As a colonial power it showed little interest in democracy until it was too late, and it did too little afterwards to defend the rights promised to Hong Kong. The current government's determination to roll back longstanding rights of protest also makes it easier for China to accuse London of double standards.



Bloody Nose to India, Iran and Afghanistan

Qamar Bashir



The influx of Afghan refugees, coupled with the presence of die-hard elements from foreign intelligence agencies and armed forces, transformed Pakistan into a battleground of ideologies, low-intensity operations, psychological warfare, and overt and covert operations across the nation. Among the Baloch population, grappling with abject poverty, the allure of communist ideology served as a catalyst for the emergence of the Baloch insurgency, particularly along the borders with Iran's Balochistan and Sistan provinces. This insurgency led to cross-border movements of Baloch insurgents, sparking tensions with Iran

PAKISTAN'S geopolitical trajectory has been deeply intertwined with the interests of superpowers since its inception. Positioned as a frontline state during the Cold War, Pakistan found itself at the epicenter of the ideological battle between communism and capitalism. Opting for the latter, Pakistan forged significant alliances with the United States and its allies through agreements such as SEATO and CENTO, positioning itself in direct opposition to the Soviet Union. This geopolitical alignment exposed Pakistan to intense regional tensions, exacerbated by the infiltration of communist ideology within its society. The resulting confrontation between the state and socialist elements contributed to significant internal strife, further compounded by periods of dictatorship and political discord. This turbulent backdrop ultimately led to three devastating wars, draining Pakistan's precious resources that could have otherwise been allocated to the nation's growth and development. Additionally, the culmination of these conflicts resulted in the secession of East Pakistan, giving rise to the independent state of Bangladesh.

In the late seventies and eighties, Pakistan grappled with a tumultuous period marked by social, cultural, religious, and political upheaval. This era was characterized by a double jeopardy scenario: on one hand, the USSR's expansionist ambitions led to the subjugation of Afghanistan, bringing Soviet forces dangerously close to Pakistan's borders. Simultaneously, Pakistan endured the imposition of another dictatorship, which sought to instill jihadist fervor within the populace, fostering a climate conducive to waging jihad against the USSR in Afghanistan and later against India in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The influx of Afghan refugees, coupled with the presence of die-hard elements from foreign intelligence agencies and armed forces, transformed Pakistan into a battleground of ideologies, low-intensity operations, psychological warfare, and overt and covert operations across the nation. Among the Baloch population, grappling with abject poverty, the allure of communist ideology served as a catalyst for the emergence of the Baloch insurgency, particularly along the borders with Iran's Balochistan and Sistan provinces. This insurgency led to cross-border movements of Baloch insurgents, sparking tensions with Iran. The sour relations with India at one hand, and Iran on the other hand finally culminated in surgical strikes by India inside Pakistan on 26th Feb, 2019 allegedly targeting terrorist hideouts, with no consequence and Iranian missile and drone attacks inside Pakistan's Balochistan province on 16 January 2024, claiming that it had targeted the Iranian Baloch militant group Jaish ul-Adl.

In response to India's miscalculated and non-professional strikes, which resulted in minimal damage, Pakistan's armed forces demonstrated exceptional precision, control, and professionalism in their strategic operations. Employing surgical precision, they locked the high-value industrial and military assets deep inside India, disengaged and unloaded their load away from them ensuring minimal collateral damage while maximizing effectiveness. This strategic execution not only took India by surprise but also garnered international recognition for Pakistan's adept military capabilities. In contrast to India's anticipated surgical strikes,

Iran's missile and drone attacks inside Pakistani territory resulted in civilian casualties, eliciting shock from both civilian and military leadership in Pakistan and drawing international attention. Responding swiftly, Pakistan's armed forces executed precise and targeted counterattacks, effectively neutralizing high-value terrorists sheltered within Iran while safeguarding civilians from harm.

Much like India's experience, Iran also gleaned a valuable lesson: the repercussions of provoking Pakistan's armed forces. These incidents highlight the imperative of dialogue, diplomacy, and restraint in de-escalating cross-border tensions. They reaffirm Pakistan's dedication to protecting its citizens and territorial integrity while promoting regional stability through peaceful resolution of disputes.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Pakistan found itself thrust into the global spotlight once again, this time in the fight against a new adversary: Al-Qaeda. This stateless terrorist organization, adept at recruiting volunteers and jihadists from various regions, including the Swat Valley, Pashtun belt, and other parts of the country, posed a significant threat. Initially supported and armed to combat the Soviet Union, Al-Qaeda shifted its focus to the United States, leveraging its newfound power, influence, and vast military and financial resources.

Following the devastating coordinated attacks orchestrated by Al-Qaeda on iconic symbols of American power, including the destruction of the Twin Towers and an attack on the Pentagon, the United States was driven to a state of fury. In response, the U.S. issued a stark ultimatum, threatening to bomb Pakistan into the Stone Age unless it collaborated in the fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which provided sanctuary to extremists.

In response, Pakistani forces launched a courageous operation, resulting in the martyrdom of numerous soldiers who valiantly fought against TTP operatives. While many militants fled across the border to Afghanistan, seeking refuge in safe havens, the imposition of Taliban rule on 15th August 2021 emboldened these rogue elements. They became increasingly active, launching cross-border terrorist attacks within Pakistan, often with support from certain elements within the Afghan Taliban's administration. Since 2021, TTP attacks have claimed the lives of over 2000 security personnel and civilians. In the latest incident on March 16, 2024, a group of suicide bombers targeted a military checkpoint in Pakistan's North Waziristan district, located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province neighboring Afghanistan. The attack resulted in the martyrdom of seven soldiers, which infuriated the armed forces to the extent that they finally decided to teach TTP a befitting lesson. The heinous and abhorrent attack prompted the Pakistani armed forces to undertake precise and intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations within border regions of Afghanistan as a last resort and killed over eight hard core terrorists belonging to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, a faction of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which had claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. However, the aftermath of these attacks and counter attacks has cast a shadow over Pakistan's entire border regions. With borders spanning 559 km with India, 2670 km

with Afghanistan, and 959 km with Iran (with the exception of China), the security situation has intensified dramatically. These border areas, often insecure and deserted, lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and gas, rendering them highly vulnerable and porous. This poses a grave risk to the lives of border guards and troops stationed there, while logistics and supply provision become arduous tasks, straining financial and economic resources. Consequently, Pakistan faces the daunting challenge of allocating significant financial resources and deploying armed forces to these volatile borders. This reallocation of resources, predominantly from civilian sectors, to bolster military capabilities further exacerbates economic strains. The resulting higher inflation and financial burdens weigh heavily on the common man, already struggling to make ends meet. Thus, the nation finds itself grappling with multifaceted challenges that demand prudent management and strategic foresight to navigate through this turbulent period. Indeed, the prevailing hostility and perceived security volatility in Pakistan, regardless of its justification, send shockwaves across the globe. These conditions instill fear among investors, traders, and businesspersons, deterring them from engaging with Pakistan. As a result, the country faces additional premiums and costs associated with investing, trading, and conducting business, further hindering its economic growth and development.

To address these pressing issues, it is imperative to prioritize intense diplomatic efforts led by our top diplomats, including the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the foreign ministry and the establishment. This necessitates comprehensive brainstorming sessions to devise strategic approaches aimed at engaging all neighbors with transparency, sincerity, and noble intentions. Establishing highly effective channels of communication, operational 24/7, is crucial for facilitating dialogue and resolving differences through bilateral or multilateral discussions.

Moreover, it is imperative to develop short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to tackle underlying issues comprehensively. Emphasizing mutually beneficial trade, investment, and business relations can foster dependencies and overlapping interests across sectors, promoting stability and cooperation. Additionally, pursuing common interests with neighboring countries is essential, as it creates a scenario where resorting to kinetic power usage would prove detrimental to all parties involved.

Additionally, investing in people-to-people exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and educational initiatives can foster greater understanding and goodwill among citizens of neighboring countries, laying the foundation for enduring friendships and constructive engagement at the grassroots level. By adopting a multifaceted approach that combines diplomatic finesse, economic cooperation, regional collaboration, and people-centered initiatives, Pakistan can navigate its geopolitical challenges effectively and chart a course towards a more peaceful and prosperous future.

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

Foreign policy challenges loom large over EU summit

Andrew Hammond

In this context, there is a huge body of work for the EU still to undertake to become a more fit-for-purpose, progressive force in the world today. In the 1990s, then-Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens said that the bloc is "an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm." Therefore, it is no coincidence that EU leaders will this week discuss security and defense as a pressing priority. There is unanimity within the bloc that Europe needs to increase its defense readiness, so there will be talks on exactly...

AS the clock ticks toward June's big European Parliament elections across the EU's 27 member states, politics in Brussels is becoming increasingly domestic-focused. However, there has rarely been a time in recent years when so many red lights are flashing outside of the bloc, in what has been called an "arc of instability." That term was first used in the 1990s, especially by Australians, to describe a chain of politically unstable nation states in the Asia-Pacific region. However, more recently, it has been utilized by some US policymakers to highlight instability in a different, broader geography. That is a spectrum of states from sub-Saharan Africa through North Africa, into the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, plus South and Central Asia and possibly parts of Southeast Asia too. Some of this vast geography will be among the key topics of discussion at the ongoing summit of the EU's 27 presidents and prime ministers. One example is the growing tensions in the Middle East, with the EU's chief diplomat Josep Borrell this week condemning Israel for creating what he said was a "manmade" famine in Gaza. Borrell added: "Before the war, Gaza was the greatest open-air prison. Today, it is the greatest open-air graveyard." Moreover, he said European leaders have told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu they cannot stand by and watch Palestinians starve to death.

There is growing concern in Europe about the possibility of a new migration crisis if conflicts spill over in North Africa, meanwhile, Sudan could face a catastrophic famine within weeks, aid workers have warned, amid security restrictions and armed violence as the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and its former security partners the Rapid Support Forces continues. The UN's World Food Programme says this threatens to trigger "the world's largest hunger crisis," with more than 25 million people scattered across Sudan, South Sudan and Chad "trapped

in a spiral" of food insecurity. The conflict has also uprooted more than 8 million people. With 2 million forced from their homes before the fighting broke out, Sudan already hosts the world's largest displacement crisis. There is growing concern in Europe about the possibility of a new migration crisis if the numerous conflicts in the Middle East and Africa spill over into neighboring countries. This is in a context where multiple European governments are still dealing with the impact of the 2015 migration crisis, which saw about 1 million Syrian refugees cross from Turkey into Greece alone, according to UN estimates.

One of the other big concerns for European leaders is that the growing proliferation of foreign challenges will distract or undermine the political focus of the West from what many see as the overwhelming international priority: Ukraine. In recent weeks, there have been growing Russian advances on the battlefield and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last week that Kyiv is running out of ammunition and that its allies are not doing enough to help. This comes as a bill in the US Congress to send further aid to Ukraine continues to stall amid deep partisan divisions ahead of elections there in November.

In this context, there is a huge body of work for the EU still to undertake to become a more fit-for-purpose, progressive force in the world today. In the 1990s, then-Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens said that the bloc is "an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm." Therefore, it is no coincidence that EU leaders will this week discuss security and defense as a pressing priority. There is unanimity within the bloc that Europe needs to increase its defense readiness, so there will be talks on exactly how to build the EU's strength, resilience and competitiveness. There is a huge body of work for the EU still to undertake to become a more fit-for-purpose, progressive force.

European Commission President Charles Michel said this week that, if Europe wants to exist in peace, it must shift to a "war economy" mode. He said that this requires significantly bolstering defense capabilities in the face of the threat posed by Russia. Michel added that US support can no longer be taken for granted and that EU countries need to take much more responsibility for their own security as they grapple with the biggest security challenge since 1945. He also condemned a decades-long lack of funding and investment in European militaries and, despite military manufacturing capacity increasing by 50 percent since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, much more needs to be done. Beyond these hugely important security and defense questions, it is also clear that the bloc will need a clearer, wider grand strategy in the years ahead. In many plausible scenarios, it is highly likely that Europe will be facing a more challenging geopolitical context.

Several states in particular will be crucial to shaping how this plays out in a fast-changing multipolar world. With respect to the US, a long-standing ally of Europe, greater stability has been infused into the bilateral relationship following Joe Biden's arrival in the White House. However, Donald Trump, who has called for the EU's further dismemberment, could well win again in November.

However, no matter which of Trump or Biden wins, the overall geopolitical context for Europe may worsen significantly in the next half-decade. This is not just because of Russia, but also wider problems, including instability in key countries in neighboring regions. The bloc therefore faces huge international challenges that may only grow. While it is on a trajectory to become a stronger, more progressive force in world affairs, it still has a long way to travel in this direction to fulfill its ambitions.

– Sourced by Arab News

Briefs

Civil-military brass...

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He also thanked the caretaker government for continuation of larger national economic agenda in a "befitting manner". Marking a "historic moment of seamless transition," the meeting was conducted with a singular focus of briefing the cabinet in the presence of the caretaker cabinet, the statement added. The apex committee was briefed about the SIFC initiative and major contributions made towards the investments, privatisation and overall micro-economic stabilisation of the country. "The committee admired the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for envisioning and launching the SIFC in June 2023, which has now moved from its formative phase and evolved progressively under the caretaker government," read the statement.

'Targeting Gwadar...

FROM PAGE 01
Shehbaz Sharif extended condolences to the families of the martyrs. He commended the commendable bravery of the security forces and their timely response, which led to the failure of the attack and the elimination of the attackers. Shehbaz Sharif expressed firm resolve that, with the grace of Allah Almighty and the unwavering support of the nation, all internal and external conspiracies against Pakistan will be thwarted.

Pakistan displeased...

FROM PAGE 01
The spokesperson, when speaking about the progress in the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project, said it is in the country's interest to proceed with it. "Pakistan government's decision on the Pak-Iran gas pipeline will be its own decision," she said, adding that Pakistan is constructing the project in its territory. Baloch highlighted that the government is committed to the construction of the pipeline, as that is the first point at the moment.

Sherman asks Lu...

FROM PAGE 01
prime minister. At this, Brad Sherman asked the US diplomat to hold a meeting with the PTI founder at the jail to hear his stance. He also asked him to review the allegations of wrongful sentence handed down to the incarcerated former premier. In the congressional hearing on Wednesday, Donald Lu refuted the cipher allegations laid against him by the PTI founder. He called the cipher issue a "conspiracy theory, lie and complete falsehood".

Imran concerned...

FROM PAGE 01
Islamabad and Kabul over the security challenges being faced towards Pakistan's north western borders. Speaking with journalists outside the Adiala jail after meeting Khan, Gohar said the situation — which has currently engulfed the country with regards to Afghanistan — never arose during the PTI's tenure in the government. Islamabad's relations with Afghanistan have remained rocky owing to the intensified terror attacks in Pak, which country claims are being launched from Afghan soil.

APNS welcomes...

FROM PAGE 01
and pending issue of increase in the Govt advertising rates. The APNS hoped that the relations of the Federal Govt with the media would be further strengthened. Ms. Nazafreen Saigol Lakhani, President and Mr. Sarmad Ali, Secretary General All Pakistan Newspapers Society in a statement have noted with pleasure that a prominent and experienced person has been re-appointed as PIO and hoped that under his tenure the issues pertaining to the print media which are still lying unattended would be addressed.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Morocco Muhammad Karmoune giving away winning prize to the captain of the UAE football team for winning match against the Gerry's club. The match was played at the UAE embassy in connection with the diplomatic football league. — DNA

Murray beats dizzy Berrettini, Stephens, Osaka advance

British number four overcomes Italian 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in first round

SPORTS DESK

MIAMI: Two-time Miami Open champion Andy Murray fought back for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over struggling Italian Matteo Berrettini in the first round at Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday. Berrettini needed medical attention near the end of the second set after appearing to almost faint on court but he battled on. The Italian recently returned to the tour after an injury-plagued 2023, reaching the final of a Challenger event in Phoenix. He broke Murray's serve in the first game of the match and was in firm control of the opening set. But he faded badly in the second and called a medical time-out when 5-2 down after walking off the court looking dizzy. The weather in Miami was not particularly hot or humid and more pleasantly mild than has often been the case at the tournament in past years. The 27-year-old former world number six, put up a better fight in the third, but a solid-looking Murray saw the match out in two hours and 47 minutes. Murray made just 20 unforced errors while Berrettini committed 44, as the Scot clinched his fourth consecutive first-round win. "There is life in the old dog yet," wrote Murray on the television camera lens at the end of the game and he was pleased with the manner of his win. "I started off a little bit slow, but I do think I played pretty



well from the middle of the first set until the end of the match," he said. "I created a lot of opportunities and he was struggling for a little bit at the end of the second and beginning of the third. I capitalised on that and got off to a quick start in the third. I served it out well in the end." Murray, who won the Miami Open in 2009



and 2013, will meet 29th-seeded Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry in the next round. In the WTA event, four-time grand slam-winner Naomi Osaka had little trouble in defeating Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-3, 6-4 in one hour, 18 minutes to move into the second round. Osaka is ranked 229th in the world after taking a break after

having a child and spending over a year out of the game and is returning to the scene of her run to the final in 2022 where lost to Iga Swiatek in the final. Osaka said her performance was the best since she returned to the tour at Brisbane in January.

"Honestly, this is probably the most free that I was able to hit my balls, the closest to the feeling that I want to capture going forward, so I would say that this is probably my best match in terms of shot-making...I was swinging the best that I have since I have been back," she said. Osaka will face another mother in the second round when she takes on Elina Svitolina of Ukraine who in 12 months back on the circuit is already back inside the top 20 — a return which Osaka says has inspired her. "I remember watching her play at Wimbledon whilst I was pregnant and thinking that I want to be there one day. I think she's always just been a really great player so it's not surprising to me she's back in the top 20. It's where she belongs," said Osaka. American Sloane Stephens beat Angelique Kerber 6-2, 6-3 in a meeting of two former grand slam champions. Stephens, celebrating her 31st birthday, was on top throughout against the German who had shown good form in Indian Wells where she reached the fourth round. Stephens, the 2018 Miami champion, will play Romania's 19th-seeded Sorana Cirstea in the second round.

Football: Pakistan Vs Jordan match glimpses



ISLAMABAD: Players of Pakistan and Jordan football teams in action during the FIFA World Cup qualifying match played at Jinnah Stadium Islamabad. Jordan convincingly defeated Pakistan by 3 goals to nil. Ambassador of Jordan Dr Maen had made elaborate arrangements for the match. A large number of diplomats, football lovers and youth watched the match. — DNA

Canada confirms...

FROM PAGE 01
war has pushed hundreds of thousands of Gazans to the brink of famine. Canada, a key ally of the United States, which provides Israel with billions of dollars a year in military aid, had already reduced its shipments to Israel to only include non-lethal equipment, such as radios, following the October 7 Hamas attack that sparked the current war. "Since January 8th, the government has not approved new arms export permits to Israel and this will continue until we can ensure full compliance with our export regime," said a statement from Joly's office. "There are no open permits for exports of lethal goods to Israel," it added.

US unveils draft UN...

FROM PAGE 01
militants during its October 7 attacks on Israel. "Well, in fact, we actually have a resolution that we put forward right now that's before the United Nations Security Council that does call for an immediate ceasefire tied to the release of hostages, and we hope very much that countries will support that," Blinken said in Saudi Arabia. "I think that would send a strong message, a strong signal," he told Saudi media outlet Al Hadath on Wednesday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas in retaliation for the October 7 attacks.

Islamabad not...

FROM PAGE 01
attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country. Islamabad's action came following a deadly attack on Pakistani forces which resulted in the martyrdom of seven soldiers including a lieutenant colonel and captain. Pakistan has repeatedly called on the Afghan interim government to prevent its soil from being used against Pakistan by TTP and other militant organisations — a claim vehemently denied by Kabul.

Security forces...

FROM PAGE 01
the night of March 20-21. During the IBO, the troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and resultant militant Chakar Liaquat was killed while two got injured. The security forces also recovered weapons and ammunition from the killed terrorist which the ISPR said were "actively involved in numerous terrorist activities". "Sanitisation operation is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area as the security forces of Pak are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," said ISPR. The Panjur operation was conducted hours after a group of gunmen attacked GPA Complex, which was foiled by the military.

Briefs

Tinubu halts Nigeria officials' foreign trips

ABUJA : Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu will introduce a three-month ban on ministers and other government officials from going on publicly funded foreign trips. Mr Tinubu's chief of staff said the move was prompted by the president's "concerns about the rising cost of travel expenses" by public officials. The ban will take effect on 1 April. President Tinubu and his administration have been criticised by some for their frequent visits abroad. He came under attack, especially on social media, after his government sponsored over 400 people to attend the COP28 climate conference in Dubai last November. Since his inauguration in May 2023, Mr Tinubu has made more than 15 foreign trips. The Nigerian president is said to have spent at least 3.4bn naira (\$2.2m; £1.8m) on domestic and foreign travel in the first six months of his presidency - 36% more than the budgeted amount for 2023, the Nigerian newspaper Punch reported in January, citing GovSpend, a civic tech platform that tracks government spending. Mr Tinubu's chief of staff Femi Gbajabamila said the travel ban will cut costs amid Nigeria's "current economic challenges and the need for responsible fiscal management". The West African country is grappling with one of its worst cost-of-living crises in decades, a situation that has led to widespread hardship and anger. The three-month block on official travel by government officials is Mr Tinubu's latest attempt at countering the public backlash. —APP

69 Rohingya rescued after boat capsizes in Indonesia

MEDAN: At least 69 Rohingya refugees have been rescued after a wooden boat with an estimated 150 people on board capsized off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh province. The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS Aceh) said on Thursday that 42 men, 18 women and nine children were brought to port. Two women holding a placard reading 'Boycott Rohingya'. The sign is written in Indonesian. It is thought that most of those presumed to have died were women and children who were unable to swim, and carried out to sea by the currents. Amateur footage shot by local fishermen at the scene, which has been widely shared on Indonesian social media, showed survivors standing on the boat's upturned hull. Amiruddin, a fishing community leader in the Aceh Barat district where Kuala Bubon is located, said a search and rescue boat from Indonesia's National Search and Rescue Agency had been dispatched on Wednesday. —DNA

Japan Airlines buys 42 aircraft from Airbus

TOKYO : Japan Airlines said Thursday that it is buying 42 airplanes from Boeing and Airbus as part of a drive to boost its international and domestic operations.

The firm said it would "introduce a total of 21 Airbus A350-900 aircraft from Airbus, along with 11 A321neo aircraft, and 10 Boeing 787-9 aircraft from The Boeing Company, as part of its fleet renewal plan". A spokesperson declined to comment on the financial details of the orders when contacted by AFP. But a separate statement listed the "catalogue" prices of the planes, which in total comes to around \$12.9 billion. One of the Airbus A350-900 planes is to replace one of the same model destroyed in an accident with another airplane at Tokyo's Haneda airport on January 2, it said. All 379 people on board the JAL Airbus escaped just before the aircraft was engulfed in flames, but five of the six people on the smaller aircraft died. The airline said it will add 20 Airbus A350-900 aircraft and 10 Boeing 787-9 to its international routes. —APP

Zelensky urges air defenses against Russian Kyiv strikes

Ukraine's air force said it shot down 31 Russian missiles targeting Kyiv

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for the West to deliver air defence systems to Kyiv after an overnight Russian missile attack injured 17 in the capital and surrounding region. Ukraine's air force said it shot down 31 Russian missiles targeting Kyiv, an attack that comes after Moscow vowed to respond to an escalation in Ukrainian strikes on its border regions. "Such terror continues every day and

night," Zelensky said in a post on Telegram. "It is possible to put an end to it through global unity... Russian terrorists do not have missiles capable of bypassing Patriot and other leading world systems," he said. "This protection is required in Ukraine now. Zelensky says 'critically important' for US to approve aid soon "From Kyiv to Kharkiv, Sumy to Kherson, and Odesa to the Donetsk region. "This is entirely possible if our partners demonstrate sufficient political will." A \$60-billion US military aid package for Ukraine is currently



held up in Congress amid domestic political arguments. Local officials said falling debris from the

missiles injured 17 - 13 in Kyiv and four in the surrounding region. The air force said Russia fired two Iskander ballistic missiles and 29 cruise missiles, launched from strategic bombers. Oleksiy Kuleba, deputy head of Zelensky's office, said all of them were shot down. Zelensky posted a video of windows blown out of a residential building and debris strewn across the street as firefighters used water hoses on the smoking building. It was the first attempted missile strike on the Ukrainian capital since early February, said Sergiy Popko, head

of the Kyiv city military administration. The attack comes after a sharp escalation in Ukrainian strikes on Russian border regions and oil refineries over the last two weeks. On Thursday, the Russian governor of the Belgorod region, on the border with Ukraine, said five people were injured in the latest aerial bombardment. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday said Russia had a "plan" for how to respond to the uptick in Ukrainian attacks on Russian border regions, where he vowed to restore security.



ISLAMABAD : Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb was called on by Mr. Young Ye, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).—DNA

Turkiye, Gulf states to launch talks for free trade pact

ANKARA: Turkiye and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have signed a deal to launch negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Turkish Trade Minister Omer Bolat said on Thursday, as Ankara steps up efforts to expand economic ties with the region. After years of tension, Turkiye launched a diplomatic charm offensive in 2020 to mend ties with Gulf countries, namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. Ankara already has a trade agreement, dubbed a comprehensive economic partnership agreement, with the UAE. Since then, Ankara has signed deals worth billions with Gulf nations, including Qatar, with which it enjoys strong ties. "The agreement will liberalize trade in goods and services, facilitate investments and trade, and increase our country's trade with the region," Bolat said on social media platform X.—DNA

UN warns Sudan of humanitarian disaster crisis

WASHINGTON : After nearly a year of the war, Sudan is suffering one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history, the United Nations has warned, slamming the international community for its lack of action. "By all measures - the sheer scale of humanitarian needs, the numbers of people displaced and facing hunger - Sudan is one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory," Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UN-OCHA] said on Wednesday. "A humanitarian travesty is playing out in Sudan under a veil of international inattention and inaction," Wosornu told the Security Council on behalf of UNOCHA head Martin Griffiths. "Simply put, we are failing the people of Sudan," she added, describing the population's "desperation." Fighting between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has since April killed tens of thousands and led to acute food shortages and a looming risk of famine. The United States, the top donor for Sudan, announced another \$47 million in humanitarian assistance.—APP

UN, 36 nations discuss Gaza aid via Cyprus

LARNACA : Officials from 36 countries and UN agencies gathered in Cyprus on Thursday to discuss how to expedite aid to besieged Palestinians in Gaza via a sea route launched last week. Thursday's gathering is being attended by Sigrud Kaag, the UN's senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, as well as Curtis Ried, chief of staff of the US National Security Council. As famine looms over Gaza, agencies are increasingly looking for alternative routes to get aid into the enclave other than land crossings. But lack of infrastructure is an issue; one charity which dispatched aid from Cyprus last week made a landing jetty out of rubble, while the US has also announced plans to create a floating pier. Under an agreement hammered out with Israel, cargoes can undergo security inspections in Cyprus by a team including Israel, eliminating the need for screenings at its final off-loading point to remove potential hold-ups in aid deliveries. One vessel left Cyprus last week and distributed aid in Gaza, while another two are expected to depart in coming days, subject to weather conditions. "We are discussing how we can max up operational capacity both in terms of departure and means of transport and also in relation to the reception and distribution methodology," said Constantinos Kombos, Cyprus's foreign minister.—Agencies

French unions strike over austerity amid inflation

PARIS : Members of the top eight French unions walked off the job demanding higher pay to offset the enduring inflation. France's unions united for a massive nationwide strike to demand higher wages in the face of prolonged record inflation. In the past two years, the annual inflation rate has combined to reach 10% in France. However, in that same timeframe, public sector workers have been given raises which add up to only 5%. Since 6 million people work for the government, that means 21% of all workers, and their household dependents, have been suffering economically since inflation began to soar above the unofficial limit of 2% in August 2021. Everyone here is working for the same goal to serve our population and to provide them with free government services of good quality. All workers need their wages to improve immediately and this is undeniable. Last month, the government added 10 billion in new budget cuts to the already austerity-driven 2024 annual budget.—APP

Turkey, Iraq to establish joint operations centre

ANKARA : Turkiye is looking forward to future collaboration with Iraq, including the establishment of a joint operations centre, Turkish National Defence Minister Yasar Guler has said. During his visit to Iraq's capital Baghdad, the Iraqi government took the significant step of officially banning the PKK and recognising it as a terrorist organisation for the first time. "After this, we will have joint work. We will establish a joint operations centre," Guler said on Wednesday during a visit to Kahramanmaraş province in southern Turkiye, where he paid a visit to Kahramanmaraş Governor Mukerrem Unlu. Guler said terrorism is the scourge of Turkiye, highlighting it as a major challenge for the country, and emphasised the nation's resilience. "We live in the most expensive land in the world. There will be a price for this. ... We have all kinds of minerals. We have human resources. Of course, this bothers everyone. Plus, our country's rapid development and growth in recent years, especially in the last 20 years, disturbs everyone around us," he said. He emphasised that some segments disturbed by Turkiye's rapid growth use terrorist organisations to hinder this situation and that the country must always be strong. Regarding the PKK conflict spanning four decades, Guler expressed disappointment in the Iraqi government's historical reluctance to recognise and ban the PKK. "We have been fighting the PKK terrorist organisation for 40 years. But unfortunately, for 40 years, the Iraqi government could not call them a terrorist organisation or ban them. Such an organisation lives in their own country and they do not feel any discomfort," he said. "We had a meeting in Ankara in December. Of course, this issue was emphasised very much in that meeting, and when we went to Iraq during our last trip to Baghdad, the Iraqi administration accepted and declared for the first time that the PKK is a terrorist organisation," he added. Citing the positive stance of the administration in Erbil, Guler also emphasised that efforts extend beyond combating terrorism. "There will be new commissions established regarding energy, agriculture, animal husbandry, water affairs and similar areas, and we will continue our efforts to achieve progress in all these areas through mutual cooperation," he said. He also highlighted the significance of the Development Road project linking the Gulf to Europe via Turkiye. "This is the most important task for Turkiye's future. In this project, all Turkish companies will preferentially do business there. Alongside four highways and four railways, all goods coming from China will be transported to Europe via the Development Road," Guler stressed.—DNA

Not another nickel for Netanyahu's war machine

'The United States of America cannot and must not be complicit in this unspeakable tragedy,' says Bernie Sanders

WASHINGTON : The US should stop funding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "cruel war" in the Gaza Strip, independent Senator Bernie Sanders said Wednesday. "History will judge what we do right now. History will judge whether we stand with starving children, whether we uphold American values, or we provide massive aid to a war machine that is operating in an unbelievably barbaric way," Sanders said. "The United States must make it clear. Not

another nickel for Netanyahu's war machine." Sanders said Israel must open the borders and allow the UN to deliver supplies in "sufficient quantities" throughout all of Gaza and Israel must stop its military operation. The world is currently witnessing "one of the worst humanitarian disasters" in modern history, he said. "The United States of America cannot and must not be complicit in this unspeakable tragedy. We cannot be complicit in starvation as a military strategy. We cannot be com-

pllicit in the physical and emotional destruction of an entire generation of beautiful Palestinian children," he added. Israel has waged a deadly military offensive on the Gaza Strip since an Oct. 7 cross-border attack by Palestinian resistance group Hamas in which nearly 1,200 Israelis were killed. Nearly 32,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have since been killed in Gaza, and more than 74,000 injured amid mass destruction and shortages of necessities. The

Israeli war has pushed 85% of Gaza's population into internal displacement amid a crippling blockade of most food, clean water and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN. Israel is accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to ensure its forces do not commit acts of genocide, and guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.—DNA

IMF Chief advocates central bank independence

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON: International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva warned on Thursday that central banks face growing political pressure to cut interest rates during a major election year but policymakers need to maintain their independence. Georgieva said in a blog posted on the IMF website that central banks with stronger independence scores are more successful in controlling inflation and keep-

ing inflation expectations in check. "Calls are growing for interest rate cuts, even if premature, and are likely to intensify as half the world's population votes this year," Georgieva said. "Risks of political interference in banks' decision-making and personal appointments are rising. Governments and central bankers must resist these pressures," she added. She said that central bankers' success in preventing a global financial meltdown during the COVID-19 pandemic was quickly followed by monetary

tightening to bring down inflation. Both efforts were a function of their independence and the credibility that goes along with that. By contrast, Georgieva said that during the high inflation period of the 1970s, central banks did not have clear mandates to prioritize price stability, nor clear laws protecting their autonomy, and as a result, they were often pressured by politicians to cut interest rates. She cited IMF research showing that between 2007 and 2021, central banks with strong

independence scores were more successful in keeping inflation expectations in check. IMF, Sri Lanka reach staff-level agreement on second review of bailout package Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Wednesday that the US central bank was still on track for three rate cuts this year, but their timing depended on Fed officials becoming more confident that inflation was declining towards a 2% target even as the economy outperforms expectations. The Fed has faced increasing calls from US lawmakers to cut rates to help bring down mortgage costs for homebuyers and boost financing for small businesses and clean energy projects.

UK and Australia sign new defense agreement

The treaty includes provisions to make it easier for the respective forces to operate together in each other's countries, such as the joint training of Ukrainian troops in the UK

CANBERRA : Australia and the United Kingdom have signed a new defence and security cooperation agreement with the defence ministers of both countries saying it was required to meet 'contemporary challenges' to maintain a global rules-based order. The treaty was signed by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and his UK counterpart Grant Shapps following annual bilateral ministerial defence talks at Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday, as part of the Australia-UK Ministerial (AUKMIN) meeting, which was first held in 2006. "Australia's relationship with the UK is dynamic and enduring," Marles said in a written statement Thursday. "From the UK's leadership of support for Ukraine and efforts to address the Houthi threat, to increasing contributions in the Pacific and



the Indo-Pacific, we continue to work closely together to support a global rules-based order." "As the world becomes more complex and uncertain, we must modernise our most important partnerships," the statement said.

Shapps said the treaty formalises how the two countries will consult on issues that affect each other's sovereignty and regional security. "I think one of the most important elements is it describes a mechanism by which we consult when

either of our countries are under threat and we have those discussions more formalised than it is at the moment," Shapps said at a joint press conference with Marles at Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday. "We do already cooperate very significantly on defence matters, it should be said. So we'll always be looking to deepen that cooperation between our countries." AUKUS alliance. Other areas within the agreement included continued cooperation on capability development, including through the AUKUS alliance, as well as closer collaboration on undersea warfare, intelligence and military exercises. Refreshing the bilateral defence treaty was a commitment made at the AUKMIN conference held last year in the UK and is unlikely to have come as a surprise to others powers in the region, namely China. Beijing has been a frequent and strong critic

of defence partnerships between nations it perceives as having the aim of containing its aspirations in the South East Asian and South Pacific. Coincidentally, Australia received the most senior Chinese leader visit in seven years earlier this week, where security and stability across the region had been high on the agenda between the respective foreign ministers. In his opening remarks before the bilateral meeting on Tuesday, China's Wang Yi said Australia should maintain an "independent" foreign policy and not allow 'third parties' to disrupt ties between the two countries. The comments were widely regarded as a thinly veiled reference to the United States, which Beijing has often claimed is building a new military bloc, AUKUS - which also includes the UK - to contain China's aspirations.—DNA

Briefs

UK, Australia sign new defence pact

LONDON: The United Kingdom and Australia inked a new defence agreement in Canberra on Thursday, as they try to boost a fledgling nuclear-powered submarine programme with the United States. UK defence minister Grant Shapps signed the agreement in Canberra with his counterpart Richard Marles, establishing a legal framework that makes it easier to host troops and share military intelligence. The agreement stops short of a full mutual defence pact, which would bind one side to intervene if the other was attacked. But it does include a "commitment to consult" about emerging threats and establishes a "status of forces agreement", which makes it easier to host soldiers from the other nation. "It is extraordinary, actually, the United Kingdom and Australia didn't already have a defence cooperation treaty in place," Shapps said after the signing ceremony. Alongside the United States, Australia and the UK are members of the fledgling AUKUS defence alliance — a landmark pact aimed at curbing Chinese military expansion in the Asia-Pacific. Barely two years old, there are already signs the AUKUS programme is under threat — and some fear Donald Trump could scrap it completely if he returns to power next year. —Agencies

Pakistan Day parade rehearsal held

ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan gears up to commemorate Pakistan Day, preparations have peaked with a final rehearsal parade by the armed forces, drawing crowds of eager spectators to witness the grand event. Citizens flocked to the parade ground to catch a glimpse of the full dress rehearsal, expressing their fervent patriotism as they soaked in the sights and sounds of the meticulously orchestrated event. "This year's parade is being organized uniquely, showcasing the discipline and passion of our armed forces," remarked Babar, a spectator, encapsulating the sentiment shared by many in attendance. The atmosphere was electric as attendees marveled at the spectacle before them. "It was an incredibly attractive and thrilling parade, a testament to the strength of our nation," exclaimed Raja Sarfaraz, a student. Shabbir Shah, Advocate Supreme Court, reflected on the significance of the event, noting, "The display of discipline and passion here reflects the unity of Pakistan," underscoring the unifying force of national pride. Amidst the celebration, citizens took a moment to honor the sacrifices of the nation's martyrs.

Plan for Catalonia's snap May election

BARCELONA: Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont is to unveil Thursday his plan for Catalonia's snap May election, a move that could bring forward his return home after years of self-imposed exile. A European Parliament lawmaker who fled Spain for Belgium to avoid prosecution over the botched 2017 Catalan independence bid, Puigdemont plans to announce whether he will stand as a candidate at a 7:00 pm (1800 GMT) press conference in southern France. "We went into exile for the same reasons that we will return, the future of our nation," Puigdemont, who was Catalan regional leader at the time of the secession bid, wrote on X. Last week, Pere Aragonès, the current leader, called a May 12 snap election in the wealthy northeastern region, on the eve of a key parliamentary vote in which Spanish lawmakers approved an amnesty law for Catalan separatists. The bill, which aims to draw a line under years of efforts to prosecute those linked to the independence bid, is currently before the Senate but will return to the lower house for a final green light in around two months. —Agencies

Fake news regarding CPEC to be countered, says Tarar

The CPEC was an important milestone in promoting the economic development of Pakistan, Tarar remarked

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ataullah Tarar on Thursday emphasized the need to devise a mechanism at the government-to-government and media-to-media level to counter fake news regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Ataullah Tarar said this during a meeting with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, Jiang Zaidong who called on the minister here. The Chinese Ambassador congratulated Ataullah Tarar on assuming the portfolio of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The CPEC, Pakistan-China strategic relations, ongoing cooperation in the media and film sector, and China-Pakistan Information Corridor were discussed in the meeting. Discussions were held regarding the expansion of cooperation between the two countries in the fields of media and the establishment of the Pakistan-China Information Corridor to prevent fake news about CPEC. Pakistan highly valued its relations with China, the minister added that both countries were bound by the eternal bond of friendship. Ataullah Tarar said in 1998, his grandfather Muhammad Rafiq Tarar received the then Prime Minister of China on his visit to Pakistan as President.



"We have seen Pakistan-China friendship from generation to generation. We have to inform our new generation about our historical and strong friendship," he maintained. "We have to tell the new generation how China and Pakistan supported each other in difficult times," the minister said. Tarar said that China had supported Pakistan at every international forum including Shanghai Cooperation Organization and United Nations. He opined that a close and sustainable partnership between the two countries in the form of CPEC was in the wider interest of the entire region. The CPEC was an important milestone in promoting the economic development of

Pakistan, Tarar remarked. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a framework for regional connectivity that will not only benefit China and Pakistan but will also have positive effects on Iran, Afghanistan, India, Central Asian Republics and the region," the minister said. He said that the China-Pakistan Information Corridor would be an important strategic step towards preventing fake news about CPEC as it aimed to harness the power of digital connectivity and information exchange. The Ministry of Information, he added will continue its work in this regard. He said it was the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to make Pakistan an invest-

ment-friendly country. In the meeting, the two countries agreed to expand cooperation in the field of film and culture. "Like China, Pakistan is an ancient civilization with a history of seven thousand years," Tarar told the Chinese envoy. He said many spiritual and cultural movements emerged from the Indus Valley of Pakistan that shaped Asian culture. The ancient Gandhara civilization of Pakistan introduced Buddhism to much of East Asia, including China, he stated. He said Pakistan and China also jointly organized a Gandhara Buddhist exhibition at the Palace Museum last year. In the meeting, discussions were also held regarding the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda between Pakistan and China. Tarar said that Romina Khurshid Alam was in close contact with China regarding the SDGs project. The MoU between Pakistan's official news agency Associated Press of Pakistan and China Media Group (CMG) for the third Belt and Road Forum was also discussed in the meeting. The minister said that a film production agreement was also under process between the governments of the two countries. The minister said that the MoU between APP and Xinhua News Agency was in progress. Cooperation for the joint production of a travel documentary between CGTN and PTV was also discussed by the minister and the Chinese Ambassador.

Russian missile attack targets Kyiv

DNA

KYIV: Ukraine has intercepted 31 missiles launched by Russia at Kyiv overnight, Ukraine's air force said. At least 17 people, including a child, were injured by falling debris, four of whom are in hospital, authorities said. It is the largest Russian attack in weeks and follows a vow from Moscow for revenge over recent attacks by Ukraine on its border regions. The attack prompted Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to renew his call for more military aid from Western allies. Several explosions were heard throughout Kyiv shortly before dawn as its anti-missile defence systems shot the rockets down. Debris fell in the Podilsky, Shevchenkivskiy and Sviatoshyn districts, causing fires on the roofs of a power transformer, several residential buildings and cars, the head of the city military administration Serhiy Popko said on Telegram.

FIA launches countrywide crackdown

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Thursday announced the launch of a nationwide "massive crackdown" against electricity and gas theft. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said there would not be any discrimination during the campaign and all those responsible would be put behind bars, he warned. "This proactive initiative aims to curb the rampant theft of essential utilities, ensuring fair distribution and access for all citizens," Naqvi said in a post on the social media platform, X, after chairing a meeting on the issue. According to media in the meeting chaired by Naqvi special teams have been formed to launch the crack down on electricity and gas thieves. Naqvi has given a special task to the FIA in this regard. He directed the investigation agency to take strict legal action against those involved in electricity and gas theft. FIA officials submitted a detailed report of the Greece boat tragedy to the interior minister, on which Naqvi said that all those involved in the boat accident must be brought to justice.

'21 killed in Kandahar suicide bombing

KABUL: At least 21 people were killed and several others injured in a suicide blast outside a bank in Afghanistan's Kandahar city on Thursday, BBC quoted a doctor at the regional hospital as saying. However, local police put the death toll at three and the number of injured at 12. The blast mostly killed civilians who had gathered in front of the bank to withdraw cash, the Kandahar police department said in a statement. "A suicide attack occurred in which three compatriots were killed and 12 others were wounded," he told AFP. "Commonly our compatriots gather there to collect their salaries," he said, adding that the "victims were civilians". The dead and about 50 injured people were shifted to Mirwais hospital, the region's largest, a doctor from the hospital told BBC on the condition of anonymity. Afghanistan's capital is Kabul but Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada lives in Kandahar city, in the southern province of the same name that is the birthplace of the Taliban movement. Taliban authorities had surrounded the area outside the bank and did not let journalists close to the site. However, an AFP journalist saw what appeared to be unconscious people or dead bodies being loaded into ambulances in the wake of the blast. Firefighters and security personnel were clearing the area, where blood, scraps of clothes and shoes littered the ground. Hospitals did not respond to requests for information, saying they had been told not to speak to the media. The number of bomb blasts and suicide attacks in Afghanistan has markedly declined since the Taliban ended their insurgency after seizing power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government. However, a number of armed groups — including the regional chapter of Daesh — remain a threat. —Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Chaudhry Salik Hussain receiving souvenir from the Grand Mufti of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dr Husein ef Kavazovic. — DNA

Vietnam: President Thuong resigns

HANOI: Vietnam's president Vo Van Thuong has resigned after only one year in office. After a meeting of the ruling Communist Party on Wednesday, the government said he had broken party rules and negatively affected its reputation. In a country known for its political stability, rigidly enforced by the party, a president has just been forced to resign for the second time in just over a year. Vo Van Thuong, at 53 years old, was the youngest ever to hold the position. With his resignation, confirmed on Thursday by the National Assembly, he is also the shortest-serving. His predecessor Nguyen Xuan Phuc resigned last year, after only two years in the job. Both men were tainted by association with corruption scandals. The explanation given by the government does not reveal much about the reasons. It states only that President Thuong "violated party rules, and that he had shortcomings which affected public opinion and the reputation of the party, state and himself". However, he is assumed to have resigned over fraud and bribery allegations being made against officials and a property business in the province of Quang Ngai, where he was once local party boss. — DNA

Indonesia's Subianto wins presidency

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto has been elected president of the world's third-biggest democracy, the elections commission said Wednesday, beating two rivals who have vowed to file legal complaints about the vote. The fiery defence minister and his vice presidential running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka — eldest son of outgoing leader Joko Widodo — already declared victory last month after unofficial counts showed them winning a majority. They were officially confirmed as winners Wednesday after receiving more than 96 million votes, commission chairman Hasyim Asy'ari said, roughly 58.6 percent of the total and enough to secure a first-round majority. "This decision is effective immediately as of March 20," Asy'ari said. Anies Baswedan secured 24.9 percent of the vote, while Ganjar Pranowo received more than 16 percent. More than 164 million Indonesians voted, representing around an 80 percent turnout of eligible voters. Prabowo, 72, was widely predicted to win the presidency on his third attempt. He takes over in October after a transition period. Speaking outside his house in the capital Jakarta to thunderous applause from supporters, Prabowo thanked Indonesians and his party for helping him rise to the country's highest office. "We are grateful to the God Almighty for the official announcement from the KPU on the results of the election," he said, referring to the elections commission. "We would like to convey our gratitude and the highest appreciation for all the people of Indonesia who have exercised their rights to vote." His popularity soared because of what experts said was his nationalist verve in populist speeches, strongman credentials as defence minister and backing from Widodo, more popularly known as Jokowi. — APP

Amb. Blome emphasizes economic development in Pakistan-US ties

ISSI hosts roundtable discussion with Ambassador Donald Blome on Pakistan-US relations in the context of regional and global developments



KHAYAM ABBASI

Islamabad: The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a Round Table discussion with H.E. Donald Blome, Ambassador of the United States of America to Pakistan, on Pakistan-US Relations in the Context of Regional and Global Developments. Other participants included former Ambassadors and diplomats, heads of think tanks, academics,

practitioners, and area experts. In his welcome remarks, DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood recalled the past patterns of the relationship and dilated on its current dynamics. He noted that the Pakistan-US relationship has been largely influenced by external circumstances, encompassing regional and global developments. The thrust of bilateral cooperation has now shifted from security to a wider range of areas, reflecting changing priorities. While counter-terrorism remains important, the greater focus now includes trade,

investment, energy, IT, environment, education, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. This aligns with Pakistan's pivot towards geo-economics and comprehensive human security. He concluded by stressing the importance of revitalizing the relationship, with due imagination and ambition about the future prospects. Ambassador Blome in his remarks highlighted the importance of establishing robust ties to strengthen the relationship even further. He emphasized that economic development is the cornerstone of Pakistan-US relations with a renewed focus on groundwork to bolster ties and collaborate effectively towards fostering enhanced peace, prosperity, and regional stability. Following the talk, participants engaged in an interactive discussion that focused on a range of subjects — including the situation in Afghanistan; peace, security and strategic stability in South Asia; conflict in Europe and the Middle East; developments in Asia-Pacific; and maritime security. In the end, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman of the Board of Governors, ISSI presented the Institutes memento to the Keynote Speaker followed by a group photo.

