



Islamabad POST

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

Japan PM Kishida requested summit with Kim Jong Un

Detailed News On Page-07

EU's unity threatened by challenges

Detailed News On Page-07



Rajitha takes five wickets as SL crush BD

Detailed News On Page-06



For the first time

UNSC demands 'immediate' Gaza ceasefire

Russia, at the last minute, objected to the removal of the word "permanent" ceasefire and called a vote, which failed to gain passage

NEWS DESK / DNA

NEW YORK CITY: The UN Security Council for the first time on Monday demanded an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan after the US, Israel's ally which vetoed previous drafts, abstained. Drawing unusual applause in the often staid Security Council chamber, all 14 other members voted in favor of the resolution which "demands an immediate ceasefire" for the rest of the ongoing Islamic holy month. The resolution called for the cessation of hostilities to lead to a "lasting sustainable ceasefire" and demanded that Hamas and other militants free hostages seized on October 7. Russia, at the last minute, objected to the removal of the word "permanent" ceasefire and called a vote, which failed to gain passage. The text acknowledged the ongoing diplomatic efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the US to bring about an end to hostilities, the release of all hostages and an increase in the distribution of humanitarian aid. The successful resolution was drafted in part by Algeria, the Arab bloc's current member on the Security Council, with a diverse array of countries including Slovenia and Switzerland. Also on Monday, the White House said the US abstention did not signal a change in Washington's policy toward the conflict. It does not represent a "shift in our policy," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told journalists.

Pakistan welcomes UNSC ceasefire resolution in Gaza

Palestinian people will have much needed respite after months of bloodshed and massacre of over 30,000 innocent civilians: Dar

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has welcomed the UNSC resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar in his X message said, 'We urge urgent implementation of the resolution and hope the Palestinian people will have much needed respite after months of bloodshed and massacre of over 30,000 innocent civilians'.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Federal Republic of Germany to Pakistan, Alfred Grannas calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

PM, German ambassador discuss ties

PM expresses desire to expand Pakistan-Germany trade ties

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Germany Alfred Grannas called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday and discussed matters of mutual interest. The Prime Minister thanked German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for sending a congratulatory message to him on his re-election. The Prime Minister emphasized that Pakistan deeply valued its longstanding ties with Germany and considered it an important partner in Europe. While noting the positive trajectory of bilateral ties, the Prime Minister

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Military courts trials

Apex court seeks summary of reserved decisions

A five-member bench comprising Justices Ijazul Ahsan, Munib Akhtar, Yahya Afridi, Syed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi and Ayesha Malik had unanimously declared the trial of civilians in military courts ultra vires the Constitution

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Attorney General for Pakistan to present a summary of the reserved decisions related to the trials of civilians by military courts on next date of hearing on March 28. The Supreme Court issued directive to the attorney general as it resumed hearing intra-court appeals (ICAs) against its Oct 23 unanimous decision invalidating trials of civilians in military courts for their alleged involvement in the May 9 violence. The court had declared that civilians could not be tried in military courts but in criminal courts of competent jurisdiction established under the ordinary or special law of the land. A five-member bench comprising Justices Ijazul Ahsan, Munib Akhtar, Yahya Afridi, Syed Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi and Ayesha

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KP govt seeks withdrawal of appeal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government Monday requested the Supreme Court to withdraw the former provincial caretaker government's appeal against the top court's October 23 judgment, declaring the military trial of civilians null and void. Presenting a resolution passed by the provincial cabinet led by KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, the government's

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Briefs

PTI demands EU report to be made public

The EU report on the elections should be made public

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has demanded the European Union (EU) report on the February 8 general elections to be made public. "The EU report on the elections should be made public," PTI spokesperson Raouf Hasan said while addressing a press conference in Islamabad. Recalling the EU delegation's visit to Pakistan before the polls, Hasan said that the inter-governmental body has confirmed handing over its report on the country's general elections to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). "The EU report is very sensitive and important," he added.

Trump wins lifeline in fraud case

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Donald Trump was thrown a huge lifeline Monday when an appeals court slashed what could have been a crippling demand for a nearly half-billion-dollar bond payment and also gave him 10 more days to pay. The Republican presidential candidate got the unexpectedly positive news about his New York civil fraud case while he was sitting in court for another case - a hearing in his upcoming criminal trial over paying hush money to a porn star. Trump had been facing a Monday deadline to pay the huge original bond pending an appeal against a judge's decision that he is liable for fraudulently conspiring to inflate his net worth. Trump had made clear he was unable to find the \$454 million and he risked seeing New York state confiscate parts of his property empire in response. Now with Monday's decision, he will have 10 more days to pay just \$175 million.

Committee formed to look into matter PM directs action against tax defaulters

He further directed that all those factories that resisted the implementation of track and trace system should be immediately sealed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday directed initiation of action against tax defaulters and evaders on emergency basis. The prime minister directed for constitution of a committee to identify the hurdles and responsibilities in the track and trace system. The committee would identify the hurdles and people involved in tax theft within seven days. The prime minister chaired a meeting regarding implementation of Track and Trace System in Islamabad, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The committee would be tasked to submit future proposals over enforcement of automatic tax system in factories and industries. The meeting was attended by federal ministers including Muhammad Aurangzeb, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Jehanzeb Khan, Chairman FBR Malik Amjad Zubair Tiwana and other senior officials. The prime minister questioned as to why the system was still inactive? He observe that this system should have been made functional in tobacco, sugar, cement and fertilizer

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'Preferential treatment' Aitchison College principal resigns

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Aitchison College Principal Michael A Thomson Monday tendered his resignation after Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman ordered to waive the fees of Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Establishment Ahmad Cheema's sons. The resignation came after Cheema's wife had requested the Punjab governor to waive off the fees of her sons. Following her request, the governor issued an order after which their fees was waived off for three years. In a letter issued to the college staff, Thomson said that he will be stepping down from the principal's post on April 1 and will not be playing any role in the management and admissions process. "I did not intend to leave Aitchison College but now I have no other

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FIA assures SC of withdrawing cases against journalists

Agency says withdrawing cases against journalists Amir Mir and Imran Shafqat

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) assured the Supreme Court on Monday that it will withdraw cases filed against journalists amidst allegations of harassment. The cases were registered over a "malicious campaign" that allegedly targeted the judiciary and other state institutions on social media. The case was presided over by a bench, led by Chief Justice of

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FM reiterates Pak's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause

Ambassador of Japan Mitsuhiro Wada paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Palestine Ahmed Rabei in a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar. - DNA

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Ahmed Jawad A. A. Rabei of the State of Palestine paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to convey his warm wishes on the assumption of office. During the meeting, the foreign minister thanked the Ambassador and reiterated Pakistan's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause. He also called for an urgent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza.

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FM stresses early resumption of PIA flights to UK

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, in a phone call with British counterpart David Cameron on Monday, stressed the need for early resumption of national carrier Pakistan International Airline's (PIA) flights to the United Kingdom to "bolster linkages", according to the Foreign Office (FO). In July 2020, the UK had joined several countries in suspending PIA's flight operations due to concerns about the authenticity of pilot licences. On Saturday, Dar had said that PIA flights to the UK would resume "in weeks, not months", and that he took up the matter of banned flights of the national carrier with British government officials over the weekend in London.

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Wafaqi Mohtasib disposes of 193,028 complaints in 2023

President appreciated the performance of the Mohtasib and urged the need to take further steps to enhance its outreach so that the maximum number of people could benefit of its services

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : The Wafaqi Mohtasib of Pakistan has processed a record 194,099 complaints against the maladministration of government departments in 2023, which is 18% higher than the previous year. Out of these, 193,028 complaints were disposed of which is 22% higher than the year 2022. This was reported by the Wafaqi Mohtasib, Mr Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, who called on President Asif Ali Zardari and presented the Annual Report of the Federal Ombudsman, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. The Mohtasib briefed the President about the performance and initiatives taken

by the Federal Ombudsman. He said that the Ombudsman was providing speedy and free-of-cost justice to the complainants against the maladministration of various government departments. He informed that 49,190 complaints were received online in 2023, which was an increase of 47% from last year. He added that 22,321 complaints were received through the Mobile App, showing an increase of 21% as compared to the year 2022. He stated that the Ombudsman was using the latest technology to help in the speedy redressal of cases and to enhance its outreach to the people in remote areas of the country. The Mohtasib highlighted that the opening of new regional of-

fices, holding of Khuli Katcheries, launching of the Informal Resolution of Disputes mechanism, and visits of Mohtasib's inspection teams had helped in addressing complaints, besides leading to an increase in the registration of complaints. He further said that the office of Overseas Pakistanis in the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat had processed a record 202,367 complaints received through Pakistan Missions abroad, and One Window Facilitation Desks at all international airports of the country. The President appreciated the performance of the Mohtasib and urged the need to take further steps to enhance its outreach so that the maximum number of people could benefit of its services.



ISLAMABAD : Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain in a meeting with the President Pakistani Overseas Community, Malawi Country in East Africa Chaudhry Karamat.—DNA

AIOU to establish a state-of-the-art campus in Mardan

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will establish a state of the art campus in Mardan. In this regard, Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood called on Mayor of Mardan, Hamayatulullah Mayar, and Additional Deputy Commissioner, Naik Mohammad Khan. While giving a detailed briefing on the educational services of the university, Dr. Nasir said that if AIOU could get land at a suitable place in Mardan, the University will build a state-of-the-art campus of the university, which will provide a lot of convenience to the students of Mardan. All the facilities will be available to them at their doorstep. Hamayatulullah Mayar and Naik Muhammad Khan assured to lease suitable land to the University in Mardan for the construction of the campus. In these meetings, Director General Regional Services, AIOU, Dr. Malik Tauqeer Ahmed Khan accompanied the Vice Chancellor. The delegation of Allama Iqbal Open University led by the Vice Chancellor also participated in a seminar organized in Abdul Wali Khan University regarding Pakistan Day. Dr. Nasir Mahmood also called on the vice chancellor of Kohat University of Science and Technology, Prof. Dr. Naseeruddin in his office yesterday. VC, AIOU will also visit the campus in Mardan.

Alif holdings revolutionizes Pakistan's construction sector

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Alif Holdings, a trailblazer in Pakistan's real estate development landscape, celebrates its excellence in providing superior and luxurious lifestyles to its esteemed customers. With a steadfast commitment to design excellence, construction quality, and unparalleled customer service, Alif Holdings has emerged as a trusted name synonymous with innovation and reliability. For more than past 6 years, Alif Holdings has been empowering its customers to secure their futures by investing wisely in real estate. With an experienced staff boasting years of collective expertise in project management, construction, and architectural services, Alif Holdings stands as a beacon of trust and reliability in the industry. The company's dedication to

excellence extends beyond construction to include rental and maintenance services, ensuring that clients' properties are not only a source of pride but also a valuable investment. "We take pride in our ability to provide our customers with not just properties, but opportunities for a secure and prosperous future," said Mr. Ahmed Saljouk, Director of Finance & Development at Alif Holdings. "With our experienced staff and commitment to excellence, we aim to redefine the standards of luxurious living and smart investment in Pakistan." One of Alif Holdings' recent milestones includes the overhaul of its operations with the hiring of specialists from the hospitality industry, bringing years of cumulative experience to the table. This strategic move underscores Alif Holdings' unwavering commitment

to ensuring that its tenants receive the best possible experience, from the moment they step into one of our properties. Among Alif Holdings' successful projects is the Waterfall Tower project, which exemplifies the company's dedication to innovation and quality. This landmark project has set new benchmarks in the industry, redefining urban living with its luxurious amenities and state-of-the-art design. As Alif Holdings looks ahead to the future, the company remains committed to its vision of pioneering positive change in the construction industry and elevating the standards of its competition. With a portfolio of exceptional projects and a team driven by passion and expertise, Alif Holdings is poised to continue shaping the future of Pakistan's urban landscape for years to come.

Nusrat calls for resolving national issues

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Political and social leader Nusrat Khan has said that everyone needs to come together to solve national issues. In a statement, Nusrat Khan emphasized that instead of traveling in circles, we need to move forward. Regarding a question, Nusrat Khan stated that the enthusiasm shown by the public in the February 8 elections is truly commendable. Nusrat Khan said that it is time for the government and the opposition to join hands instead of aligning against each other and resolving the country's issues by working together. The political and social leader expressed that Pakistan is facing difficult times, and in such circumstances, it is essential for us to play a role in reducing the problems of the people rather than focusing on individual or group interests.

Minister for Maritime Affairs visits PNSC headquarters

KARACHI Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, conducted an official visit to the main office of the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) on Monday. The minister received a warm welcome from PNSC officials upon his arrival. During the visit, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh was briefed by PNSC's Director Project and Planning, Khurram Mirza, alongside other key officials including Director Finance, Syed Jarrar Ahmed Kazmi, Director Ship Management, S.M. Babar, and Director Commercial, Captain Mustafa Qazilbash. Addressing the gathering, the Minister underscored the necessity for collaborative efforts to steer the nation's economy in a positive direction, emphasizing the importance of building a better Pakistan for future generations. He also pointed out the significant progress in the Asian region while noting the country's lag in development. In discussions with the media, the minister outlined plans to finalize the PNSC board and appoint a CEO from the private sector, aiming to enhance the corporation's efficiency further. While expressing satisfaction with PNSC's current performance, the minister stressed the potential for further improvements. Regarding the government's economic endeavors, Sheikh assured that efforts were underway, promising visible results albeit requiring some time. Following the PNSC visit, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh proceeded to tour the DLB Building, where DG Port and Shipping, Aaliya Shahid, provided further insights during a briefing session.—APP

Citizens' gear up for shopping ahead Eid-ul-Fitr

ISLAMABAD : As the holy month of Ramazan has reached its midpoint, the majority of the people are gearing up for Eid-ul-Fitr shopping by visiting the shopping malls and local markets of the federal capital. The preparations for the upcoming festival have begun with the markets of the capital city bustling with shoppers, amidst prayers and fasting, as a huge rush of people can be witnessed thronging the main markets, including G-9, G-10, F-6, F-7, F-10, Apara Market, etc. Several women can be witnessed in the main markets and shopping malls of the capital looking for dresses, shoes, and other

essential accessories to celebrate the Eid festivities in a befitting manner, taking advantage of the Pakistan Day sales. Shagufta Shahid, a mother of three children, said, "I have completed shopping for my family, thinking that there will be more people in the coming days and the required sizes of dresses and shoes may not be available." Talking to APP, she said, "Although the online shopping platforms have made it easier for many to shop while sitting at their homes during fasting, visiting the market physically for Eid shopping has its own charm." Shaishta Naz, a young girl, said, "I bought my Eid dress

and shoes from the nearest shopping mall, availing of the sale offers. Now I have to buy just bangles, jewelry, and henna on the 'Chaand Raat' with my friends". She said, "I always try to buy dresses and shoes by the middle of Ramazan as all the good stuff is sold out during the last few days before Eid, while the tailors also stop taking orders during the last week of Ramazan as they also leave for native towns". Hira Iftikhar, who is a government employee, said, "Shopping during the month of Ramazan is a difficult task, so I am trying to complete it so that I can focus on prayers to seek blessings.—APP

HEDP 8th steering committee reviews progress

ISLAMABAD : HEC's Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project held its eighth Steering Committee (SC) meeting at the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Secretariat, Islamabad. SC is the highest forum of the project comprising senior officials from federal ministries, provincial higher education departments, vice chancellors, and private sector representatives. HEDP is a five-year US\$ 400 Million national flagship project (2019/20 - 2023/24) of HEC to implement key higher education priorities. The committee members reviewed the progress made so far on the project. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum, Executive Director, HEC chaired the meeting saying that HEDP is a key investment for higher education as it is supporting HEC in its various areas of research, quality assurance, IT initiatives and capacity building. "I am glad to share that HEDP has a good standing of achieving 81% of its targets, and this has also been validated by the recent World Bank mission that has improved the project rating." Project Coordinator HEDP Dr. Mehmood ul Hassan Butt gave an overview of the HEDP project, its history, progress, plans, and the recently held World Bank Mission that has further improved the project rating to satisfactory in seven components. He along with his team briefed the committee on the key project initiatives, including the physical and financial progress. In addition, it was apprised that the project is moving towards its last year and the team is working closely with HEC officials as eventually these will be taken over by the HEC staff to sustain these initiatives. Technical heads of the project components updated members on the progress of each of their components of the project. Component 1 has recently completed award of 10 Rapid Technology Transfer Grants (RTTG) - focused on addressing Pakistan's current financial distress by encouraging industry-academia collaborations to enable import substitutions. It is also working to gather the outputs and impacts of the grants awarded in last years in terms of research publications, recognitions, awards, and innovative ideas/products developed. Component 2 team has recently completed the establishment of 41 Quality Enhancement Cells in Affiliated Colleges (QECACs) as well as training faculty of affiliated colleges on General Pedagogy across Pakistan. It is also working closely with the HEC QAA division to facilitate implementation of new HEC QA policy.—DNA

PR to run four special trains on Eid ul Fitr

MULTAN :Pakistan Railways (PR) has decided to run four Eid ul Fitr special trains to ease rush of passengers from and to Karachi-Peshawar, Quetta-Rawalpindi, Karachi-Lahore and Lahore-Karachi. A well placed source of PR told this news agency on Monday that two trains would depart from Karachi to Lahore and Quetta to Rawalpindi on April 7 while a third train will operate between-Karachi-Lahore on April 8.—APP

Civil society urges extension of e-cigarette ban

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government to extend the interim ban on e-cigarettes and vapes for an additional 60 days

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Blue Veins, local NGO, Civil Society Organizations, Provincial Doctor Association, Tobacco Control Advocates, and Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control on Monday demanded Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government to extend the interim ban on e-cigarettes and vapes for an additional 60 days. The CSO, on Monday urged the authorities for extending the stringent measures, prohibiting the sale of e-cigarettes to individuals under the age of 21 and implementing a minimum distance requirement of 50 meters from educational institutions to safeguard public health. Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 16th January 2024, through Administrative notification imposed an interim ban, under Section 144, on the storage, sale, and use of e-cigarettes in the province.

This temporary measure, which expired on March 16, 2024, was a significant stride towards safeguarding our communities from the harms of electronic nicotine delivery systems. In response to the World Health Organization's call for action and in the interest of public health, civil society organizations commend the proactive approach of the Governor and Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a press statement Qamar Naseem, Program Manager at Blue Veins and leading advocate for a complete ban on vape and e-cigarette sales in KP, stated, "Extending the ban on sale of e-cigarettes and vapes is imperative to prevent youth and adolescent of these harmful products and to pave the way for evidence-based regulations." "Civil society organizations proactively stands with Government to




strengthen and expedite the enactment of comprehensive provincial legislation to ensure a permanent solution to these growing health concerns." He added. Dr. Ihtisham Ullah Khan, a renowned Physician and Chest Specialist at Lady Reading Hospital (LRH), highlighted the health risks associated with e-cigarette use, stating, "As healthcare professionals, we have evident detrimental effects of e-cigarettes on respiratory health. Extending the ban is a crucial step in protecting individuals, particularly youth, from the long-term health consequences of vaping." Dr. Qazi Shahbaz Mohyuddin Senior Vice President Provincial Doctors Association, emphasized the need for comprehensive regulations, stating, "The regulation of e-cigarettes must go beyond a temporary ban. We urge the government to


implement permanent stringent measures, through strong regulations, to effectively mitigate the harms associated with vaping." Zahoor Ahmad, member for the Provincial Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control, underscored the importance of stakeholder engagement in the policy-making process, stating, "Extending the ban will provide an opportunity for meaningful consultation with stakeholders from various sectors. This inclusive approach is essential for the development of comprehensive and effective regulations to address the growing threat of e-cigarettes." In light of emerging concerns, speakers called on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government to prioritize public health and safety by extending the interim ban on e-cigarettes, coupled with stricter regulations, to combat the menace of E-cigarettes and vapes.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

March 01/Bosnia
National Day

March 03/Bulgaria
National Day

March 06/ Ghana
Independence Day

March 12 /Mauritius
National Day

March 17/Ireland
St. Patricks Day

March 20/Tunisia
Independence Day

March 21/Namibia
National Day

March 25/Greece
National Day

March 26/Bangladesh
National Day

March 27/Myanmar
Armed Forces Day

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Islamabad.....1122 & 16
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& Rescue Services.4451122
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Motorway Police.9270601-20
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MH.....5611116
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DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Pak for increasing economic with Cote d'Ivoire: Zardari

During the meeting, the President asked the Ambassador-designate to explore opportunities for advancing trade and economic relations with Cote d'Ivoire. He said that there was great potential to increase the exports of Pakistani rice, medical and surgical equipment, pharmaceutical products and sports goods to Cote d'Ivoire

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan enjoyed cordial relations with Cote d'Ivoire and underscored the need to enhance economic and cultural ties with Cote d'Ivoire for the mutual benefit of the two countries. He expressed these views while talking to the Ambassador-designate of Pakistan to Cote d'Ivoire, Mr Mahmood Akhtar Mahmood, who called on the President, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. During the meeting, the President asked the Ambassador-designate to explore opportunities for advancing trade and economic relations



with Cote d'Ivoire. He said that there was great potential to increase the exports of Pakistani rice, medical and surgical equipment, pharmaceutical products and sports goods to Cote d'Ivoire. The President also called for exploring possibilities to promote cultural relations and people-to-people contacts to strengthen the friendship between the two nations. He urged the Ambassador to make efforts to further improve bilateral cooperation. The President also congratulated Mr Mahmood Akhtar Mahmood on his appointment as Pakistan's Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire and wished him a successful tenure.

Musician Ustad Beebo Khan remembered

ISLAMABAD: The death anniversary of renowned musician Ustad Beebo Khan of Sindh was observed on Monday. His original name was Muhammad Ibrahim Qureshi. He was born in Shikarpur in 1904. Ustad Beebo Khan received his musical training from his father Ustad Gaman Khan, Ustad Mubarak Ali Khan and Ustad Murad Ali. He was well versed in his family heritage. With the passage of time, the fame of his singing began to spread far and wide. He started being invited to sing every month at All India Radio Bombay. Ustad Beebo Khan's students include Ustad Qudratullah Khan, Ustad Niaz Hussain, Ustad Fida Hussain Khan, Muhammad Hashim Kicchi, Hadi Bakhsh Khan, Mai Allah Wasai, Muhammad Saleh Sand and Allah Deno Noonari. Ustad Beebo Khan was died on this day in 1954 in Hyderabad and was buried in Tando Yusuf graveyard.—APP

Kashmir historian blames India for committing 'memoricide'

ISLAMABAD: Kashmiri historian Hafsa Kanjwal has blamed India for committing "memoricide" and repression in the disputed territory of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K). According to Kashmir Media Service, in a media interview, Kanjwal said that India is trying to erase the history of the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination and to suppress dissent in the region. "India has always tried to domesticate what was always an international issue," Kanjwal said. "It's completely rewriting that entire history, engaging in something that Kashmiri scholars have called memoricide." Memoricide is referred to the destruction of the memory, extermination of the past of targeted people. Kanjwal said that the Indian government is using various tactics to suppress dissent in Kashmir, including arbitrary arrests, detentions, and internet shutdowns. She also said that the government is trying to change the demographics of Kashmir by allowing Indian settlers to move into the territory. "So Kashmiri Muslims face an immense dispossession of their land and their resources and the demographic threat now of being made into a minority," Kanjwal said. "And once that happens, then the calls that Kashmiris have been making for all of these decades for self-determination will be rendered obsolete." Kanjwal said that the international community has not done enough to hold India accountable for its actions in Kashmir. She said that there is a lack of political will to address the issue, as countries are more interested in using India as a bulwark against China. "We are kind of held hostage by the international community and unable to think about ways beyond what we see now with what people are doing for Gaza in terms of popular mobilizations and disruptions," Kanjwal said. Kanjwal said that despite the repression, the Kashmiri people have not given up their struggle for self-determination. She said that there is a new generation of Kashmiris who are learning about their history and who are committed to continuing the fight for freedom. "So it's hard to say what will happen, what people will do," Kanjwal said. "But for sure, this is like a period of quiet, perhaps reflection. When there are these structures that are so oppressive, the structures themselves enable some kind of resistance, whether it will happen now, or it will happen five years from now. We don't necessarily know. But it's very hard for people to keep up with this level of oppression." "There were different human rights organisations like Amnesty International, which represents freedom of the press like the Committee to Protect Journalists and so on, that have issued statements. The UN Special Rapporteurs have issued several statements, especially around the arrests of human rights defenders and the kind of clampdown on the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society and other organisations. This outcry has happened, but it's not been able to be taken forward. And I think, as we can tell from what's happening in Gaza today, this thing called the international community in many ways further subjugates occupied peoples instead of doing anything substantial," Kanjwal said.—DNA

Pakistan's largest IT Park approved in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: In a move set to redefine Pakistan's tech landscape, the establishment of the country's largest IT Park in Islamabad has been greenlit under the auspices of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Planned to be situated in the G-10 sector of the federal capital, the IT Park will span an impressive 3.3 acres, marking a significant milestone in Pakistan's journey toward technological advancement and economic growth, PTV News reported on Monday. This ambitious project, which operates under a public-private partnership model, is geared to accommodate approximately six thousand freelancers, equipping them with state-of-the-art facilities and resources.—DNA

Drum beating tradition in Sehri still alive in capital city

ISLAMABAD: The centuries old tradition of a Drum beating waking up people for Sehri remains alive even in the federal capital of Islamabad. For centuries, the majority people would wake up to the loud drumbeats in the wee hours heralding the beginning of Sehri time during Ramadan. However, with modern technology, this tradition has declined but still kept alive by drum beaters like Faqeer Hussain. Faqeer Hussain still beats the drum at Sehri and wakes up the people in sector G-7, Islamabad. Talking to APP he said "I feel very happy to wake the people up. I never enjoyed any other event like this and feel that I am doing a religious activity. "I don't perform this duty for the sake of cash but I do it only for the hereafter," he added. "It's not that the people of my area do not have modern equipment, they do have, but they want to keep this custom alive," he added. The drum beaters visit various streets, usually around 3 to 4 AM. Most of the time, he calls out loudly, "Utho rozay daro" and makes sure that the thunderous beat of his drum along with his slogans is loud enough to wake up the residents of a particular locality. Those who perform this duty during the Ramazan, go from house to house to receive their reward at the end of the holy month. The locals give cash, clothes and rations of their free will, which helps them celebrate Eidul Fitr better. Prof. Chaudhry Rasheed Sal told APP that due to the use of advanced technology, the tradition of waking people up at sehri has changed as the majority of people now use alarms and digital clocks to wake up for Sehri. However, he said that keeping alive, centuries-old traditions are a very positive activity and should be encouraged, adding that all these traditions make our country more beautiful. He said that even though people had modern devices to help them wake up, they wanted to keep the tradition alive and encouraged the 'dhol wala'. In some areas, Qawali performers are also seen in action visits from one street to another soon after Iftar or before Iftar.—APP

'Text to CPO' service launched to facilitate citizens

RAWALPINDI: City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani on Monday launched 'Text to CPO' service to facilitate the citizens and improve service delivery. Through this service, the citizens can send a direct message to CPO on cell number 0300-4911720. According to a police spokesman, during last six months, a total of 1560 complaints were received from the citizens. More than 99 percent of the complaints of the citizens were resolved, he said adding, in this regard, 103 cases were registered while 14 complaints were being processed. A complainant can send text messages through whatsapp/sms regarding abuse of civic authority, corruption or bribery, police violence, misbehavior, poor investigation, delay in FIR or any other complaint related to police. Action on merit would be ensured on the complaint, as per the vision of Chief Minister Punjab and Inspector General of Police Punjab and best service delivery was being ensured for the citizens, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Women taking interest in various items displayed on the sidelines of the diplomatic football league played at the UAE embassy.—DNA

Security of Gwadar City

JAVED AKHTAR

ISLAMABAD: Gwadar, a port city situated in the southwestern province of Balochistan in Pakistan, has been contending with governance challenges for the past decade. These challenges have given rise to various social and security issues that require immediate attention to ensure Gwadar City's safety and stability. Complicating matters further is the city's strategic location as a deep-sea port and its proximity to conflict-ridden regions, which adds another layer of complexity to Gwadar's security situation. Moreover, the city continues to grapple with the aftermath of recent rains and floods, which have posed significant obstacles to its development. Additionally, Gwadar City faces

an unprecedented security challenge, with certain non-state actors or purported terrorists escalating tensions within this critical port city. Despite such challenges, Gwadar Port holds significant strategic, geographic, and economic advantages. These advantages include offering a direct and shorter route to China, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, positioning it as a pivotal hub for regional trade and connectivity. Understanding the governance challenges confronting Gwadar City necessitates delving into its historical development. Historically, Gwadar City has been a neglected and marginalized region, receiving minimal investment in its development and governance. This lack of infrastructure and essential services has left the local populace feeling marginalized and excluded from the dividends of progress. Consequently, this neglect has fostered an environment where local communities are susceptible to manipulation by external entities vying for power or influence in the area. Addressing the longstanding governance challenges in Gwadar is paramount to enhancing security. A comprehensive strategy is imperative, encompassing various facets. This entails bolstering law enforcement and security apparatus, fortifying intelligence gathering and sharing mechanisms, enhancing border control measures, investing in critical infrastructure projects like roads, electricity, and water supply, and implementing robust community engagement initiatives to foster trust and collaboration with the local population.

MARCH 2024

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Briefs

MoITT introduces standardized quality test

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) has introduced a standardized quality test in all universities across Pakistan to enhance job opportunities for fresh graduates. An official from the Ministry of IT said that this decision aims to revamp IT education in collaboration with various entities, including the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the National Computing Accreditation Council, the Examination Testing Council, the Pakistan Software Export Board, and the Pakistan Software Houses Association. Students who successfully pass the test will be eligible for job opportunities through the Industry Placement Program. He said, funds will be allocated to support special industry courses in universities, with the goal of preparing students to meet current industry trends and demands. The official explained that the National Computing Accreditation Council will consider the pass rate of students to determine a university's rating and the permissible enrollment of IT students. He said that Pakistani universities currently produce 20,000 to 22,000 IT graduates annually, but only 2,000 of them manage to secure employment.—APP

OPF to establish new female academic block in Rawalpindi

ISLAMABAD: The Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) an attached department of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development would establish OPF Higher Secondary Girls School Academic Block the government's unwavering commitment to providing quality education to the children of overseas Pakistanis. An official source told APP that the construction of a new Academic Block at OPF Girls Higher Secondary School, Rawalpindi reflects the government's dedication to meet the educational needs of both the overseas community and the general public. At present, 710 students including 279 children of Overseas Pakistanis are enrolled in the said school. New Academic Block will be constructed on an area of 21057 Sqr. Ft to accommodate around 300 more students. The proposed construction work of the new academic block will be completed with an estimated cost of Rs.99.93 million. The new academic block includes classrooms, daycare, a conference room, an art studio, a medical room, and a cafeteria. Highlighting the alignment with the Prime Minister's vision, he underscored the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development's relentless efforts to extend maximum facilities and assistance to Pakistani expatriates, not only domestically but globally.—APP

US, China, UK remain top destinations for Pakistani exports

ISLAMABAD: The United States (US) remained the top export destination of Pakistani products during the first eight months of the current financial year 2023-24, followed by China and the United Kingdom (UK). Total exports to the US during July-February 2023-24 were recorded at US \$3,626.141 million against the exports of US \$4,046.337 million during July-February 2022-23, showing a decline of 10.38 percent, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). This was followed by China, wherein Pakistan exported goods worth US \$1,895.720 million against the exports of US \$1,334.804 million last year, showing an increase of 42.02 percent. UK was the third top export destination, where Pakistan exported products worth US \$1,351.008 million during the months under review against the exports of US \$1,329.990 million, SBP data revealed.—APP



ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Malaysia Azhar Mazlan hosted iftar dinner for the embassy staff and Malaysians living in Pakistan. The Executive Chef of Islamabad Serena Hotel is also seen in the picture.—DNA

Drive on Railway safety, prohibited items in full swing

The campaign was launched on the directives of Minister for Railways Shahid Ashraf Tarar and Secretary Syed Mazhar Ali Shah which will not help the department to control accidents but also win the confidence of the passengers

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways awareness campaign was in full swing in order to raise public knowledge of the dangers of trespassing, crossing railroad tracks, and carrying forbidden objects like gas cylinders, guns without a license, cartridges, drugs, and daggers. "The campaign was launched on the directives of Minister for Railways Shahid Ashraf Tarar and Secretary Syed Mazhar Ali Shah which will not help the department to control accidents but also win the confidence of the passengers of the rail" an official told APP. The official said, "Pakistan Railways will use all the social media platforms including print, electronic media, twitter, Facebook, poster and pamphlets to create an awareness among the citizens about a safe train journey." He said the department has also

asked all the divisional superintendents to ensure checking of luggage of passengers at entry points with scanners, metal detectors and walkthrough gates. He said Pakistan Railways had always given importance to the safety of citizens and its passengers. "It has been directed to discourage and stop those passengers who are carrying prohibited products. It is suggested to install emergency doors and auto-lock doors in coaches in case of any emergency," he added. The official urged the citizens to stop at the level crossing before crossing the track, look on both sides of the track and wait for the train to pass if any train was coming.

He said that double whistle boards had been provided at most of level crossings where train drivers were bound to play

horn to warn the road users about train arrival. To a question, he said, "Pakistan Railways has converted approximately 181 un-manned level crossings to manned level crossings across the country, out of 550 identified by the department over the entire railway network in over one year." "The relevant provincial government provided the finances to Pakistan Railways for the up-gradation of un-manned level crossings in the country," he said. He said the department was taking several steps including the up-gradation of un-manned and vulnerable railway level crossings across the country in collaboration with respective provincial governments. The official said there were two types of level crossings over the Pakistan Railways network, un-manned and manned level crossings, adding that the un-

manned level crossings were without gate leaves. "There is a total of 1,565 un-manned level crossings over the entire railway network and as per railway policy in vogue, the up-gradation of any un-manned or manned level crossing is the responsibility of road owning authority," he added. The said that un-manned level crossings without gates leaves and gate men, were previously provided where 'Kacha path' with low traffic volume crosses the railway track to facilitate movement of locals, farmers and carts at their own risks. However, he said, "Due to high risk of accidents on existing un-manned level crossings, construction and provision of new un-manned level crossing is completely banned on entire Railway system as per Railway policy for level crossings from 2019."—Agencies

Economy cannot run on debt for long

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Muhammad Hanif Mughal, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Shadbad, said on Monday that it is impossible to run an economy on debt for an extended period of time. He said that an economy dependent on debt has no future and that politicians should support a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which is imperative for survival. Dr. Hanif Mughal said in a statement issued today that a new loan from the IMF is necessary. We should take advantage of the IMF's support to correct the economic problems, as we no longer have room for extravagant spending and irresponsible decisions. He stated that international lenders dislike finance ministers who prioritize politics. The lender thinks the economic situation can improve with a non-political person serving as a finance minister. He noted that Shahbaz Sharif's 16-month government saved Pakistan from default with the help of the IMF, but the people had to pay a very heavy price for that as elites were saved from the impact of IMF's conditionalities. He said that inflation would

have increased by several hundred percent if the country had gone bankrupt. Hanif Mughal said that the country has struggled with debt since its creation. Now, the country's economy relies on loans to pay salaries. Imran Khan's four-year government has taken unbelievable levels of loans, but this valuable capital has also been wasted, he informed. The IMF has recommended a thorough review of the tax incentive regimes with the goal of eliminating and streamlining any unnecessary elements. It would be desirable to have a more regular tax system with a lower tax rate backed by a larger tax base, which would be more consistent, the lender believes. Dr. Hanif Mughal said that the IMF, economists, and Muslim League (N) favored privatizing PIA and other institutions at that time. Still, the People's Party had become an obstacle. PPP has proposed a public-private partnership, which is not feasible. In such a situation, there are concerns about the government's privatization of ailing institutions, which could strain relations with the IMF. He said that if the reform process is obstructed, the new agreement with the lender may go sour.

Automating the FBR will increase govt revenue

ECC is the most important committee, and it usually includes the Ministers of Finance, Economic Affairs, Commerce, Power, Petroleum, and Planning

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Monday that the PM's choice to place the burden of difficult decisions on the elite instead of the poor masses is admirable. He said that the state of the economy and the general populace would have been different if a decision of this nature had been made several decades earlier. Shahid Rashid Butt said in a statement issued here that Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif understands the importance of the National Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) which is poised to promote investment in the country. The PM also understands the importance of cordial relations between the center and provinces and with neighboring countries and

he is aware of the impact of inflation and people's worries. PM Shahbaz Sharif also knows that running the country is impossible without painful reforms and improving infrastructure. He is making serious efforts to bring investment into the country while increasing the tax base. He thinks raising the revenue collection target which is at Rs9 trillion can be increased to Rs14 trillion if the FBR is automated. The more automated the FBR system will be, the more transparent it will be, reducing public complaints and increasing government revenue. Shahid Rashid Butt said that, as usual, even at this time, billions of rupees in revenue and claim cases are pending in the courts. If such cases are decided soon, the government can get more than 100 billion rupees, which will solve many problems. Because the PM can only give a little time to the Eco-

nomic Coordination Committee (ECC) due to his busy schedule, he has handed over this committee to the finance minister, which is a very laudable move. In addition to focusing on maintaining macroeconomic stability, supporting sustainable growth, lowering income inequality, and tackling structural economic difficulties, the finance minister should prioritize fixing the tax system. The problems that Pakistan is experiencing are a direct result of its undocummented economy, which is roughly identical to the one documented. This is why the overall tax-to-GDP ratio in the country struggles at 10-11 percent, despite the population being 250 million. ECC is the most important committee, and it usually includes the Ministers of Finance, Economic Affairs, Commerce, Power, Petroleum, and Planning.

6 companies participated in Game Developers Conference

ISLAMABAD: As many as 6 dynamic Pakistani companies and a delegation of 30 delegates have participated in the Game Developers Conference (GDC) 2024 held in San Francisco, USA. The Pakistani delegation engaged in networking, knowledge-sharing, and exploring collaboration opportunities with industry leaders worldwide, said a news release received here on Monday. This interaction showcased Pakistan's talent and creativity in game development, opening doors for potential partnerships and investment opportunities. The presence of officials from the Consulate General of Pakistan in Los Angeles Asim Ali Khan and Trade & Investment Counselor Quratulain Fatima, underscored Pakistan's booming gaming sector's importance on the international stage. The Consulate's support highlights the government's commitment to fostering innovation and promoting Pakistan's digital economy.—APP

Sindh kacha robbers have grown to be a significant issue

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Monday that the problem of kacha robbers has gotten worse. The dacoits are damaging the economy, the reputation of the country, and the aviation industry, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that Pakistan might see a cut in the airlines' flights from other countries coming to Pakistan. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that while the lives of the people have become tormented due to the bandits, the aviation industry is also suffering.

Pollen surge concerns mount for allergy sufferers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The pollen and mold ratio has surged this year compared to previous years in Islamabad, said a recent reports by Pakistan Meteorological Department. The measurements, crucial for allergy sufferers, indicate a significant increase in airborne allergens from trees, grass, weeds, and molds in the region. Using a Burkhard sampler that operates continuously for 24 hours, pollen and mold spores are collected and analyzed on slides by experts to determine their quantity and type. The severity of pollen and mold counts is measured in grains per cubic meter, with each type of pollen assigned a severity level based on its concentration found on the slide. Today's readings reveal a notably high pollen ratio in the city, with Paper Mulberry registering at 45,103, which is categorized as "very high" on the severity scale. Pine, Grass, Cannabis, and Alternaria are also notably elevated at 22, 24, 25, and 27 respectively, contributing to a total ratio of 45,201. The interpretation of pollen and mold counts and their correlation with allergy symptoms is complex, with symptoms varying among individuals and at different levels of pollen and mold concentrations. Weather conditions further complicate the situation, as allergy sufferers often find relief on rainy, cloudy, or windless days due to limited pollen movement. Conversely, hot, dry, and windy conditions lead to higher pollen and mold concentrations, exacerbating allergy symptoms. Individuals sensitive to these allergens need to be vigilant, as even small concentrations can trigger symptoms. Extremely sensitive individuals may experience severe reactions.

CDNS accomplish Rs 1200 billion targets in fresh bond

ISLAMABAD: The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has attained a target of Rs 1200 billion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, from July 1 to March, 21. The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, the senior official of CDNS told APP here on Monday. He said this was an Rs 200 billion additional annual target than the target of Rs 1300 billion for the previous financial year 2021-22. "The CDNS has set a reviewed saving target of Rs 1.4 trillion for the current financial year (2021-22) which will promote savings culture in the country," he said. Given the current market trend in the country, the ambitious target had been set to improve the savings culture further, he added. The official said that work was being done on institutional reforms in CDNS and new reforms and innovations were being introduced. "At this time Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has also been introduced in CDNS which will provide enough facilities to the users," he added. Replying to a question, he said the CDNS had collected an investment of Rs 60 billion by March 15th, 2023-24, through Islamic investment bonds. The official added that the directorate had set a target of Rs 75 billion for the new financial year 2023-24 for Islamic finance bonds.—DNA



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Sudden surge of Al-Qaeda

THE sudden resurgence of Al-Qaeda has thrust its name back into the global spotlight, this time as a prime suspect. Turkey has pointed fingers, linking the terrorist organization to two attacks resulting in 12 fatalities, while a statement has emerged claiming the group's involvement in a recent terrorist strike in Moscow, which left more than 100 dead. Other reports indicate the group's alleged involvement in attacks across Somalia, Yemen and Iraq. Al-Qaeda was once a well-established organization with a recognized presence, headquartered in Kabul and led by Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden engaged with journalists and activists, releasing video statements. But today, Al-Qaeda has been reduced to nothing more than a name. Why would Al-Qaeda target Moscow? Especially with the decline in hostilities in Syria, leaving no convincing explanation for its actions. The primary enemies for Russians are the Ukrainians and their allies, who have conducted operations targeting Moscow. It is crucial to recognize that the war in Ukraine is significantly larger in scale than the Gaza conflict, both in terms of military operations and the involved armies. Moreover, the Ukraine situation has dangerous strategic implications, while the Gaza conflict is primarily regional in nature. Despite the reluctance of most regional nations to engage in the Ukrainian conflict, Iran stood out by actively supplying Russia with drones, marking the first instance of its status as a dangerous source of weaponry. Therefore, it seems implausible that any organization under Tehran's control or influence would launch an attack against Russia. Most countries in the region have chosen to remain nonaligned in Ukrainian conflict. Despite mounting pressure from the US, their relations with Russia remain positive. However, navigating these ties proves challenging, given Moscow's support for Tehran and Tehran's military involvement in the region's numerous proxy conflicts. The indictment against Al-Qaeda, though not entirely unfounded, has lost much of its persuasive force, prompting a deeper dive into the reality of the group and its affiliated armed factions. Whether breakaway factions from the original Al-Qaeda or independently inspired groups, the spotlight is back on. Since the US-led crackdown on Al-Qaeda's leaders, the Iraq war marked a significant turning point, offering a broader marketplace for terrorism. Iraqi Baathists, embittered by the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, have played a notable role in this new chapter. Additionally, Arab jihadists with ties to Syria have joined the fray, expanding the theater of conflict beyond Iraqi borders. As the conflict in Iraq waned, these elements spilled over into neighboring Syria, fueling anti-Russian insurgencies. This phenomenon drew in counter-establishment organizations from Central Asia. Since the demise or capture of its key leaders, Al-Qaeda has lost its prominence, overshadowed by groups such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, Daesh, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Al-Shabab in Somalia and others. These organizations have spread across the region like wildfire. Saif Al-Adel stands as one of the last surviving leaders of Al-Qaeda from the Afghan jihad era. He currently lives in Iran, where he sought sanctuary alongside other key figures of the organization in the aftermath of the American invasion of Afghanistan. With only a solitary photograph dating back four decades, Al-Adel remains an enigmatic figure.



Upgradation of US-Japan alliance

AN American newspaper reported on Sunday that the US and Japan, with an eye on China, are planning the biggest upgrade to their security alliance in 60 years. According to the report, the plan, which will see the restructuring of the US military command in Japan, will be announced during Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to the US in April. Responding to the report, Tokyo's top government spokesperson said on Monday that the two are "discussing ways to strengthen cooperation in command and control in order to enhance interoperability and readiness." The rise of China in the past few years has unsettled the US, as it feels that its global hegemony is challenged, and Japan wants to resume its primacy in East Asia. At the end of 2022, Japan passed three key defense policy documents which called China the "greatest strategic challenge." The three documents were also seen as a major shift from Japan's defensive policy since the end of World War II. The US and Japan have been working to strengthen their alliance. In January 2023, US and Japanese officials said the two nations would expand their military and security cooperation by improving Japan's missile strike capabilities and making the US Marine unit in the country more flexible for potential combat. Wang Guangtao, an associate research fellow with the Center for Japanese Studies at Fudan University, told the Global Times that the latest upgrade of the US-Japan alliance will see a boost of the power of the US command in Japan, which marks a major change of the two militaries at the operational level and helps the US military to more closely coordinate with Japan to deal with emergencies. Nonetheless, the US-Japan alliance is not all roses. Wang noted that it is worth analyzing what Japan will gain and lose from the upgrading of its alliance with the US. "It seems that Japan does not obtain a reliable security commitment from the US. Japan will have to give up a fair amount of autonomy and commanding rights in the military and security fields. Whether Japan's strategic initiative is stronger or weaker will be obvious. Meanwhile, the expanded scope of activity of the US military in Japan may have a negative impact on local communities," Wang said. Cai Liang, director and senior research fellow at the Center for Northeast Asian Studies under the Institute for Foreign Policy Studies, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, pointed to the dilemma faced by traditional alliances. "The US-Japan alliance is an asymmetric relationship, with the US being 'big brother' and Japan in a subordinate position. With US power declining, it puts hopes on allies and pushes them like agents to the forefront to confront China, so that it can keep itself away once a conflict occurs. But Japan is not willing to be a whipping boy. It would drag the US into the same conflict it is involved in. This is a structural contradiction in this alliance," said Cai. The paradox is, Cai added, the US and Japan strengthen their security alliance to deter China and plan for a potential crisis in Taiwan island as they say, but if a crisis truly occurs, the essence of the alliance will be fully exposed.

We need to take action now to halt deforestation

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

Empowering these communities to manage and protect their own ancestral lands not only strengthens their rights but also enhances the conservation of biodiversity and mitigates climate change. In addition to policy interventions, consumer awareness and corporate responsibility can play crucial roles in efforts to combat deforestation. Consumers can make informed choices to support sustainably sourced products and boycott companies that engage in destructive practices such as illegal logging or deforestation for the sake of agricultural expansion. Corporations, meanwhile, have a responsibility to adopt sustainable supply chain practices, agree and adhere to zero-deforestation commitments, and invest in reforestation programs...

IN the face of the ever-escalating problem of climate change and the devastating effects it is having on ecosystems worldwide, the need to address the issue deforestation has never been more urgent. In March 2012, the UN recognized the pivotal role forests play in mitigating the effects of climate change when it established March 21 as the International Day of Forests, underscoring the critical need to safeguard these vital ecosystems. This annual event also serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnections between our forests, climate stability and biodiversity, and of the need for collective action to combat deforestation, promote sustainable forest management, and preserve our planet's natural resources for future generations. Forests are not merely clusters of trees; they are intricate ecosystems that support myriad forms of life and provide essential ecosystem services. From the Amazon rainforest to the boreal forests of Canada, from the mangroves of Southeast Asia to the temperate forests of Europe, these diverse ecosystems sustain an astonishing variety of plant and animal species. Forests also act as "carbon sponges," absorbing huge amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby helping to regulate the Earth's climate. Moreover, they play a crucial role in maintaining the hydrologic cycle (the continuous movement of water on, above and below the planet's surface), prevent soil erosion, and provide livelihoods for millions of people worldwide. However, rampant deforestation driven by human activities such as agriculture, logging and infrastructure development poses a grave threat to our forests and the invaluable services they provide. The loss of forest cover not only contributes to the build-up of greenhouse-gas emissions but diminishes biodiversity, disrupts water cycles, and exacerbates the effects of climate change. Rich forest regions such as the Amazon basin, known as the "lungs of the Earth," have experienced alarming rates of deforestation, driven by agricultural expansions and illegal logging. Similarly, in Southeast Asia vast swaths of tropical forests are being cleared to make way for palm oil plantations, leading to loss of habitats for endangered species such as orangutans and tigers. These examples of deforestation underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to halt such damaging activities and protect our remaining

forest ecosystems. The International Day of Forests is an important annual celebration that ought to serve as a rallying cry to raise awareness about the critical importance of forests in efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and preserve biodiversity. By highlighting the value of forests beyond their economic significance, this special day helps foster a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships between forests, ecosystems and human well-being. It encourages governments, policymakers, businesses and individuals to take proactive steps to address deforestation and promote sustainable forest-management practices. One of the key strategies for combating deforestation is the development and implementation of policies and initiatives that incentivize sustainable land-use practices. Countries such as Costa Rica have demonstrated the effectiveness of "payments for ecosystem services" programs, through which landowners are rewarded for taking action to conserve forests and utilize ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water regulation. Similarly, initiatives such as REDD+ (which stands for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries) provide financial incentives to nations that take action to reduce deforestation and invest in sustainable forest management. Furthermore, the strengthening of land-tenure rights for indigenous and local communities is an essential element of forest-conservation efforts. Indigenous peoples have been the stewards of forest ecosystems for generations, and so they possess invaluable knowledge of traditions and practices for sustainable resource management. Empowering these communities to manage and protect their own ancestral lands not only strengthens their rights but also enhances the conservation of biodiversity and mitigates climate change. In addition to policy interventions, consumer awareness and corporate responsibility can play crucial roles in efforts to combat deforestation. Consumers can make informed choices to support sustainably sourced products and boycott companies that engage in destructive practices such as illegal logging or deforestation for the sake of agricultural expansion. Corporations, meanwhile, have a responsibility to adopt sustainable supply chain practices, agree and adhere to zero-deforestation commitments, and invest in reforestation programs

as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives. In addition, international collaborations and partnerships are paramount in efforts to address deforestation on a global scale, given the interconnected nature of environmental issues. Initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge, a global effort launched in 2011 with the goal of restoring 350 million hectares of deforested and degraded land by 2030, serve as exemplary models of concerted action. This particular initiative brings together governments, businesses, civil society organizations and indigenous peoples from around the world to collaborate on reaching the common goal of restoring forest landscapes and promoting sustainable land-management practices. Similarly, multilateral treaties such as the Paris Agreement on climate change provide a framework for countries to work together to reduce emissions resulting from deforestation and forest degradation. Governments should commit to taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience against the effects of climate change, including specific provisions for addressing changes of land use, including deforestation. International cooperation and commitment to achieving shared goals, along with the adoption of effective initiatives to accomplish this, offer hope for a sustainable future in which forests thrive, ecosystems flourish, and the effects of climate change are mitigated for the benefit of generations to come. The dedication by the UN more than a decade ago of March 21 as International Day of Forests underscored the critical importance of addressing the problem of deforestation as part of our efforts to mitigate climate change and preserve biodiversity. From the lush rainforests of South America to the vast woodlands of Africa and the majestic, coniferous forests of North America, forests are invaluable assets that must be protected for the well-being of current and future generations. By promoting sustainable forest-management practices, empowering indigenous and local communities, engaging consumers and corporations, and fostering international collaborations, collectively we can combat deforestation and safeguard our planet's natural resources. As stewards of that planet, it is our moral obligation to take decisive action now to protect forests and ensure a sustainable future for all life on Earth.

When wounded empires rise and seek revenge

The man who knows Putin believes that he cannot tolerate defeat in Ukraine even if it means teetering on the edge of a nuclear inferno. He may be right. Putin knows that a defeat in Ukraine may lead Russia to a collapse similar to the one suffered by the Soviet Union. One must also remember his image in history. I recalled what one of Saddam Hussein's friends once told me. They said that his failure to withdraw from Kuwait was also tied to his image before history and before his friends in Baghdad. There is no doubt that the invasion of Ukraine is different to the invasion of Kuwait

AN experienced man once advised me: "Don't forget the wounds of history when you write about the crises of the present." I paused at his statement. The speaker believes that the world is headed toward a new dangerous phase where the sole superpower loses its hegemony, and empires of the past seek revenge through major coups that will change maps and the distribution of powers. He believes that the coups will take various forms, such as military or ideological invasions, drone, rocket and cyberattacks, and the sponsorship of militias. Have the wounds of empires, which believe they have been wronged by history, reopened? Do these empires harbor dormant volcanoes that are waiting for the right moment to vent their rage? The man reminded me of what several Arab communist leaders told me after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mohammed Ibrahim, Aziz Mohammed and George Hawi, the respective secretaries-general of the Sudanese, Iraqi and Lebanese communist parties, said Russia would not languish under the snow of defeat and would not become a subjugated state. It would regroup, rise and seek revenge. Some observers have said Russia's military and security institutions, which were so overwhelmed by the Soviet collapse and terrible Western victory, had plotted secret revenge and tasked a junior KGB officer to implement it. I do not advocate this theory because I worry about exaggerating scenarios. But a person has the right to think that a wounded Russia is now living under a wounded czar who harbors the greatest coup project since the Second World War. Set aside the terrorist attack that struck Moscow on Friday: This terrible massacre will not shake Vladimir Putin's control. He has just been reelected president in a landslide victory the scale of which the likes of Biden, Trump, Macron and Scholtz can only dream. I am aware that the West has said the czar tailored

the election so that he ran without a serious competitor. But I believe that Putin succeeded in connecting with the depth of the Russian spirit. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, I witnessed the elderly in Moscow yearn for the days of Joseph Stalin. The Russians love the strong ruler, even if that means ruthless killings and tempting fate. The man who knows Putin believes that he cannot tolerate defeat in Ukraine even if it means teetering on the edge of a nuclear inferno. He may be right. Putin knows that a defeat in Ukraine may lead Russia to a collapse similar to the one suffered by the Soviet Union. One must also remember his image in history. I recalled what one of Saddam Hussein's friends once told me. They said that his failure to withdraw from Kuwait was also tied to his image before history and before his friends in Baghdad. There is no doubt that the invasion of Ukraine is different to the invasion of Kuwait. The man calling the shots here is different from the one there, but experience has shown that the "historic leader" sometimes becomes a prisoner of his own image. The man asked why the West refuses to coexist with Putin's coup the same way it is coexisting with the coup carried out by Iran. He said the Iranian coup changed the features of four maps and the balances of power within them. It gave Tehran the right to appoint ministers, form governments and fire rockets. He noted that the US was dealing the Houthi militias calculated strikes that have led it to grant China and Russia permission for their vessels to safely sail in the Red Sea. Decades ago, the shah of Iran viewed the borders of his country as a robe that was too tight to contain the legacy of its empire. Khomeini's revolution, which overthrew the shah, made the "export of the revolution" a main article of the constitution. Istanbul is not too far from the wounds of history. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also views Turki-

ye's current borders as a tight robe that has stifled the Ottoman spirit. So, he has tried to lure the orphans of the Soviet Union, especially the Turkish speakers. He also tried to alter the features of major countries in the region when the Arab Spring swept through. Türkiye boasts a long history of wars with the Persian and Russian empires. Now, it is paving the way for a "security belt" inside Iraq and another inside Syria, while the West denies Russia the right to establish its own belt in Ukrainian territory. One must make the distinction here between a belt that restores land, and another that does not. China is also suffering from the wounds of history. It has been firm in declaring that Taiwan cannot be estranged from it forever, and its patience is running out. Lucky for the world that Chinese leader Xi Jinping is banking on an ally called time and, unlike Putin, has not yet launched a coup to fix the border situation. The chaos of empires is frightening in the current international jungle. The West is no longer capable of managing the world. The policeman is gone and wounded empires have risen. The UN Security Council is out of service, and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' tears cannot tend to the wounds in Gaza or Ukraine. The world is in store for worse. The terrorist attack in Moscow is dangerous given its timing and targets. The perpetrators operated differently to Daesh. The whole truth may not come out if the confessions are manipulated by the intelligence service. The attack will mark a turning point should the theory about the Ukrainian thread be true. It could pave the way for a massive escalation in the war in Ukraine. Can the West tolerate the victory of the Russian coup? Can Europe take in such a huge bitter pill? What about Russia and the master of the Kremlin if the West decides to prolong the war in Ukraine and trim the claws of the new empire and its czar?

Briefs

FM reiterates Pakistan's unwavering support...

FROM PAGE 01
The discussions underscored the longstanding and close ties between Pakistan and Palestine, reaffirming commitment to mutual cooperation and solidarity. Meanwhile, Ambassador of Japan Mitsuhiro Wada paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bilateral relations and collaboration in trade, investment, and export of manpower were discussed. The foreign minister appreciated the longstanding development partnership between Pakistan and Japan. He also stressed the need to further enhance this mutually beneficial relationship in all domains.

FM stresses early resumption of PIA...

FROM PAGE 01
Sources had told Dawn that the matter came under discussion during Dar's meetings as he urged UK officials to review the matter. Today, a press release from the FO said Dar received a call from British Foreign Secretary David Cameron during which the foreign minister made his request regarding the resumption of flights, saying that it would further bolster linkages, particularly in view of the large Pakistani diaspora in the UK. FM Dar thanked Lord Cameron for his felicitations on the former assuming office, saying that he looked forward to working closely with the UK leadership to further strengthen bilateral relations.

Apex court seeks summary...

FROM PAGE 01
Malik had unanimously declared the trial of civilians in military courts ultra vires the Constitution. However, on Dec 13, in a 5-1 majority verdict, the Supreme Court suspended its verdict "conditionally" as there were ICAs pending for a final judgment. Today, a six-member bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan and including Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Azhar Hasan Rizvi, Justice Shahid Waheed, Justice Musarrat Hilali and Justice Irfan Saadat Khan, took up the appeals.

KP govt seeks withdrawal...

FROM PAGE 01
lawyer said the government wants to withdraw the intra-court appeal. However, the apex court maintained that the appeal on cabinet resolutions cannot be returned, directing the KP government's counsel to file a formal application to withdraw the appeal. In November last year, KP caretaker government, along with that of the federal and other provinces, filed intra-court appeals against the apex court's October 23 verdict which was issued by a five-member bench. In its decision, the top court declared civilians' trials in military courts null and void in the May 9 riots, triggered by the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan in a corruption case.

PM, German ambassador discuss ties

FROM PAGE 01
expressed the desire to expand existing level of bilateral trade and investment, stating that there was great potential for enhanced German investments in Pakistan. The Prime Minister welcomed the German side's initiative to send a business delegation to visit Pakistan soon and assured that the delegation would be facilitated in every way to ensure a successful visit. He also extended an invitation to the German Chancellor to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his earliest convenience.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of UAE Hamad Alzaabi along with Ambassadors of Iran, Jordan presenting winners trophy to Iranian team, which won the diplomatic football league final, played at the UAE embassy premises. - DNA

PCB names 29 players for fitness camp in Kakul

Naqvi said that there will be national as well as international coaches for the national team, which will be finalised in four to five days

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Monday announced that 29 players will take part in a fitness camp in Kakul, Abbottabad. After taking back retirement recently, all-rounder Imad Wasim and pacer Mohammad Amir have been called up. Meanwhile, batter Usman Khan, one of the top performers of PSL 9, has also been included. The camp is set to be held from March 26 and will conclude on April 8. The players will report in the camp later today.

"The camp, organised in collaboration with the Pakistan Army, is strategically designed to prepare the players for the upcoming series and tournaments, including the home T20I series against New Zealand, the away T20I series against Ireland and England, and the forthcoming ICC T20 World Cup in USA and West Indies," the PCB said in a press release. "The camp will focus on team building and aims to enhance the physical and mental strength of the players, ensuring they are in the best condition to



face the challenges ahead. Under the guidance of experienced trainers and coaches, the players

will undergo a comprehensive training regime tailored to elevate their fitness levels, agility, leadership and strategic thinking and overall performance on the field." It must be noted that Pakistan team is currently without a coaching staff but PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday stated that the management was working on it. He said that the PCB was making a proper panel for the coaches which is in the final stages. Naqvi said that there will be national as well as international coaches for the national team, which will be

finalised in four to five days. Players called up for camp: Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Saim Ayub, Fakhar Zaman, Sahibzada Farhan, Haseebullah, Saud Shakeel, Usman Khan, Mohammad Haris, Salman Ali Agha, Azam Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed, Irfan Khan Niazi, Shadab Khan, Imad Wasim, Usama Mir, Mohammad Nawaz, Mehran Mumtaz, Abrar Ahmed, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Hasan Ali, Mohammad Ali, Zaman Khan, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Aamir Jamal, Haris Rauf and Mohammad Amir.

PM directs action against tax defaulters

FROM PAGE 01
industries in the last two years, adding that the system should be placed in other important sectors of the economy. He said that all the legal impediments in the enforcement of track and trace system should be removed. The prime minister directed that the system should be enforced at all the production lines of cement factories, besides he summoned a comprehensive plan over digital strategy and automated track and trace system. He further directed that all those factories that resisted the implementation of track and trace system should be immediately sealed. He opined that besides revenues, the said system could also be utilized for counterfeit and substandard products.

Aitchison College principal resigns

FROM PAGE 01
choice. Throughout my time as principal, I have done my very best to protect the school's reputation while extending compassion to those in need," said Thomson in the letter. "However, there is a crucial difference between this pursuit and blatant policy manufacturing to accommodate certain individuals because such people simply insist on preferential treatment," the letter said. The picture shows a letter written by Aitchison College Principal Michael A Thomson. - Provided by the reporter The picture shows a letter written by Aitchison College Principal Michael A Thomson. - Provided by the reporter The letter mentioned that the college's policy was undermined "to favour some people", adding that there is no room for "politics and nepotism" in the college.

FIA assures SC of...

FROM PAGE 01
Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa. The CJP remarked that the court had also taken notice of journalists being harassed in 2021. "If action had been taken promptly, perhaps we would not be facing this today - that matter was more severe than a mere FIA notice," observed the chief justice. He also highlighted the apparent reluctance of some to take a firm stance before the court. The legal counsel representing the journalists drew attention to Section 20 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), flagging its frequent misuse as a concern. The court responded that the FIA has committed to withdrawing cases against journalists Amir Mir and Imran Shafiqat. FIA officials also confirmed that applications will be submitted to retract the charges against the aforementioned individuals formally.

Rajitha takes five wickets as SL crush BD

Sri Lanka's win over Bangladesh help Pakistan in ICC World Test Championship standings

SYLHET: Kasun Rajitha claimed his second five-wicket haul in Test cricket as Sri Lanka crushed Bangladesh by 328 runs on Monday in Sylhet to go 1-0 up in the two-match series. The visitors bowled out Bangladesh for 182 in their second innings after lunch on the fourth day, with Rajitha returning with 5-56. Overnight batsman Mominul Haque scored 87 not out for Bangladesh to delay the inevitable, before Lahiru Kumara (2-39) took the final wicket. Fast bowler Rajitha claimed the wicket of Tajul Islam in the third over of the morning, trapping the left-hander in front for six. Mominul, who hit 12 fours and a six, put on a dogged 66-run partnership with Mehidy Hasan Miraz for the seventh wicket before Rajitha struck again. Mehidy, on 33, edged Rajitha to Dhananjaya de Silva at second slip. Rajitha took the wickets of Shoriful Islam (12) and Khaled Ahmed (zero) off consecutive deliveries after the break to complete his five-wicket haul. Vishwa Fernando was the other pivotal bowler for Sri Lanka with 3-36 as pacemen took all 20 wickets for the visitors in the game. "The wicket had something for the fast bowlers," said Sri Lanka captain and player of the match de Silva. "We were talking about playing late, and what shots to play on this wicket. It paid off at the end of the day." Tajul and Mominul resumed Bangladesh's innings at 47-5 after the top order collapsed in little over an hour before the close of play on Sunday. "The wicket was good, there was movement early on," said Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto. Sri Lanka push Bangladesh to brink after de Silva, Mendis feat "We have to improve our new-ball batting. A lot of work has to be done before the next Test, and we are going to have a plan to come back strongly." Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series in Bangladesh, made 280 in their first innings and Bangladesh replied with 188. The visitors then made 418 with first-innings century-makers de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both reaching three figures for the second time in the match. - Agencies

NBA suspends 2 players after altercation

LONDON: Utah Jazz guard Kris Dunn was slapped with a two-game suspension and Houston forward Jabari Smith Jr. was banned for one game by the NBA on Sunday after their altercation during a game. The incident took place five seconds into the second quarter of Houston's 147-119 home win against Utah on Saturday. Both players were given technical fouls and faced ejection from the game. "Utah Jazz guard Kris Dunn has been suspended two games without pay for initiating an altercation and throwing a punch at Houston Rockets forward Jabari Smith Jr., who has been suspended one game for fighting with Dunn, it was announced today by Joe Dumars, Executive Vice President, Head of Basketball Operations." - Agencies

PCB announce 20 probables for WI women series

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced 20 probables for the forthcoming white-ball series against West Indies women scheduled to take place at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi from 18 April to 3 May. The women's national selection committee led by Saleem Jaffer finalised the 20 names against the West Indies series which includes three ODIs - part of the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25 and five T20Is. The first ball in the ODIs (18, 21 and 23 April) will be bowled at 3:30pm, while the T20Is (26, 28, 30 April, 2 and 3 May) will begin at 7:30pm. Ayesha Zafar, Gul Feroza, Rameen Shamim, Sidra Nawaz and Tuba Hassan are the players making a comeback. Omaima Sohail and Shawaal Zulfiqar (recovering from shoulder injury), who were part of the 17-member squad that was named for the last bilateral series against New Zealand women's team, have been omitted from the camp probables. The selection committee in consultation with the captain and interim head-coach will announce the 15-member squad for the ODI series during the camp in Karachi. The remaining five players of the probables camp will be released to take part in the domestic Women's One-Day Tournament. The selection committee has chosen 20 probable players based on their performances in both domestic and international circuits.

USA beats Mexico 2-0 for CONCACAF league title

Gio Reyna and Tyler Adams scored, giving the Americans their third title in the event's history

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

DALLAS: Gio Reyna and Tyler Adams scored as the United States beat Mexico 2-0 in Sunday's CONCACAF Nations League final, giving the Americans all three titles in the event's history. Adams scored a long-distance screamer in the 45th minute and Reyna fired home a loose ball from the edge of the box in the 63rd for the USA, who also won Nations League crowns in 2021 and 2023. "It never gets old winning titles for your country. I'll never take any of them for granted," Reyna said. "The group of guys and the energy we have, I always love coming to camp. I'm at a loss for words right now." Reyna hoped the "Three-peat" would provide inspiration for competing in Copa America on home soil this summer against South America's top teams. "It's big for momentum," he said. "We've been together with our core group now. We know what it takes to win big matches. We can hopefully keep the momentum going into Copa America and maybe lift a trophy there." The Mexicans appeared to have a lifeline into the match in the 73rd min-

ute when a penalty was awarded after US defender Antonee Robinson was ruled to have fouled Santiago Gimenez in the penalty area. But a video review overturned the decision and instead Gimenez was issued a yellow card for simulation, blunting the emotions for a Mexican fightback. Play was halted in the 86th minute and twice more in stoppage time after Mexican fans yelled discriminatory language, a homophobic insult when the opposing goalkeeper kicked the ball. When the final whistle

finally came, the Americans had captured the crown at Arlington, Texas, on the home field of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. "Our goal this whole tournament was to advance and then get a chance to play in the final and win the final and we achieved it," US coach Gregg Berhalter said. The Americans won both prior CONCACAF Nations League crowns, beating Mexico 3-2 in extra time in the 2021 inaugural championship match and Canada 2-0 in last year's final after dispatching

Mexico 3-0 in last year's semi-finals. Mexico still leads the all-time rivalry 37-24 with 17 drawn, but the US men stretched their current unbeaten streak against Mexico in all competitions to a rivalry-best seven matches with five wins and two draws. "Whenever you don't achieve something, you have to learn from it," Mexico manager Jaime Lozano said. "They were better in almost everything, in quality, in pressure, in scoring options. They pressed us well and we couldn't find solutions. "They're deserved winners and from these experiences we have to learn as much as possible and turn it around quickly." The United States took the lead in the 45th when unguarded Adams took a pass from Wes McKennie and from blasted home a right-footed shot from 30 yards out giving no chance to diving Mexican goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa. "I'm excited to be back with this group," said Adams, who has been plagued by injuries since the World Cup, "I always get up for big games." His only prior international goal also came against Mexico, in a 2018 friendly. Mexico had frustrated the Americans much of the first half, shutting down passing lanes to contain the US attack with a pressing physical performance.



Briefs

EU divided on nature law, hits green agenda

BRUSSELS : The European Union's flagship policy to restore damaged nature is hanging in the balance, with a vote to pass the law on Monday cancelled after Hungary withdrew its support for the bill. A vote on the law among EU countries' environment ministers on Monday was called off after Hungary said last week it would no longer back the policy - wiping out the already-slim reinforced majority of countries in favour. The nature law is the latest EU environmental policy to come under fire as policymakers try to respond to months of angry farmers' protests over complaints including strict green EU regulations. The EU has already weakened numerous green rules to attempt to quell the protests. "The agricultural sector is a very important sector, not only in Hungary, but everywhere in Europe," Hungary's state secretary for environment Aniko Raissz told reporters on Monday. Raissz said Hungary was not opposed to protecting nature, but that environmental goals needed to be realistic and take into account the sectors affected. Some EU diplomats said Hungary's already-large protected natural areas meant the country could comply with the content of the EU nature law, and suggested Budapest's move was a purely political one.—APP

Aukus funding creates 1,000+ UK jobs: Rolls-Royce

SYDNEY : Australia's Aukus funding will help create more than 1,000 new jobs in Derby in the United Kingdom, according to the beneficiary, Rolls-Royce. The project - which is jointly funded by the UK's Ministry of Defence - is also expected to see the construction of new office space in addition to manufacturing facilities. The Australian government revealed late last week that it would send \$4.6bn (£2.4bn) to the UK over the next 10 years to ensure the Rolls-Royce nuclear reactor production line in Derby was able to supply reactors for use in Adelaide-built submarines. Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup. The government has not provided detailed information about what the funding will cover, except to say it will "enable the Rolls-Royce factory in Derby to operate at an increased rate of production". Rolls-Royce, however, has been more forthcoming. It has welcomed the Australian government funding and said work was already under way "to double the size of the Rolls-Royce Submarines site in Raynesway, Derby".—DNA

UK loses thousands of foreign nurses abroad

LONDON : Almost 9,000 foreign nurses a year are leaving the UK to work abroad, amid a sudden surge in nurses quitting the already understaffed NHS for better-paid jobs elsewhere. The rise in nurses originally from outside the EU moving to take up new posts abroad has prompted concerns that Britain is increasingly becoming "a staging post" in their careers. The number of UK-registered nurses moving to other countries doubled in just one year between 2021-22 and 2022-23 to a record 12,400 and has soared fourfold since before the coronavirus pandemic. Seven out of 10 of those leaving last year - 8,680 - qualified as a nurse somewhere other than the UK or EU, often in India or the Philippines. Many had worked in Britain for up to three years, according to research from the Health Foundation. The vast majority of those quitting are heading to the US, New Zealand or Australia, where nurses are paid much more than in the UK - sometimes up to almost double.—APP

IMF deal to open a floodgate of inflation, says PTI leaders

Urges govt to take all stakeholders onboard to negotiate a better bailout package

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Advisor on Finance to Chief Minister Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Muzammil Aslam sounded alarm that the new IMF bailout package laced with harsh conditions would trigger an inflation of tsunami and would further compound public miseries; hence the mandate stolen government should not hastily ink an agreement with the lender but should take onboard the federating units so as to negotiate a better financial deal. Addressing a press conference, flanked by PTI Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan and PTI senator Walid Iqbal, Muzammil said that an IMF team, led by Nathan Porter, visited Islamabad from March 14-19 to hold discussions on the second review of Pakistan's economic programme supported by an IMF. He said that IMF staff and the Pakistani authorities successfully reached a staff-level agreement on the second and final review under Pakistan's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), which was subject to the approval of the IMF's Executive Board. However, he expressed his surprise that despite lapse of several days, the IMF's Executive Board meeting was yet to be held and the financial body might delay its board meeting until release of Pakistan's economic indicators. Muzammil stated that the IMF agreement was successfully completed due to PTI Founding Chairman Imran Khan because the lender

team had sought formal meeting with Khan before entering into a formal agreement with Pakistani authorities. About PTI's letter to IMF, he noted that the letter PTI wrote to IFM was not meant to block the financial package, which was evident from the lender's reply in which it stated that IMF encouraged the fair and peaceful resolution of all electoral disputes but had a narrow mandate on economic issues and it did not comment on domestic political developments. Lashing out at Atta Tarar for accusing PTI of writing letter to EU to revoke Pakistan's GSP plus status, Muzammil said that he was acting more like PML-N cell information minister instead of federal information minister. Adviser on Finance to CM KP pointed out that the IMF revealed that the authorities also expressed interest in receiving a new bailout package. However, he raised questions about the lender new bailout program because it proposed imposition of massive taxes, which would open a new floodgate of inflation, which had already been higher than the projected range. Muzammil cautioned that IMF program was critical for the cash-strapped country; however, the government needed to take all provinces into confidence in order to hold formal and professional talks so as to build consensus to strike a better financial deal instead of blindly accepting the bailout package laced with harsh conditions that would put the industrial wheel into a grinding halt. He went on to say that the financial

body proposed increasing the levy on petrol by Rs60, besides jacking up exorbitantly the prices of gas and power to meet IMF's fiscal tightening conditions to unlock the new program. Adviser on Finance to CM KP warned that a slight change in the composition of NFC award would disturb and shakeup the entire financial system of the provinces since they got lion shares from the center. He revealed that IMF was demanding to end PSDP, which would shift all the burden of the federally sponsored projects to the province that would further escalate financial woes of the federating units. Muzammil accepted that Pakistan's prevailing economic woes warranted a new IMF program, which the PTI would support, but the government should not take a solo flight to hammer out a deal to further plunge the country deep into the quagmire. Adviser on Finance to CM KP said that Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb was earlier excluded from the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC); however, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif suddenly changed his mind to make him as head of the economic body by showing his inability to chair the ECC meetings. Speaking on the occasion, PTI Central Secretary Information Raouf Hasan demanded that the EU polls observer mission should public its fact-based report outlining serious irregularities in the election process, which was handed over to the government recently. He said that

the EU mission exposed the massive pre-polls and post-polls rigging in the country in its reports and it was important that it should be published at the earliest because it was the right of the people of Pakistan as also others in the democratic world to learn how the election process was systematically impacted through interference by various state institutions which operated beyond the scope of their constitutional role to inflict grievous damage on the prospect of democracy taking roots in the country. "I call upon the EU to publish this report in its unaltered form to strengthen the fight for genuine democracy and reinforcement of human rights policies in Pakistan," he added. Speaking on the occasion, PTI senior leader Walid Iqbal said that no tax without representation as mandate thieves were imposed on the nation, which did not have the right to decisions independently. He demanded accountability of those responsible for polls fraud and added that there was no self-accountability as it was said that only one elections was fair and transparent in Pakistan but never officials of ECP were held accountable for polls rigging. He stated that EU and US congress showed them mirror this time around by exposing glaring irregularities and massive polls fraud, demanding that EU should public its report so as to unmask the truth regarding the polls robbery and to ensure transparency in elections.

11 Rohingya dead in Indonesia boat tragedy

WASHINGTON : The bodies of at least eleven Rohingya refugees have been recovered off Indonesia's westernmost coast after their boat believed to be carrying around 150 people capsized last week, UN officials say. The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys, often in flimsy boats, in an attempt to reach Malaysia or Indonesia. Indonesian rescuers called off the search for any remaining Rohingya refugees on Friday after 75 were rescued, despite reports from some survivors that dozens of people were swept away when their boat and another trying to help them capsized days earlier. "One more dead body found," United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) protection associate Faisal Rahman told news agency after local authorities confirmed four bodies had been recovered a day earlier. UNHCR Indonesia spokesperson Mitra Suryono said four bodies were found off the coast of Aceh Jaya district on the northern tip of Sumatra and one in West Aceh, where the capsized took place 14 nautical miles (26 kilometres) off the coast.—APP

EU's unity threatened by security challenges: Borrell

Josep Borrell hails European Peace Facility fund to support Ukraine, says member states must organize 'massive industrial ramp-up'

WEB DESK

BRUSSELS : The EU has to face "mounting security challenges" while the rising popularity of the far-right threatens its internal cohesion, the 27-member bloc's foreign policy chief said on Monday. Speaking at the annual EU ambassadors conference in Brussels, Josep Borrell warned that "we must decouple the sources of our prosperity from our sources of security." He explained that the bloc's prosperity was based on cheap gas from Russia and access to the big markets of China for export and import. According to Borrell, with their cheap production costs, Chinese workers contributed more to keeping inflation low within the EU than "all the central banks together." "But

Russia and China are not there anymore for our economy," he said, adding that it will lead to "tough adjustment" and "create political problems" in the EU. The West's relations with Russia deteriorated further due to its war on Ukraine. The US, EU, and the UK, among others, have imposed a raft of sanctions on Moscow, which include curbs on high-tech trade, ban on Russian oil, coal and gold imports, and suspension of major Russian banks from the SWIFT payments system. Russia has in turn cut gas supplies and global economies are struggling with high inflation and skyrocketing energy prices. China, meanwhile, is perceived as an economic and military rival by the US and its allies. Beijing has not supported the war

that started in February, but has criticized the "unilateral" sanctions. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, a blueprint for the alliance for the next decade approved at its Madrid summit in June, accuses China of pursuing "coercive policies" that threaten NATO's "interests, security and values." Borrell said "the radical right is increasing grasp on European politics," adding that this development combined with the "mounting security challenges" in foreign policy poses a risk to the EU's internal cohesion. In the last month, far-right parties in Sweden and Italy had electoral breakthroughs and are set to form governments. Referring to the changes in US foreign policy during the presidency of Donald Trump, Borrell said the

EU "needs to shoulder more responsibility" for assuring its own security. Calling it a "messy multipolarity," Borrell said other important players of world politics, including Türkiye, India, South Africa, Indonesia, Brazil, and Mexico, are "not always following" the EU in their foreign or economic policy choices. He admitted that the EU failed to prepare for how other countries "will perceive the Brussels model." The bloc insisted on rational arguments, "underestimated the role of emotions and perceptions" and resisted to acknowledge "the appeal of identity politics," he said. "The rest of the world is not ready to follow our model," he argued, urging the EU to listen to the rest of the world with "more empathy."

Flood fallout claims at least 20 lives in Brazil

BRASILIA : Brazil was hit by devastating floods over the weekend that have so far claimed 20 lives in the resultant landslides and mudslides. There was heavy rainfall in parts of the south-east, including Rio de Janeiro, Petrópolis and the larger Espírito Santo region, with hourly rainfall totals of about 20mm recorded in places. Cumulative totals from Friday through Sunday were close to 250mm, particularly along the coast: this is far higher than the monthly average. Landslides and mudslides occurred across the region, and a number of houses collapsed. Rescue operations are under way to look for people who may have been stranded by the floods. Although there may still be a few showers over the following days, the worst of the rain has now passed. Over in Europe, the Iberian peninsula experienced some high temperatures over the last week, with daytime highs locally reaching in excess of 30C (86F) in southern Spain, which is about 10C greater than the seasonal average here. Night-time temperatures have also been much higher than average, particularly in the south, where these remained in the mid to high teens on Thursday and Friday night. Then on Saturday in eastern parts of Andalucía the minimum overnight temperature was 24C (75.2F), which is particularly warm for March. However, heading into the new week, temperatures could plummet well below the seasonal norm. This is linked to a large area of low pressure developing in the north-east Atlantic, which will introduce cooler maritime air to the peninsula. The daytime temperature will likely be in the high single figures or low double digits across both Spain and Portugal, a good 15-20C lower than last week. This cooler air mass will also bring some wetter conditions, allowing for some snowfall to develop over higher parts of central Spain, as well as over the Pyrenees, where up to a metre of snow could fall by Friday.—DNA

Tokyo stocks end lower on profit-taking

TOKYO : Tokyo stocks snapped a four-day winning streak to close lower on Monday, as investors took profits after the key Nikkei index hit record highs last week. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index lost 1.16 percent, or 474.31 points, to end at 40,414.12, while the broader Topix index dropped 1.26 percent, or 35.58 points, to 2,777.64. "Profit-taking was dominant in Tokyo after falls of the Dow index, amid widespread caution over the rapid rise (of the Nikkei index)," IwaiCosmo Securities said. The dollar fetched 151.24 yen in Asian trade, against 151.40 yen in New York on Friday. A Japanese finance ministry currency diplomat on Monday hinted at potential intervention in the currency market, referring to the yen's depreciation after the Bank of Japan raised interest rates but indicated monetary easing conditions would continue. "Clearly there are speculative actions behind the current cheapness of the yen," Masato Kanda told reporters. "We can't tolerate excessive movement based on speculation, which has a huge negative effect on the national economy," he said. "We will take appropriate measures against excessive movement without ruling out any means."—DNA

Nigerian army rescues abducted Kaduna students

ABUJA : The Nigerian army has rescued students and staff who were abducted by gunmen from a school in the country's north earlier this month, the military said, days before the deadline for a ransom payment. School officials and residents had said 287 students were taken on 7 March in the town of Kuriga, in the north-western state of Kaduna. A military spokesperson said 137 hostages - 76 female and 61 male - were rescued in the early hours of Sunday in the neighbouring state of Zamfara. "In the early hours of 24 March 2024, the military, working with local authorities and government agencies across the country in a coordinated search and rescue operation, rescued the hostages," Maj Gen Edward Buba said in a statement. A security source said the students had been freed in a forest and were being escorted to Kaduna's capital for medical tests before being reunited with their families. The governor of Kaduna, Uba Sani, earlier put the number of people kidnapped at more than 200. Given the discrepancies in numbers reported, it was unclear whether any hostages remained in the kidnappers' hands. Some Kuriga elders said Sani had told them all hostages had been freed.—APP



ISLAMABAD : Country Director Teradata Global Consulting Pakistan (Pvt) Ltd, Haroon Kanth meeting with Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja.—DNA

North Korea says Japan PM requested summit with Kim

Japanese leader Fumio Kishida has recently expressed a desire to improve ties with North Korea

FOREIGN DESK

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister said Monday that Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has requested a summit with her brother, adding a meeting was unlikely without a policy shift by Tokyo. Relations between the two countries are historically strained, including by a long-running kidnapping dispute and North Korea's banned weapons programs, but Kishida has recently expressed a desire to improve ties, which Pyongyang has hinted it is not opposed to. Last year, Kishida said he was willing to meet Kim "without any conditions," saying Tokyo was willing to resolve all issues, including the abduction by North Korean agents of Japanese citizens in the 1970s

and 1980s, which remains an emotive issue in Japan. "Kishida... conveyed his intention to personally meet the President of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as soon as possible," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim Yo Jong - who is one of the regime's key spokespeople - had hinted last month at a possible future invitation for the Japanese leader to visit North Korea. But she said the "history of the DPRK-Japan relations gives a lesson that it is impossible to improve the bilateral relations full of distrust and misunderstanding," without a substantive policy change on Tokyo's part. She warned that were Japan to remain "engrossed in the abduction issue that has no further settlement" then Kishi-

da's hopes of improving ties would not materialize. Kishida said Monday that he was not aware of the KCNA report, and did not directly comment on its contents, while calling top-level talks with North Korea "important." "For Japan-North Korea relations, top-level talks are important to resolve issues such as the abduction issue," Kishida said in parliament, referring to kidnappings that took place in the 1970s and '80s. "This is why we have been making various approaches to North Korea at the level directly under my control, as I have said in the past." North Korea admitted in 2002 that it had sent agents to kidnap 13 Japanese people in the 1970s and '80s who were used to train spies in Japanese language and customs. The abductions remain a potent and emotional issue

in Japan and suspicions persist that many more were abducted than have been officially recognized. Analysts have long said that contention over the issue could hinder progress toward a summit between Kishida and Kim Jong Un. But North Korea's statement appeared to be an attempt by Pyongyang to negotiate terms for any future summit between the two countries' leaders, said Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul, said. "It seems the North sees there's no point in making contact with the Japanese side without checking what requirements each side has in mind that could lead to nothing after all if those requirements are too different to reconcile," Hong said. "It is Pyongyang's way of testing how serious Japan is in holding the meeting and setting its own summit prerequisites in order to

host the meeting." Japan's former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a landmark visit to Pyongyang while in office in 2002, meeting Kim's father Kim Jong Il and setting out a path to normalize relations in which Japan would offer economic assistance. The trip led to the return of five Japanese nationals and a follow-up trip by Koizumi, but the diplomacy soon broke down, in part over Tokyo's concern that North Korea was not coming clean about the abduction victims. Kim Yo Jong said that Kishida "should not think that it is possible for him to meet our state leadership when he has wanted and decided." "If Japan truly wants to improve the bilateral relations and contribute to ensuring regional peace and stability as a close neighbor of the DPRK, it is necessary for it to make a political decision for strategic option conformed to its overall interests," she added.

Briefs

Court issues production order for Imran, Bushra

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A district and sessions court of Islamabad on Monday issued a production order for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi. The court has issued their production order on the plea filed by the two seeking bail in the cases pertaining to the forgery of receipts for Toshakhana gifts, while Khan has also filed a plea to seek bail in a May 9 violent protests case as well. District and sessions judge Tahir Abbas Sipra issued the production order and directed the Adiala jail superintendent to produce the couple before the court on April 4. The decision came after another district and sessions court, last week, had approved a request seeking to produce Khan and PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi in court, directing authorities to ensure the politicians' production on April 20. The petition, requesting their production, was heard by Judicial Magistrate Mureed Abbas in relation to the Parliament attack case against Khan and others. Khan's lawyer Naem Panjotra, during the hearing, had argued that the Superintendent of Adiala jail did not obey the order of any court. He had insisted the court to ensure that the jail officials adhered to the orders and produced Khan.

LHC calls for larger bench on SIC's plea

DNA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court's (LHC) single bench requested the Chief Justice to form a larger bench to hear a plea filed by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) against the non-allocation of reserved seats in National and Provincial Assemblies, ARY News reported. The bench comprising Justice Raheel Kamran Sheikh issued a written order on the plea filed by the SIC, a coalition of lawmakers backed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The single bench requested Chief Justice Shahzad Ahmed Khan to form a larger bench to hear and decide the matter. SIC Chief Hamid Raza and Amina Liqat approached the LHC against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). In the petition, the SIC maintained that the ECP's distribution of reserved seats was 'unconstitutional' and asked the court to order the commission to assign seats in accordance with the party's strength in the National and Punjab Assemblies.

Navy rescues eight Iranian fishermen

DNA

KARACHI: A Pakistan Navy warship rescued eight Iranian fishermen from a boat that had caught fire in the open sea, a private news channel reported, citing military's media wing. Pakistan Navy's PNS Yarmook rushed to the scene immediately after receiving a distress call from the fishermen's boat that had been engulfed in a sudden fire, according to Inter-Services Public Relations. The warship rescued all eight Iranian fishermen onboard the boat and later used its modern equipment to douse the flames. The successful rescue operation in the open sea is a testament to the Pak Navy's capabilities to address all problems arising out of the sea, as per ISPR. Earlier this month, the Pakistan Navy along with other rescue officials began a rescue operation after a fishermen's boat capsized in Keti Bandar. The Assistant Commissioner of Kati Bandar, Majid Hameed, stated that at least 14 fishermen went missing on March 6 after their boat capsized near Keti Bandar, Thatta.

Moscow attack: Russian Court charges 4 with act of terrorism

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a news conference on Monday that it was inappropriate to comment on it until the investigation had been completed

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: Russia has charged four men it says attacked a Moscow concert hall and killed at least 137 people. All four appeared to have been beaten and one was brought to court in a wheelchair. They were charged with committing an act of terrorism. The Islamic State group, or IS, said it carried out Friday's outrage at Crocus City Hall and posted video evidence. Russian officials have claimed, without evidence, Ukrainian involvement. Kyiv says the claim is "absurd". The graphic video released by IS, showing attackers firing on the crowd inside the concert hall. However, no Russian official has acknowledged the claim, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a news conference on Monday that it was inappropriate to comment on it until the investigation had been completed. He also said that because of the tense international situation there was little collaboration between countries on fighting terrorism. France has raised its terror alert to the highest level, with President Macron saying on Monday that the Islamic State group behind the Moscow attack had also recently been targeting France. Mr Macron also warned Russia against trying to exploit

the attack to blame Ukraine, describing such a move as cynical and counter-productive. Rescuers are continuing to search the rubble of the concert hall for victims, and regional officials said the operation would carry on through Tuesday afternoon. The four suspects were named by Russian authorities as Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, Saidakrami Murodali Rachabalizoda, Shamsiddin Fariduni and Muhammadsobir Fayzov. Video showed three of them being marched bent double by masked police into Basmaniy district court in the Russian capital. All appeared to have been beaten - videos of brutal interrogation sessions were reportedly leaked by Russian security forces, and reports suggest at least one had suffered electric shocks. Asked about the alleged torture, Mr Peskov refused to comment. The men the court identified as Mirzoyev and Rachabalizoda had black eyes and the latter's ear was heavily bandaged - reportedly from it being partially severed during his arrest. Mirzoyev also appeared to have a torn plastic bag wrapped around his neck. The face of the man identified as Fariduni was badly swollen, while the man named as Fayzov appeared to lose consciousness as he was brought into court in a wheelchair wearing a thin hospital gown. He appeared to have an eye missing, according

to the Reuters news agency. All were held in a glass-panelled booth and guarded by masked police during their time in court. A court statement on the Telegram messaging service said Mirzoyev had "admitted his guilt in full", while Rachabalizoda also "admitted guilt". The men were identified as citizens of Tajikistan, Russia's state news agency Tass said. All four are to be held in pre-trial detention until at least 22 May, the court added. The attack has raised questions about Russia's moratorium on the death penalty, with several senior officials calling for it to be lifted. However, Mr Peskov said the Russian authorities "are not taking part in this discussion". Four gunmen on Friday night stormed the Crocus City Hall in Krasnogorsk, a northern Moscow suburb, and began firing on some of the estimated 6,000 people who were attending a rock concert. The attackers also set fires which engulfed the venue and caused the roof to collapse. Russian authorities said 137 people were killed and more than 100 injured. The men who appeared in court on Sunday were arrested in the Bryansk region around 14 hours after the attack, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said. Bryansk is around 400km (250 miles) southwest of Moscow. Officials have suggested - without evidence - that the attackers were

being helped by Ukraine and Kyiv had "prepared a window" to allow them to cross the border and escape into its territory. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday rejected the claims, and his military intelligence directorate said it was "absurd" to suggest the men were trying to cross a heavily mined border, teeming with hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers, to reach safety. Adrienne Watson, the US national security council spokeswoman, said that IS bore "sole responsibility for this attack. There was no Ukrainian involvement whatsoever". Seven other people have been arrested in Russia suspected of aiding the attack. The US warned Moscow earlier this month of a possible attack in Russia aimed at large gatherings before issuing a public advisory to citizens in the country. The alert was roundly dismissed by the Kremlin as propaganda and an attempt to meddle in its presidential election. Washington said after the attack that it had no reason to doubt the IS claim. It would not be the first time IS and its allies have attacked Russia or its interests abroad. The group claimed the bombing of a Russian aircraft over Egypt in 2015 with 224 people on board, most of them Russian citizens. It also claimed a 2017 bomb attack on the St Petersburg metro, which killed 15 people.

Activists endorse IMF advice

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revealed that the consumption of cigarettes in Pakistan has witnessed a notable decline of 20-25 percent following a significant increase in prices or taxes on tobacco products. This revelation featured in Technical Assistance Report of the commission-Pakistan Tax Policy Diagnostic and Reform Options. The report was released in February. Earlier, the global lender advocated imposition of uniform excise rates on both local and foreign cigarette manufacturers. The IMF's proposal, which advocates for equal taxation measures for all cigarette producers, aims to address health concerns associated with smoking while ensuring fair taxation practices. It suggests subjecting e-cigarettes to similar taxation as traditional tobacco products, citing comparable health impacts. Capital Calling, an Islamabad-based think tank, has endorsed the IMF's recommendation, aligning it with the guidelines set forth by the WHO. The objective behind these proposals is to establish equitable taxation across all cigarette products, regardless of their origin.

Iraqi PM sets agenda for Biden meeting

BAGHDAD: Iraq's government spokesman Basim Al-Awadi outlined the agenda for Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani's upcoming Washington visit, emphasizing five crucial topics for discussion with US President Joe Biden. Iraq News Agency reported on Monday. Al-Awadi said the visit aims to address bilateral relations after the withdrawal of the international anti-Daesh coalition, financial matters concerning the country's banks and debts, regional developments including the Gaza conflict, and Iraq's role in the evolving regional landscape. He stressed Iraq's commitment to agreeing a timetable for the US-led international coalition's withdrawal, emphasized the country's sovereignty. Earlier this year, Iraq and the US initiated a new phase of discussions aimed at concluding the US-led international coalition's mission in Iraq, according to official statements from the Iraqi government. - Agencies



LAHORE: Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan Dr Mehmet Pacaci calls on Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and her father former premier Mian Nawaz Sharif. - DNA

Azam Swati, Murad allowed to contest Senate polls

PESHAWAR: An appellate tribunal has overturned the rejection of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) stalwart Azam Swati's nomination papers for forthcoming Senate election - scheduled for April 2. The appellate tribunal - set up by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for listening to the poll-related complaints - heard Swati's petition against rejection of his nomination papers on Senate's general and technocrat seats ahead of the poll. However, the tribunal would announce its verdict after deliberations on the politician's appeal for his nomination for technocrat seat. The hearing was conducted by tribunal's judge Justice Shakeel Ahmad in which lawyers from both sides appeared. The judge questioned on which grounds, the nominations were rejected. Swati's lawyer apprised Justice Ahmad that there were a total of three persons filed objections against his client's nomination, of which two complaints were not candidates in the forthcoming election. Swati provided details of cases against him in nominations for Senate poll, which were not provided during general elections, the counsel said while detailing genre of objections before the tribunal. The counsel continued that his client was himself unaware of complete details of cases against him which were provided over orders of the high court. Subsequently, another complainant raised objection that Swati was "ineligible" for contesting poll on Upper House's technocrat seat, as he is "inexperienced". The counsel added that his client spent 18 years as senator, including two terms on technocrat seat, and one term on general seat. "If Swati was eligible for technocrat seat from 2006 to 2012, then why he is ineligible in 2024," the counsel argued. - APP

Ogra holds public hearing on massive gas price hikes

As the hearing concluded, the Ogra officials said it wasn't necessary to hike the gas prices according to the Sui Northern demand and that a final decision would be taken after completing the process of public hearings

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) on Monday held a public hearing in Lahore on the suggested increase in gas tariffs - the third in the current fiscal year - after the Sui Northern requested for up to a whopping 147% hike. With the next hearing scheduled for Wednesday (March 27) in Peshawar, the Sui Northern has requested an increase of Rs2,646.18 per mmbtu, setting a new average price of Rs 4446.89, after it argued that it has estimated a revenue shortfall of Rs189.18 billion. If the request is approved, then the increase in gas price for the consumers in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad will be applicable from July 1. As the hearing concluded, the Ogra officials said it wasn't necessary to hike the gas prices according to the Sui Northern demand

and that a final decision would be taken after completing the process of public hearings as well as pondering upon the objections. Earlier, the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) as well as All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) declared the plan as cruel move and decided that they will be strongly oppose the same at the hearing. LCCI Vice President Adnan Butt said the gas prices in Pakistan were already much higher than the rest of the world and any further hike would force the closure of factories. Similarly, the APTMA is of the view that the Sui Northern authorities should be asked about their performance and the gas and electricity prices must be reduced. Last week, the Ogra held similar public hearings in Karachi and Quetta as the Sui Southern sent a request for an increase of Rs 324.3 per mmbtu, asking the regulator to fix a new average price of Rs 1740.80 per mmbtu - a move which is expected to burden the consumers by Rs79.63 billion.

Pakistan faces tax evasion of Rs5.8tr annually

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's tax evasion (revenue gap) was estimated to be around Rs5.8 trillion on an annual basis of fiscal year 2022-2023, which makes 6.9% of the GDP. This was revealed to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) during a presentation, according to which, the evasion on petroleum products is estimated to be Rs996 billion due to smuggling and other means. Meanwhile, the evasion in the retail sector of the country stood at Rs888 billion, transport sector Rs562 billion, independent power producers (IPPs)

Rs498 billion, smuggled-prone items Rs355 billion, exports Rs342 billion and real estate Rs148 billion on annual basis. The tax evasion in "others" category was estimated at Rs1,607 trillion annually. The presentation revealed that highest tax evasion existed in sales tax which could go up to Rs2.9 trillion on annual basis. Moreover, the gap in customs stood at around Rs0.6 trillion (Rs600 billion) annually including under-invoicing and smuggling. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its diagnostic report, has analysed that the policy level tax gap was not on the much higher side and it could go up to a maximum of 12.9% of the GDP. There was also a compliance gap between the total revenues and expenditures, with federal tax revenues standing at 9.1% of GDP while the federal non-tax revenue was at 1.2% of GDP. The presentation also stated that provincial taxes contributed to around 1% in the GDP while the total revenues stood at 11.4% of GDP. Meanwhile, the federal expenditure to the GDP stood at 12.9% and provincial expenditure around 6.1%, so the total expenditure jacked up to 19% of the GDP. There is a gap of 7.6% of GDP between the total revenues and expenditures of the country.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Japan Mitsuhiro Wada pays a courtesy call on Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar. (News on Front page) - DNA

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