



# Islamabad POST

Thursday, March 28, 2024

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**Colombian President warns Israel over Gaza ceasefire breach**

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**Hamid demands SJC to probe judges' letter**

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**PCB set to reappoint Babar Azam as captain**

Detailed News On Page-06



## No tolerance for terrorism Pakistan vows swift action after terrorist attack

Army vows to take all-out measures for safety of Chinese citizens in Pakistan

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: An emergency meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in the aftermath of Besham terrorist attack on Chinese nationals working on Dattu Hydel Power Project. The meeting was attended by the Federal Ministers, Chief of the Army Staff, Chief Ministers, Chief Secretaries and Inspector Generals of Police of respective provinces to discuss the heinous attack on innocent civilians working on a development project, meant to contribute to energy and water security of Pakistan. The PM offered deepest condolences to the families of the innocent victims of the attack and assured them that the perpetrators of this barbaric act would be brought to justice swiftly. PM underscored the enduring bond of brotherhood between the people of Pakistan and China and conveyed that the whole nation was saddened by the loss of Chinese lives. PM appreciated the alacrity with which Law Enforcement Agencies and locals responded to the attack, saving many precious lives which could have been lost. PM instructed for a thorough joint investigation to be conducted, utilizing all resources of the State. The PM stated, Terrorism is a trans-national threat that has been instrumentalized by the enemies of Pakistan to stymie Pakistan's progress and development. The acts targeting Pakistan-China friendship are particularly aimed at creating mistrust between the two iron brothers. Participants of the meeting expressed resolute commitment to completely rooting out terrorism from the country. The participants expressed serious concerns over sanctuaries available to terrorists across the borders and emphasized upon the need for a regional approach for countering terrorism. During the meeting, the COAS reiterated the resolve of armed forces to eliminate the scourge of terrorism afflicting the country.

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## Attempts to undermine Pak-China coop will not succeed

China vows firm support for Pakistan's counterterrorism, economic, and social development, pledging robust cooperation

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan and China have the determination and ability to make terrorists pay the price for their actions, and any attempt to undermine China-Pakistan cooperation will not succeed, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said on Wednesday. Lin made the remarks at a regular press briefing in response to a terrorist attack that killed five Chinese nationals in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Tuesday. "We strongly condemn this terrorist attack, express deep sympathy for the victims, and extend sincere condolences to the bereaved families," Lin said. Noting that some other countries have also condemned the

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif chairing an emergency meeting in the aftermath of Besham terrorist attack on Chinese nationals, COAS General Asim Munir is also present at the meeting. - DNA

## FM receives phone call from Bahraini counterpart

The two Foreign Ministers discussed the entire gamut of Pakistan-Bahrain relations

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar received a congratulatory telephone call today from Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani. The two Foreign Ministers discussed the entire gamut of Pakistan-Bahrain relations and explored various aspects of enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation. The Ministers agreed to further enhance bilateral relations by activating institutional cooperation between Pakistan and Bahrain, through early convening of BPC and JMC.

## FM Dar hosts interfaith iftar dinner for diplomats

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister M Ishaq Dar hosted the Annual interfaith iftar for the Islamabad-based diplomatic community at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. The event aimed to foster interfaith harmony and propagate the message of tolerance and inclusivity. It also underscored Pakistan's strong commitment to combating Islamophobia and all forms of discrimination.

## Spy agencies interference PM Shehbaz, law minister to meet CJP

SC holds full court meeting on judges' letter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is to meet Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa to discuss situation arising out of the letter written by the Islamabad High Court judges to the Supreme Judicial Council. Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar and Attorney General of Pakistan will also accompany the prime minister. Earlier, a full court meeting of the Supreme Court judges was held in the federal capital to deliberate on a letter written by the six Islamabad High Court judges about the alleged interference of spy agencies in the judiciary. The Supreme Court judges including Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa attended the huddle that lasted for over two hours in the federal capital. The development took place after the bar associations and legal experts called for a

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## PTI questions credibility of verdicts against Imran

Gauhar says ex-premier not afforded right to fair trial

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders associated on Wednesday the letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to court decisions against party founder Imran Khan and claimed the same have lost their credibility. Six IHC judges reached out to the SJC a day earlier seeking clarity on the alleged intrusion of

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## Briefs

### Asif: Kabul responsible for surge in terrorism

Defense minister stresses need for a paradigm shift

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In response to recent terrorist attacks plaguing Pakistan, Defense Minister Khawaja Asif on Wednesday pointed fingers at Afghanistan, asserting that the source of terrorism lies across the border. Amid escalating tensions, Asif emphasized the urgent need for a paradigm shift in the border dynamics between the two nations. In a statement circulated on social media platform X, Asif underscored that despite Pakistan's relentless efforts, Kabul has failed to address the issue effectively.

### PTI granted permission for rally

PTI to hold a public rally against alleged rigging

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Wednesday directed authorities in the federal capital to grant permission to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to hold a public gathering in the city. "One's right of assembly cannot be taken away," IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq said while hearing PTI's petition seeking the court's permission to hold a public rally in Islamabad against alleged rigging and election result manipulation in the February 8 polls. The judge's remarks come after the district administration had turned down PTI's request, filed by party leader Aamir Mughal, for power show on March 30 citing "law and order" concerns.

## Senate elections

### Naqvi among 8 senators elected unopposed

Fifty-two seats in the upper house of parliament will fall vacant after the expiration of the 6-year term of the incumbent senators next week

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Ahead of Senate election, slated for April 2, seven personalities linked to different political parties have been elected unopposed as senators from Punjab on Wednesday. Those who have been elected as senators without facing any contest include Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders Pervaiz Rasheed, Nasir Mehmood and Talal Chaudhry. Subsequently, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Cheema have also been elected unopposed as senators. Moreover, Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC)-backed Raja Nasir Abbas, and Hamid Khan were also among the newly-elected parliamentarians. On technocrat seat, Mustafa Ramday withdrew his nomination papers, whereas, Shahzad Waseem, Musadik Malik, Walid Iqbal, and Umar Ijaz Cheema took back nominations from general seats. Earlier, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)

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### JUI-F announces protests from April 25

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Wednesday said that his party had decided to boycott the by-elections and will be holding protests in different cities from April 25. "We decided not to recognise the results February 8 elections and reject them, because this parliament is less representative of the people and more representative of the establishment," said the JUI-F in a video message. Major political parties including JUI-F, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)

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## FM Dar terms settlement of disputes vital for peace

He said our collective dream of peace and prosperity cannot be realized without settlement of outstanding regional disputes like Palestine and Kashmir

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has said Pakistan stands ready to build bridges and partnerships to foster the agenda of peace for the entire world. He was addressing an Iftar dinner, hosted in the honour of Islamabad-based diplomatic community in Islamabad, today. The Minister said this week's terror attacks in Moscow and Besham remind us that terrorism is a collective and persistent threat for everyone across the globe. Therefore, our war against terrorism will not end till peace wins. He said our collective dream of peace and prosperity cannot be realized without settlement of outstanding regional disputes like Palestine and Kashmir. Ishaq Dar emphasized that time has come for an urgent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, as called for by the United Nation Security Council. He said Pakistan as a candidate for non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for the years 2025 and 2026, is extremely grateful to the countries that have already expressed their

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### Qatar says, Gaza truce are still ongoing

The Qatari official stressed that the talks are continuing in Doha and no party has withdrawn from them despite the difficulties on the ground

NEWS DESK

DOHA: Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majid Al-Ansari said that talks between Hamas and the Israeli occupation on a truce in Gaza and exchange of prisoners are continuing at the level of technical teams, adding, "We are in a state of continuous hope, but it is not possible to talk now about a timetable." Contrary to what was leaked on Tuesday morning by Hebrew media that the professional staff in the

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## Railways Police foiled an attempt of drug smuggling

PESHAWAR : Railway Police Wednesday conducted operations against drug dealers and successfully foiled an attempt of large quantities of drugs by train. Three women were arrested red-handed while carrying 8.4 kg hashish from the city railway station, railway officials said. The accused woman train was carrying hashish from Peshawar to Gujarat through Khyber Mail, railway officials said. The three women were arrested at the Peshawar railway station when they entered the main gate of the station in a suspicious condition, railway officials said. On search, 3600 grams of hashish was recovered from Muntaja, a resident of Kohat, 2400 grams from Alishba of Sarband Peshawar and 2400 grams from Ayesha, a resident of Rahman Baba Peshawar, railway officials said. The accused had secretly hidden the drugs in his belongings, SP Peshawar Mehr Kausar said. The accused has been arrested and a case has been registered in Railways Police Peshawar Cantt, further investigation is going on, said SP Mehr Kausar.—APP

## LDA seals, demolishes illegal constructions

LAHORE : The Lahore Development Authority (LDA), during its ongoing crackdown on illegal constructions, demolished and sealed several structures and properties on Wednesday. The LDA team took action in Johar Town, Audit and Accounts, Raiwind Road, Nespak Society and adjoining schemes and partially demolished Plot No. 339-D in Audit and Accounts and Khasra No. 1880, Mouza Sadhoki, Defence Road. An illegal commercial building near Mouza Sadhoki and Plot No. 934-B on Raiwind Road in Ali Town were demolished. The LDA team demolished illegal private book shop on Plot No. 12 F 2 Johar Town and Raiwind Road, Ali Town. Plot No. 778, 74 in Johar Town G Four Block and Plot No. 315 in H Block were sealed. Plot No. 36 in K Block Johar Town and Plot No. 207 D One in Nespak Society were sealed. The operation was conducted by Director Town Planning Zone IV under the supervision of Chief Town Planner II Azhar Ali. Several notices were issued to the properties before sealing and demolishing the illegal constructions.—APP

## GB Women's parliamentary Caucus meet with representative of UN-Women

SULTAN SHOAB

GILGIT : Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly Women's Parliamentary Caucus held a very productive meeting with Speaker Nazir Ahmed Advocate with UN Women Representative. President Kulsom Farman and members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus discussed key agenda items to strengthen pro-women legislation in the GB Assembly. The caucus has placed some important demands on UN Women, including the need for human resources and professional staff to run the day-to-day office and support for the caucus team to conduct various programs such as capacity building and exhibition tours.

# Pak can play important role in global economy: Envoy

He said that there are wide possibilities of cooperation between Pakistan and Brazil in the field of sports, especially in football. Brazil can co-promote football in Pakistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Brazil to Pakistan, Olyntho Vieira on Wednesday said that Pakistan can play an important role in the global economy by becoming a part of the international multilateral forum BRICS. Pakistan is a big market in terms of its population which can play an important role in BRICS and promote trade with these countries, the Ambassador said. Ambassador of Brazil to Pakistan, Olyntho Vieira said this in call on meeting with President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari and Secretary General UBG, FPCCI Zafar Bakhtawari. The Brazilian ambassador said that the BRICs have an important role in the future global economy and with it, South-South cooperation will also grow and international multilateralism will be strengthened. He said that Pakistan is the largest market in terms of population in the Islamic world, which is important because of its geo-Strategic location and there is a need to strengthen the trade relations between Brazil and Pakistan. He said that Pakistan and Brazil have vast trade and cooperation opportunities in technology and fruits, especially mango and



Citrus, which need to be expanded further. Brazilian Envoy said that Brazil is part of various economic and trade integration forums in the world and South, South Coop-

eration are very important from which Pakistan can take full benefits. The Ambassador said that between Pakistan and Brazil there is a mutual trade of \$45 million in

which Brazil is in trade surplus. He said that Brazil is exporting soybeans and cotton to Pakistan, while Pakistan is exporting surgical equipments, textiles and fruits

to Brazil. He said that in the same way, Brazil is a big market with which Pakistan can be connected with the market of South America by being economically connected. Meanwhile, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the signing of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Pakistan and Brazil will promote mutual trade in both countries and both countries will be able to benefit from each other's markets. He said that the role of the business community is very important for the promotion of mutual trade relations between Pakistan and Brazil and ICCI is ready to play its full role in this regard.

Ahsan said that Brazil is a big trade market which is connected to a big trade block like BRICs and its trade and economic relations with Pakistan are important. He said that there are wide possibilities of cooperation between Pakistan and Brazil in the field of sports, especially in football. Brazil can co-promote football in Pakistan. Meanwhile, Zafar Bakhtawari highlighted the international importance of Brazil and its role in global trade and expressed hope for the expansion of mutual economic and trade relations between the two countries in the future.

## Architectural grandeur of Mohabat Khan Mosque attracts visitors

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Peshawar has been remained a strategic city where invaders constructed worship places to freely perform religious obligations and use its peoples' strong bonds with religion in their favor to prolong their rule. Being a gateway to the sub-continent and central Asian states (CARs), Peshawar was always a strategic city where kings, warriors and invaders constructed mosques, churches and gurdwaras at prime locations to worship in accordance with their faith besides molding public opinions after conquering it before extending their influence to the subcontinent. The Muslims commanders and kings of different dynasties passed through the historic Khyber Pass from Central Asian Republics (CARs), Afghanistan stayed first at Peshawar where they constructed scores of mosques and worship places in 1982 and took its administrative control to the Auqaf Department. Built on a high mound at Andar Sher bazaar near historic Chowkyadgar at Peshawar City, the worshippers enter its 30,155 square feet vast open courtyard with

capacity to accommodate about 30,000 worshippers at a time besides a centrally located ablution pool and a single row of rooms lining the exterior walls with two tall minarets, which further magnified its look. The prayer hall's facade is also capped by six smaller decorative minarets that flank the mosque's five arched entryways, with an additional two minarets and its prayer hall capped by three awesome domes that draw visitors' attention. The mosque's ceiling was embellished with elegant red frescoes in geometrics and floral motifs while its exterior was decorated with Mughal frescoes that amplify its beauty. "Mohabat Khan mosque is the identity of Peshawar due to its unique architecture and glorious ancient history. For the last 12 years, I regularly came to this historic mosque of Peshawar for Jumma prayer, Namaz e Tarveh and Mahfil-e-Shabina of Ramazan ul Mubarak as its spiritual environment take the worshippers to a new world," said Zahid Shinwari, former President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry while talking to the news agency. He said Mohabat Khan's mosque architecture was a jewel of Peshawar, attract-

ing tourists and archeology lovers from across the country. The shopkeepers, who had been rented shops by the Auqaf department, increased the size of their shops by many feet by digging more small cabins and encroaching on the entrance and surrounding area of the mosque which negatively impacted its exterior outlook. The construction of illegally built large plazas and shops around the mosque has adversely affected its exterior architecture and demanded the demolition of all these illegal structures to restore its original grandeur and architectural designs. "The mosque has recently undergone heavy conservation work after approval of Rs 87.70 million for Mohabat Khan Mosque's conservation project. We have almost completed rehabilitation and conservation work on its minarets, domes, ablution area, and other portions without compromising on its Mughal era's architectural designs." Former Chief Minister Mahmood Khan during his visit to Mohabat Khan mosque had increased the allocation of the project to Rs160 million with direction for expansion of work and the amount was used on its beautification.

## Sharjeel Memon visits Excise & Taxation office at Civic Centre

KARACHI : Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, paid a surprise visit to the Excise and Taxation Office here at Civic Centre. During the visit, Sharjeel Inam Memon reviewed the work of various sections in the Excise and Taxation office and also obtained detailed information on vehicle registration and other related issues. The Provincial Minister received a comprehensive briefing about the operational mechanism of registration and taxation. Sharjeel Memon emphasized the need for collective efforts to promote transparency and accountability in administrative affairs. He stated that the Sindh government has a proactive approach to address administrative challenges and improve public service delivery. He further added that the Sindh government aims to implement necessary reforms for better service to all citizens. Secretary Excise and Taxation, Atifur Rehman, and Director General Excise and Taxation, Aurangzeb Panhwar.—APP

## Minister imposes ban on education department transfers

PESHAWAR : Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education Faisal Khan Tarakai on Wednesday said that there was a complete ban on all transfers and appointments in the Education Department and henceforth all transfers will be made under the e-transfer policy. He said that wrong posting should be completely eliminated and teachers will be transferred on merit under the automatic system. He expressed these views while presiding over the meeting on the e-transfer policy of the Education Department. Secretary Education Masood Ahmed, Special Secretary, Director Education Samina Altaf, Director IT Salahuddin and other senior officials participated in the meeting. Every effort has been made to facilitate women under the e-transfer app, the transfer will be done only once a year and at the end of the academic year, said Minister. He said that various indicators have been set including duration of schooling, distance

between school and home, annual results and other indicators. The provincial education minister was told that only once a year, the education department will call for applications from teachers for transfer to vacant posts as per the need, interested candidates will apply online to the vacant schools, the district education officer will do verification under the digitalized system and Transfer will be done on merit under automatic system. The provincial education minister issued instructions to make the transfer policy app more active and issued orders to form a technical committee so that vacant positions are advertised on the app as soon as possible. The minister said that the number of teachers in the education department is high and in remote areas especially women have to go round the offices, which will be completely remedied and transfers will be done on merit without any recommendation under the automated system.—DNA

## Province-wide Ramazan Dastarkhwan supports deserving

PESHAWAR: On the directives of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, "Ramazan Dastarkhwan" is being held across the province to provide free food to deserving people. According to official statistics, a total of 71 Ramadan food distribution points were set up throughout the province, and 12,259 individuals broke their fasts at these Ramadan food distribution points on Tuesday. The highest number of eight food distribution points were set up in Swat, benefiting 3,065 individuals. In Peshawar, four food distribution points were established, benefiting 1,199 individuals. The Ramadan food distribution program will continue until Eid. Special Assistant to Chief Minister, Mishap Azam Yousafzai, said that the KP government is committed to serving the public and providing them with maximum facilities. The Ramadan food distribution program is being organized under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and Women Development and the District Administration.—APP

## KP Food Authority crackdown against adulteration mafia

PESHAWAR : Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority Wednesday stepped up its crackdown against the adulteration mafia across the province. Under the supervision of DG Food Authority Wasif Saeed, district administration and food safety team conducted sudden raids on bakers and juices units in University Town Peshawar, a spokesman of Food Authority said. The Seven-Eleven fast food unit was sealed due to poor cleanliness, about 500 kg of non-standard ketchup and 50 kg of spoiled meat was also recovered, he informed. Another operation in Pakha Ghulam Peshawar was a sudden raid on the fake dairy products manufacturing unit inside Kedar house, the spokesperson informed about 1000 kg of non-standard and damaged by exporting various dairy products which are harmful to health were also recovered from the site, the spokesman said. The Mardan Food Safety Team also inspected the milk vendors in Gujargarhi, Jhande and Takhtbhai Bazaars, the spokesman said.—APP

## Measures taken against dengue reviewed in meeting

BAHAWALPUR : Deputy Commissioner Zaheer Anwar Jappa chaired a meeting of the District Emergency Response Committee for Dengue Prevention in the committee room of his office. The meeting reviewed the actions taken from March 1 to March 26 against dengue. Additional Deputy Commissioner Headquarters Sumera Rabbani, Chief Executive Officer District Health Authority Syed Tanveer Shah, AMS Bahawal Victoria Hospital Dr. Ajaz Rasool, DHO Dr. Khalid Chanar, entomologists, officers from relevant departments, and focal persons were present in the meeting, while Assistant Commissioners from all tehsils participated via video link. The Deputy Commissioner emphasized the need to ensure the effective implementation of preventive measures against dengue and to improve further the ongoing activities. He stressed not allowing water to accumulate anywhere and conducting dengue larval surveillance systematically. The Deputy Commissioner instructed the field members of the newly formed indoor and outdoor teams for dengue prevention to work actively and ensure 100 percent coverage of hotspots across the district. He directed the members of the outdoor teams working in collaboration with field staff under the Clean Punjab Program to eradicate dengue breeding sites to prevent dengue proliferation. Legal action will be taken against those who do not comply with preventive measures against dengue. The actions taken by relevant departments regarding anti-dengue measures and the individual performance of focal persons were reviewed. DHO Dr. Khalid Chanar briefed that during the period from January 1 to March 26, a total of 1082 suspected dengue cases were reported throughout the district, with 3 confirmed dengue patients who had traveled from other cities. He further informed that no dengue larvae were found during surveillance in these days and effective measures are being taken to eliminate dengue breeding sites. He mentioned that there are 1795 hotspots related to dengue across the district with 100 percent coverage ensured. He further told that 412 indoor and 108 outdoor teams are actively engaged in anti-dengue activities in the field.

## Dr. Abrar raises concerns over Pakistan's education

Over 2.6 mln out-of-school children in Pakistan question mark on education system: Dr Abrar

ISLAMABAD : All Pakistan Private Schools and Colleges Association (APPSCA), Central President Dr. Malik Abrar Hussain on Wednesday said there were more than two million and six hundred thousand children out of schools in the country, which is a big question mark on our education system. The government should take concrete steps to bring the out-of-school children to schools, whereas the role of private education sector was above all for the educational development, social and economic improvement of

the country, Malik Abrar said in a news release. The Association central president was addressing the first meeting of the newly elected central executive body. The first meeting of the newly elected central executive body of the Association was held here at the head office of the association. The meeting was presided over by Central President Dr. Malik Abrar Hussain. While Senior Vice President Rana Sohail Ahmad, Vice President Javed Iqbal Raja, Secretary General Ashraf Haraj, Zulfiqar Ali Siddiqui, Irfan Muzaf-

far Kayani, Malik Deen Muhammad Awan, Qasim Abbas, Asrar Bakhar, Muhammad Ibrahim, Malik Hafeezur Rehman, Malik Shaikat Ali, Muhammad Arif Advocate, Qari Tariq Mehmood, Antak Hussain, Syed Abid Shah, Sardar Gul Zubair Khan, Dr. Rukhsana Khan, Nagina Younis and Sadia Ishaq also participated in the meeting and expressed their views. On this occasion, the meeting has demanded that taking into account the services of private educational institutions, the government should provide

facilities to these schools. Provision of land for construction of private school buildings, interest-free loans should be given, laboratories and libraries should be provided in registered private educational institutions. It has been clarified in the meeting that undoubtedly, the private education sector was ready to cooperate with the government in every possible way, however, the state would also have to fulfill its responsibilities and take concrete steps to solve the problems of private educational institutions.—APP

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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

### Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



### Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115  
PIA Flight Info.....114  
PIA Cargo.....9280979  
Railway Inquiry.....117  
Railway Exchange9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489  
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

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



### Departments

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

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Expanding trade ties between Pak, Ethiopia need of hour

Ethiopian Ambassador Jemal Baker Abdula said Ethiopian Airlines is very well received in Pakistan and now we are working to expand our operations to Islamabad and Lahore

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD : The founding chairman of Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry, Khurshid Barlas, along with the delegation including Fahad Barlas, Canoner Exhibition, Aminur Rahman, Shamreez Iqbal, EC members, along with Ethiopian Ambassador to Pakistan, Jemal Baker Abdula, visited the Embassy of Ethiopia. Chairman Khurshid Barlas briefed Ethiopian ambassador Jemal Baker Abdula about Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta and international events organized by Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry. In this regard, Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry of Ethiopia Pakistan also wants to organize the Ethiopia Expo to increase the trade fair. Khurshid Barlas further said that we will take our trade delegation to Ethiopia and there we will meet with the industrialists and business community regarding the Expo. And will review the sit-



uation regarding the conference and expo. This will promote the business relations between the two countries. Ambassador Jemal Baker Abdula said that Africa and engagement are important in Pakistan's Africa policy. Ethiopian Airlines is well received in Pakistan Ethiopia is trying to connect

the entire region by sharing its resources with sister countries to ensure fair and equitable development in the entire region. Ethiopia is giving great importance to advancing bilateral relations with Pakistan. He said that the establishment of institutional links between Pakistan and African countries is indispensable for the fruits of Pakistan's foreign policy related to Africa. Jemal Baker Abdula said that in the last year and a half, we organized a 75-member trade delegation to visit Ethiopia and facilitated the arrival of a 50-member trade delegation from Ethiopia to Pakistan. Jemal Baker Abdula held a detailed discussion on strengthening the cooperation between the commercial institutions of the two countries. Finally, the founder chairman of Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry Khurshid Barlas presented the shield to Ethiopian Ambassador Jemal Baker Abdula along with PAEI Delegation Fahad Barlas Convener Exhibition, EC Member Shamreez Iqbal.

## ANF Academy conducts anti money laundering workshop

RAWALPINDI : Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Academy here on Wednesday organized a three-day Workshop/Seminar on Anti Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism. 53 Investigation Officers and Public Prosecutors from ANF and sister law enforcement agencies benefited from the Workshop/Seminar. Chief Instructor ANF Academy Sahib Khan highlighted the importance of the workshop. The experts from relevant stakeholders on Anti Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism, including Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), FATF Secretariat and Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Islamabad were invited as guest speakers. Honorable Commandant, ANF Academy Brigadier Ghazi Kamal Kiani graced the closing ceremony on the final day of the workshop/seminar. Commandant ANF Academy appreciated the earnest efforts of ANF Academy to provide a platform for capacity building on money laundering and terrorism financing related issues relevant to various stakeholders. He also highlighted Pakistan's efforts at policy, procedural and operational level to fulfill the requirements of FATF. He underscored the importance of ANF as a vital link in "National Integrated Approach" being a key member of various national forums on money laundering and terrorism financing. As the task is multi sectoral endeavor, ANF is actively engaged with all stakeholders namely MoI, NACTA, FATF Secretariat, FMU, Police, FIA, NAB, CTD and FBR for information sharing, cooperation and provision of data through a desk involving a dedicated focal person. ANF Academy strives to remain at the forefront of holding specialized courses and workshops for capacity building that in turn, feeds into the national efforts against money laundering and terrorism financing, he added. The Commandant stressed the need for continuous capacity building of investigation officers and prosecutors to better deal with the dynamics of assets investigation including financial intelligence to undertake proactive pursuit of assets investigation.—APP

## Mobilink Bank launches "center of excellence

ISLAMABAD: Mobilink Bank, Pakistan's leading digital microfinance bank, has reaffirmed its commitment to women's financial inclusion with the launch of the country's first "Center of Excellence for Women" in partnership with Arid Agricultural University, a leading agricultural institution in Pakistan, to advance financial education. In this joint endeavor, Mobilink Bank will serve as the exclusive financial partner for Arid University's outreach program, which extends its services to approximately 200 rural villages in the Potohar region, said a news release. Alongside offering customized financial services, the Bank will actively contribute to advancing agricultural education by supporting financial literacy training, skills development, and capacity building for women. Mobilink Bank is part of the VEON group, a global digital operator that provides converged connectivity and digital services to nearly 160 million customers in six dynamic markets that are home to 7% of the world's population. Pakistan's agricultural sector is a powerhouse, contributing a substantial 24% to the GDP and engaging nearly half of the country's workforce. Women constitute 45% of this agricultural labour force, predominantly employed on small farms. Despite their critical role, women farmers encounter multiple challenges, particularly in accessing financial services and technology. Recognizing these challenges, Mobilink Bank has taken proactive measures by launching the "Center of Excellence for Women" under its flagship initiative, the Women Inspirational Network (WIN) program, to empower women, promote financial inclusion, bridge existing gender gaps, and propel their economic growth. Speaking about the initiative, Haaris Mahmood Chaudhary, Chief Operating Officer Mobilink Bank, said, "We are committed to fostering growth within Pakistan's agricultural sector, recognizing its vital role in the nation's rural landscape. Currently, 40% of our borrowers are engaged in agriculture, highlighting our dedication to supporting those who form the backbone of rural communities. Understanding their challenges, we strive to empower them with innovative financial solutions. One such initiative is our WIN program, which has already made strides by imparting valuable skills and knowledge to thousands of women nationwide." He further said, "We are poised to take another leap forward by partnering with Arid University. With the launch of this center, we are expanding our reach and equipping more women, particularly women farmers, with the essential digital and financial tools they need to thrive in today's challenging landscape." Dr. Gulshan Irshad, Associate Professor, Department of Plant Pathology, Faculty of Agriculture, PMAS AAUR, said, "As an institution dedicated to agricultural advancement, we are proud to partner with Mobilink Bank. Our outreach programs offer joint awareness sessions, educating farmers, especially women, on both agricultural best practices and financial literacy. This empowers our communities and creates a valuable connection for Mobilink Bank with potential customers. We are committed to expanding this initiative - facilitating access to Mobilink Bank for all agricultural universities across Pakistan." As Mobilink Bank continues to expand its outreach and impact, it remains dedicated to fostering partnerships that promote the digital and financial inclusion of women.—DNA

## Summer School on Understanding Greenhouse Gas Emission

ISLAMABAD: The NUST Atta Ur Rehman School of Applied Biosciences in collaboration with the HGU Germany is organizing the Summer School on "Improving Mechanistic Understanding of Greenhouse Gas Emission and Measurement Techniques" from June 24-28. According to an official of NUST, the event is aimed at improving understanding of GHG emissions, focusing on agriculture's impact and biochar technology's potential to reduce emissions. It fosters commitments to share techniques, offers funded travel grants, and covers GHG formation, advanced measurement, data analysis, and teaching. The program includes fully funded learning, immersion in Germany's environmental landscape, networking opportunities, interactive sessions, field trips, and teaching experiences in Pakistan. The intensive program will offer a unique opportunity for early career scientists, enrolled PhD students, and agriculture industry professionals to gain knowledge about the understanding of Greenhouse Gas Emission and Measurement Techniques. The official informed that the applicants having a degree in the fields of Agroecology, Agronomy, Soil and Environmental Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Climate Change, or relevant fields dealing with GHG emissions will be given preference. The applicants having proven knowledge about the role of GHG emissions and atmospheric concentrations in global climate change and permanent job (except PhD students) to ensure a potential multiplier of the knowledge gained from summer school are expected to participate in the programme. The applicant (must be Pakistani national) would commit to teach the lessons learned in Germany in a subsequent GHG Summer School taking place in the last week of September 2024 in Pakistan at NUST and have proven knowledge of doing/completing relevant projects will be preferred for selection.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov hosted iftar dinner for Dr. Abrarul Hasnain, the renowned dentist of Islamabad. The Ambassador hosted iftar dinner at his residence.

## Steering committee on 5es framework holds maiden meeting

ISLAMABAD : Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday chaired the first meeting of the Steering Committee on the 5Es framework for effective implementation of the multi-pronged strategy to turnaround Pakistan and put it on a sustained growth trajectory. The Committee decided to hold a One-Day "consultative workshop" after Eid-ul-Fitr in which officials from all the ministries and relevant stakeholders would be invited for deliberations to implement the framework, a news release said. Among others, the meeting was attended by senior officials of federal and provincial ministries and divisions. The 5Es framework is centred on five key pillars including Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment and Climate Change, Energy and Infrastructure, Equity and Empowerment. The National Economic Council (NEC) approved the framework last year in June, following which the

Planning Ministry expedited its implementation, the formation of a Steering Committee. "Engagement with all ministries is a part of the exercise which has been started on the directions of Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal," it added. In the one-day workshop, all the stakeholders and experts from various fields including academia and industry will be invited and their proposals to be considered before finalizing the action plan to implement the 5Es framework. Chairing the meeting, the minister directed all the ministries to come up with solid proposals with their respective Es in the workshop. "The plans should be holistic with inputs and outputs so that its implementation can be ensured," remarked the minister while emphasizing to increase the country's exports. He said Pakistan's biggest challenge was to increase foreign exchange reserves, which could only be effectively tackled with increased exports, adding

"Success of Pakistan depends on increasing foreign exchange reserves." Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that the future of Pakistan hinged on the growth of key sectors such as agriculture, industry and services, and the adoption of technological advancements. He said the government's ambitious goal was to transform Pakistan into a \$100 billion export-oriented economy within the next 7 to 8 years, making it a pivotal moment in the nation's history. Furthermore, he said that planning should be made keeping in view the modern infrastructure as digital technology had a great influence on different sectors in the era we lived in. "Our top priority is to improve our governance system and build the economy on modern lines," the minister said highlighting the key issues of governance which must be addressed. Furthermore, he added that digitization and the creation of infrastructure for a knowledge-based economy were indispensable.—APP

## Efforts afoot to ensure continuity of education

ISLAMABAD: The district administration is committed to ensure continuity of education for the children residing in flood affected areas of the district. These views were expressed by Sub Divisional Education Officer (SDEO) for Prova Tehsil Ms Sobia during her visit to Lunda union council. She also inspected academic activities and facilities at the Government Girls Primary School (GGPS) Adha Khyarah School which suffered a heavy damage during last year's floods, resulting in the collapse of its boundary walls. Accompanied by her team, the female education officer took stock of the plight of the school in the wake of last year's floods and expressed concerns over the physical infrastructure and enrollment of students, which had been adversely affected. She issued special directives to the school's head teacher.—APP

**NATIONAL TRANSMISSION AND DESPATCH COMPANY Ltd.**

**NTDC TENDER NOTICE NO. 08/2023-24**

Sealed tenders are invited on percentage rate basis on prescribed forms from registered contractors. Tender will be issued to those contractors, who will produce original or attested copies of the following: -

1. Company profile.
2. Bidders are required to be registered with PEC as valid registration certificate in Category C-5 or above for the current year 2023-24 and having specialization code CE-01, CE-09 and CE-10.
3. Appointment letter of Engineers working with the firm as required by PEC laws.
4. The list/detail of technical and supervisory staff along with attested copies of Degree/Diploma.
5. At least three (3) similar nature works valuing not less than estimated cost completed during last two (2) years. The contractor will have to provide the copies of work order and satisfactory completion certificate with in schedule time otherwise no consideration will be given.
6. Detail of tools & plant available with contractor.
7. Bidder having poor performance for the execution of civil works (present / past) will not be qualified.
8. CDR must be attached with the application in advance in the name of Executive Engineer Civil NTDC Islamabad as mentioned below.
9. Bank statement of at least 3 financial years showing average annual cash flow of at least 20 million rupees.
10. 10% performance guarantee in the shape of Bank guarantee only will be accepted from successful bidder before the award of work.
11. All prevailing federal and provincial government Taxes, levies or charges shall be applicable on Contractors. Firm should have registration with Tax authorities as well as active Tax payer.
12. Tenders will be issued only to the owner of the firms or the person holding authority's letter on judicial paper from the owner for the respective work.
13. Tenders where convincing, collusion, pooling amongst the bidders if observed / reported will be canceled.
14. No litigation / No black listing certificate on judicial stamp paper duly attested by 1st class Magistrate.
15. Un sealed/improper sealed/in complete/conditional bid/rate offered will be rejected straight away.
16. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids as per PPRA Rule 33 (1).

| Sr. No. | Name of Works  | Earnest money (In the shape of Bank draft/pay order) Rs. (Rupees) | Tender form Cost (Rs.) N/R |
|---------|--|---|----------------------------|
| 01.     | Protection of Tower No. 107,108,114,115 & 122 of 220KV Rawat-University Islamabad Transmission Line. | Rs. 180,000/-   | Rs. 5,000/-                |
| 02.     | Carpeting of Road at 220KV Grid Station NTDC Mari Daudkhel.  | Rs. 1000,000/-  | Rs. 5000/-                 |

Tender will be received for the above said work in the office of the undersigned on 08-04-2024 at 11.00 AM and will be opened on the same day at 11:30 AM publicly. Bidding documents can be obtained on request from the office of Executive Engineer, (Civil) NTDC H-8/2 Islamabad on or before 05-04-2024 during office hours up to 11:00 AM. Tender received after the due time and date will not be considered. This tender is also available on PPRA website: www.ppra.org.pk.

**PID (L) NO. 2966**

**Executive Engineer (Civil) A.M(N)**  
NTDC H-8/2, Islamabad PH# 051-9250231



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## War on hospitals

**A**S the genocidal war in Gaza rages on, the Israeli military implements the next stage of its starvation plan inside the besieged coastal enclave. It is important to understand that famine in Gaza is not a mere byproduct of the conflict, it appears to be "Israel's" only coherent battle strategy. From day one of the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip, the intent to manufacture famine has been communicated in public from the highest levels of the Zionist leadership. The infamous quote that has been extensively cited, including by the South African legal team at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in which Israeli Security Minister, Yoav Gallant, calls the people of Gaza "human animals", was also accompanied by a clear intent to manufacture famine in Gaza. Gallant said, "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed," which his military abided by for weeks, before a single ounce of aid was allowed into Gaza. When the aid trucks were eventually permitted to enter Gaza on October 21, after a complete ban on aid since October 7, the Associated Press reported that some "two dozen" aid trucks were able to cross the Rafah crossing from Egypt. Although the Israeli regime claims that it has not obstructed aid and points to the convoys that have been able to cross into Gaza as proof, it is crucial to understand that for context, 500 trucks entered the besieged territory every day - on average - prior to the beginning of the war. Since then, there has not been a single day when even near to half of the normal pre-war number of aid trucks have been permitted to enter. In two months-time, it may already be too late for one, while on the other hand, why build an expensive port for delivering aid, when it is much quicker and simpler to pressure the Zionist Entity to let sufficient truckloads enter? There is still no plan as to who will coordinate this aid delivery, who will manage the security of the operation, and how it will actually play out. As the US enters election season and the majority of Democratic Party voters favor a ceasefire and younger demographics of voters voice their support for Palestinian human rights, the aid port propaganda appears to be a means of silencing criticism more than actually delivering aid. All the needed food, water and medical aid is only hundreds of meters, or at most a few kilometers away from those starving to death in Gaza, yet the Zionist entity will not permit its entry into the besieged coastal strip of land. What we have to understand is that in the absence of any way for the Israelis to secure a military victory against the Palestinian Resistance in Gaza, they are using the method of slow mass murder of the entire population instead. It has been made clear that it is politically untenable for the Israelis to ethnically cleanse the population of Gaza into the Sinai desert, while a mass murder operation in the southern city of Rafah is also a political disaster for them. As an alternative, it appears that a genocide through mass starvation and disease is the tactic of choice here, and at this point, the US government is providing the perfect cover for the implementation of this plan. The Israeli leadership has made its intentions to starve the people of Gaza to death clear, from day one, they stated that they would block all aid and fight a long war.



## Can Egypt succeed in Sudan

**I**N efforts to address the Sudanese crisis, there is a consensus that the only viable solution lies in an immediate ceasefire, a return to the negotiating table and the initiation of a political process. This call for action resonates among Sudanese citizens, the African Union, which previously has intervened to mediate negotiations, and Egypt, the key neighboring country most affected by the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan. This conflict not only exacerbates the refugee crisis but also raises concerns about the cross-border security threats posed by armed groups, arms smugglers and human traffickers, along with the implications for the security of the Nile River waters. As the focus of conflicting powers is increasingly diverted to the internal turmoil in Sudan, particularly recent movements of forces from Darfur toward Khartoum, there is an increased risk that border security with Egypt will be neglected. Despite Egypt's strict control measures along its 1,276-kilometer border with Sudan, palpable concerns remain about the potential exploitation of security vacuums by armed groups seeking to infiltrate Egyptian territory. Given these pressing concerns, Cairo has been compelled to intensify its efforts to quell the conflict in Sudan, as evidenced by the recent flurry of diplomatic activity surrounding the crisis, including the visit of Abdullah Hamdok, Sudan's former prime minister, to Cairo on March 8. The recent resurgence of Egyptian diplomatic activity coincides with a perceived lull in international efforts to resolve the Sudanese crisis. Alongside efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, an eight-country trade bloc in Eastern Africa, and an initiative by neighboring countries, which have made limited progress toward halting the conflict, Egypt has also stepped up its unilateral attempts to find a resolution. The urgency of the situation has been compounded by the escalating humanitarian crisis in Sudan, which has resulted in a significant influx of refugees into Egypt that has placed further strain on Cairo's resources amid an ongoing economic crisis. The impasse in Sudan has prompted Egypt to develop a new initiative in an attempt to overcome previous shortcomings and galvanize Sudanese factions in the hopes of reaching a comprehensive political settlement. Cairo seeks to identify and address the underlying obstacles and challenges that have thwarted previous initiatives, with a view to effecting a transformative change in the trajectory of the crisis. Regional and international developments have thrust Sudan back onto the list of Western priorities, particularly amid escalating security tensions in the southern Red Sea and burgeoning relations between Sudan and Iran. The appointment by US of a special envoy to Sudan signals increased American engagement in reconciliation efforts, presenting an opportunity for Cairo to reinvigorate regional initiatives and shape its approach to the Sudanese crisis accordingly. Despite these efforts, numerous barriers remain that hinder the realization of a comprehensive political settlement in Sudan. The persistence of armed conflict, exacerbated by external interventions and the fragmented nature of Sudanese political forces, presents formidable challenges to mediation efforts.

## SIFC's agriculture plans and water scarcity...

Qamar Bashir



Firstly, the SIFC can provide leadership and allocation of resources to construction of new dams, delay action dams, reservoirs, and storage facilities to capture and store water during periods of abundance, ensuring a dependable water supply during dry seasons. Additionally, investments in modern irrigation systems and water conveyance networks can optimize water distribution and minimize losses, thereby enhancing water use efficiency across agricultural, industrial, and domestic sectors. Secondly, embracing advanced water conservation and efficiency measures is crucial

**U**PON perusing the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC)'s website, one encounters an impressive brochure detailing the Green Pakistan initiative. The brochure boasts a professional design, featuring easily readable text accompanied by high-definition images showcasing various facets of the GPI, painting an impressive picture. The initiative commences with a vision statement, which articulates its overarching goal: "Ensure food security and optimize agricultural production in Pakistan through innovative technologies and sustainable, precision-driven agricultural practices based on the agro-ecological potential of the land, while safeguarding the well-being of rural communities and preserving the environment." Furthermore, the brochure outlines the mechanism to achieve this mission, emphasizing the utilization of innovative technologies and sustainable, precision-driven agricultural practices tailored to Pakistan's agro-ecological potential. It underscores the importance of prioritizing the welfare of rural communities and the conservation of the environment in the pursuit of food security and agricultural optimization. In an effort to attract investors, the brochure leverages Pakistan's diverse climate zones and vast land resources, encompassing a total of 79.6 million hectares. Within this expanse, 24.1 million hectares are cultivated, with an additional 9.1 million hectares available for agriculture, and 22.4 million hectares designated for range use. Through strategic marketing, smart business propositions are being presented to potential investors, promising enticing returns on investment. These plans aim to catalyze a transformation in Pakistan's agriculture, livestock, and afforestation sectors by deploying state-of-the-art machinery and cutting-edge digital technologies. The objective is to transition to modern mechanisms, maximizing output, and unlocking Pakistan's immense agricultural potential. But what it does not tell is that Pakistan is Water scarce country facing a frightening situation. The country ranks 14 among the 17 'extremely high water risk' countries of the world, a list that includes hot and dry countries like Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It also does not factor in the 1991 Water Accord, canal water allocation among provinces based on a baseline volume of 144.8 billion cubic feet (BCF). 48% of this water is allocated to Punjab, 42% to Sindh, 7 percent to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 3 percent to Balochistan. The brochure was also silent about the fact that Pakistan is already facing climate-related threats to water resources as is evident from the change in monsoon patterns, receding glaciers, rising temperatures and recurrence of floods and droughts. As per IMF, Pakistan's per capita annual water availability has reduced from 1500 cubic meters in 2009 to 1017 cubic meters in 2021. Perhaps the brochure was also silent over the fact over 80 percent of its population experiencing 'severe water scarcity' for at least one month annually, largely due to the over-extraction of groundwater for irrigation purposes. This unsustainable practice has

led to the depletion of Pakistan's groundwater resources, which serve as a crucial backup water supply. If current trends persist, the entire country may confront water scarcity by 2025. Complicating matters further is Pakistan's status as a lower riparian country to India, with 78 percent of its water inflows originating from there. Moreover, inefficient water usage exacerbates the crisis, with only one-third of available water being utilized, while one-third is lost or discharged into the sea. It also did not mention that Pakistan ranks 36th globally in total renewable water resources while most efficient countries in terms of renewable water resources are Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway and the bottom five water-stressed countries are Yemen, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Lebanon and Israel. This shift from water abundance to water stress is evident in Pakistan's diminishing share of global renewable water resources, accounting for just 0.5 percent despite its 2.8 percent share of the global population. Particularly alarming is the state of the Indus Basin aquifer, ranked as the 2nd most over-stressed underground water reserve globally. With over 60 percent of irrigation, 70 percent of drinking water, and 100 percent of industrial water dependency on groundwater. As the SIFC's brochure entices investors to invest in bringing an additional 9.1 million hectares of land under cultivation and developing 22.4 million hectares of range land for livestock development, it must address a crucial question: how will it provide the immense amount of additional water required for such a vast expansion, especially considering Pakistan's looming water crisis? By 2025, Pakistan is projected to require 274 million acre-feet (MAF) of water, while its current water resources remain at 191 MAF, resulting in a staggering demand-supply gap of approximately 83 MAF. With a water consumption rate per hectare calculated at around 7.93 MAF per million hectares, cultivating an additional 9.1 million hectares of land and developing 22.4 million hectares of range land would necessitate approximately 72.23 MAF and 177.83 MAF (totaling 250 MAF) of additional water, respectively. This demand represents 130% more than the country's current water resources. Addressing this critical water scarcity challenge is paramount for any investment initiative aiming to expand agricultural and livestock development in Pakistan, necessitating innovative solutions and comprehensive water management strategies to bridge the widening gap between water demand and supply. As the beacon of hope for Pakistan's agricultural and range land development, the SIFC has the potential to catalyze the realization of the nation's aspirations for rapid progress. The accompanying brochure should outline a comprehensive strategy to address the formidable challenge of bringing an additional 250 MAF of water into the country's water system to remain within the 1991 water accord and to pre-empt any possible

political uprising, as every province zealously guard every drop of water which has been allocated to it. While this goal may seem daunting, it is achievable through political commitment, consensus-building, meticulous planning, resource allocation, and leveraging human expertise, intellect, and knowledge, along with regional and international cooperation. A multifaceted approach is necessary, focusing on innovative solutions and strategic investments. Firstly, the SIFC can provide leadership and allocation of resources to construction of new dams, delay action dams, reservoirs, and storage facilities to capture and store water during periods of abundance, ensuring a dependable water supply during dry seasons. Additionally, investments in modern irrigation systems and water conveyance networks can optimize water distribution and minimize losses, thereby enhancing water use efficiency across agricultural, industrial, and domestic sectors. Secondly, embracing advanced water conservation and efficiency measures is crucial. Implementing cutting-edge technologies and practices, such as drip irrigation, precision agriculture, and water-efficient industrial processes, can significantly reduce water wastage and enhance productivity. Moreover, promoting rainwater harvesting techniques at both individual and community levels presents a sustainable means of augmenting water supplies, particularly in rural areas where access to conventional water sources may be limited. Lastly, fostering collaboration and innovation on a national and international scale is essential for achieving long-term water security. Strengthening water governance frameworks, enforcing regulations, and promoting integrated water resource management strategies are vital steps toward optimizing water allocation and usage. Furthermore, forging partnerships with neighboring countries for transboundary water management and exploring regional water-sharing agreements can unlock synergies and mitigate the impacts of water scarcity across borders. SIFC might also benchmark Singapore and Australia. Both made significant investments in water infrastructure, technology, research, and governance reforms to combat water scarcity. Singapore's ongoing efforts, spanning several decades, include funding for desalination plants, NEWater facilities for wastewater recycling, and water-sensitive urban design practices. Similarly, Australia has heavily invested in water management reforms, especially during severe droughts, with initiatives like water efficiency programs, irrigation modernization, and infrastructure for water recycling and desalination. By embracing these strategies with determination and foresight, SIFC can provide an additional water of 250 MAF into the existing water resources of the county and pave the way toward a more resilient and water-secure future for the people of Pakistan.

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

## A Journey through karabakh

Ahsan Hamid Durrani



The Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque, once desecrated by Armenian forces where they housed cattle and pigs, stood tall once more, its walls echoing with the prayers of the faithful. The mosque was completely restored by Azerbaijani authorities. Nearby, a new luxury hotel stood as a beacon of hope, a symbol of Shusha's resurgence as a vibrant tourist destination

**I**N the heart of the Caucasus, amidst the echoes of a turbulent past, lies the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. It was a land scarred by conflict, where the shadows of Armenian occupation once loomed large. Yet, it was also a land of resilience and hope, where the spirit of its people soared above the ruins left by the ravages of war. My journey to Karabakh was not merely a trip but an expedition of sorts, a quest to bear witness to history in the making. Accompanied by a group of international visitors, I traversed through the remnants of Armenian occupation, a grim reminder of the toll that conflict can exact upon a land and its people. Arriving in the city of Fuzuli, I was greeted by the desolation of a community reduced to ruins. Mosques, churches, homes, and schools lay shattered, a testament to the rampage unleashed by the departing Armenian forces. Watching the ghostly ruins of this city, I felt the weight of history pressing down upon me, the echoes of the past whispering tales of sorrow and loss. But amidst the rubble, a flicker of hope emerged as I traveled deep into the city center. New buildings rose defiantly from the ashes, a testament to the indomitable spirit of the Azerbaijani people. Fuzuli was not just a city in ruins; it was a canvas upon which the resilience of a nation

was painted with blood and sweat. As locals toiled tirelessly to rebuild their shattered lives, I witnessed the birth of a new chapter in the city's history—a chapter defined not by destruction, but by resilience and renewal. More than 400 families have started living in this city. Venturing further into the heart of Karabakh, I arrived in the enchanting city of Shusha, a jewel nestled amidst lush green mountains and pristine snow. Here, amidst the echoes of a bygone era, I witnessed the rebirth of a cultural capital reclaiming its rightful place in the annals of history. The Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque, once desecrated by Armenian forces where they housed cattle and pigs, stood tall once more, its walls echoing with the prayers of the faithful. The mosque was completely restored by Azerbaijani authorities. Nearby, a new luxury hotel stood as a beacon of hope, a symbol of Shusha's resurgence as a vibrant tourist destination. Yet, amidst the gleaming facades and bustling streets, reminders of the city's tumultuous past lingered—houses and buildings destroyed by the occupation forces of Armenia. In Shusha, I delved into the rich tapestry of Azerbaijani culture, immersing myself in the legacy of a renowned singer Murtuza Mammadov, affectionately known as Bulbul by the locals. His museum,

a tribute to his enduring legacy, stood as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit—a spirit that transcended the boundaries of time and conflict. His vandalized statue stood beside a newly erected one bearing testament to the scars left Armenian forces in an effort to destroy the soul of this city. As I gazed upon the snow-capped peaks of Karabakh, I couldn't help but marvel at the transformation that had taken place. Where once the echoes of gunfire had pierced the air, now the strains of folk songs resonated, a celebration of newfound freedom and unity. New constructed roads, monuments, and residential and commercial buildings lifted the spirit of the city. It's indeed a wonderful achievement that such progress has been achieved in merely a span of three years. The Azerbaijani flag, once a distant dream, now fluttered proudly atop the lofty mountains, a symbol of hope and reconciliation. My journey through Karabakh was more than just a voyage through a land scarred by conflict—it was a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, a reminder that even amidst the darkest of times, hope can still bloom. As I bid farewell to this land, I carried with me not just memories, but a renewed sense of hope for a future where peace and prosperity reign supreme.



## Briefs

## Japan finance minister warns on yen weakness

TOKYO : Japan's finance minister issued his strongest warning to date about the weakness of the yen as the currency fell to a 34-year low against the dollar, saying authorities could take "decisive steps", language previously used before intervention. Shunichi Suzuki last used the words "decisive steps" in autumn 2022 when Japan last intervened in the market to stem the yen weakness. Suzuki made the remarks on Tuesday shortly after the dollar spiked on strong US data, nudging the Japanese yen to a 34-year low and into the zone that drew official market intervention in 2022. Yen hits 34-year low ahead of key US inflation test. The yen traded at 151.97 per dollar in the Asia session, down about 0.2% and weaker than 151.94 where Japanese authorities stepped in during October 2022 to buy the currency. It hit the weakest level since the middle of 1990, around the time Japan's asset bubble burst. Suzuki said the government is closely watching market moves with a high sense of urgency following the yen's fall.—DNA

## Thailand moves to legalise same-sex marriage

BANGKOK : Thailand has taken a historic step closer to marriage equality after the lower house passed a bill giving legal recognition to same-sex marriage. It still needs approval from the Senate and royal endorsement to become law. But it is widely expected to happen by the end of 2024, making Thailand the only South East Asian country to recognise same-sex unions. It will cement Thailand's reputation as a relative haven for LGBTQ+ couples in a region where such attitudes are rare. "This is the beginning of equality. It's not a universal cure to every problem but it's the first step towards equality," Danuphorn Punnakanta, an MP and chairman of the lower house's committee on marriage equality, told parliament while presenting a draft of the bill. "This law wants to return these rights to this group of people, not grant them the rights." The new law, which was passed by 400 of 415 of lawmakers present, will describe marriage as a partnership between two individuals, instead of between a man and woman. And it will give LGBTQ+ couples equal rights to get marital tax savings, to inherit property, and to give medical treatment consent for partners who are incapacitated. Under the law, married same-sex couples can also adopt children. However, the lower house did not adopt the committee's suggestion to use the term "parents" instead of "fathers and mothers". Thailand already has laws that ban discrimination over gender identity and sexual orientation and is, therefore, seen as one of Asia's most LGBTQ+ friendly nations.—APP

## Belgian farmers clash with police in protest

BRUSSELS : Belgian farmers have clashed with the police amid protest against the European Union's policies in this area, on the eve of the meeting of the bloc's agriculture ministers. The farmers sprayed manure towards police officers on Tuesday, prompting the authorities to retaliate with water cannons and tear gas during a demonstration prior to a meeting of 27 EU agriculture ministers set to address the crisis in the industry. The farmers expressed their discontent with what they perceive as an abundance of bureaucratic regulations, heightened environmental requirements, inexpensive imported goods, and unjust trading policies. They blocked the streets of the Belgian capital near the EU headquarters to protest what they called extreme stoning.—APP

## Colombia warns Israel over Gaza ceasefire breach

Colombian President Gustavo Petro urged other nations to suspend ties with Israel if it doesn't cease its military offensive in the Gaza Strip

## NEWS DESK

BOGOTA: Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Tuesday threatened to break off diplomatic ties with Israel if the country doesn't comply with a UN Security Council resolution that calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Petro made the announcement on X. On Monday, he published another message in which he celebrated the resolution's approval and urged other nations to suspend ties with Israel if it doesn't cease its military offensive in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the deaths of more than 32,000 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Israel's Foreign Ministry replied to Petro's threat on Tuesday with a tweet, which said that the Middle Eastern nation will "continue to protect its people and will not give in to any pressures and threats." The Foreign Ministry accused

Petro of being a "supporter of Hamas terrorists" who massacred children and women during an Oct. 7 raid on Israeli communities that unleashed the current invasion of Gaza, and said that Petro's stance is a "disgrace to the Colombian people." The confrontation on X signals a growing deterioration in the relations between both nations, which have gone from being military and commercial partners, to becoming bitter ideological rivals. For decades, Colombia used Israeli-built warplanes and machine guns to fight drug cartels and rebel groups, and both countries signed a free trade agreement in 2020. But relations began to cool in 2022, when Petro was elected to office. Petro, a leftist and longtime supporter of the Palestinian cause, has described Israel's military offensive in Gaza as "genocide." In February, he suspended military purchases from Israel, after the country's troops fired

on Palestinians who gathered around aid trucks, in a tragedy in which more than 100 people were killed.

Israel's Foreign Ministry had suspended defense cooperation with Colombia in October, after Petro had failed to condemn the Hamas raid on villages in southern Israel, and instead compared Israel's military to Nazi troops. Military analysts in Colombia have said that the deterioration of relations with Israel jeopardizes the South American nation's defense capabilities. Colombia depends on Israeli companies for the maintenance of its fleet of more than 20 Israeli-built Kfir jets, which are the only planes in Colombia's arsenal that are capable of launching laser-guided bombs. Colombia also has multiple contracts with Israel for the provision of military communications equipment, and produces assault rifles for its troops under a license from an Israeli manufacturer.

## France denies supplying arms to Israel

PARIS : France's defence minister on Tuesday denied allegations from investigative journalists that France supplied components for ammunition used by the Israeli army in its Gaza campaign. Marseille-based firm Eurolinks had sold Israel M27 links, metal pieces used to join rifle cartridges into ammunition belts for machine guns, investigative websites Disclose and Marsactu wrote. Such ammunition "could have been used against civilians in the Gaza strip," they claimed. The investigative outlets' reporting was supported by photos of the links which they said were taken on October 23, weeks after Hamas' bloody October 7 attack on Israel that triggered the intense Gaza fighting. But Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu told reporters in Paris that Eurolinks' license to export to Israeli firm IMI Systems "only covers re-export to third countries" rather than use by the Israeli army. Left-wingers have called for France to follow Canada's example and stop all arms exports to Israel. MP Mathilde Panot, a leader of the France Unbound (LFI) opposition party, described the exports as a "massive scandal", accusing Lecornu of "lying" in a recent parliamentary hearing. The minister told the National Assembly lower house's defence committee last month that France's policy on arms for Israel was "irreproachable", with recent deliveries covering items like "ball bearings, glass, cooling systems" and sensors. "In general, these are arms planned to be re-exported from Israel to other customers," he added at the time.—Agencies

## German economy to stay nearly flat this year

Hit by inflation, high interest rates and cooling exports, the German economy shrank by 0.3 per cent last year and is struggling to emerge from the doldrums

BERLIN : The German economy is expected to barely grow this year, leading economic institutes say, as weak demand at home and abroad slows the path to recovery. Europe's largest economy will expand by just 0.1 percent in 2024, five think tanks said in a joint statement, a sharp downgrade from their earlier forecast of 1.3 percent growth. "Cyclical and structural factors are overlapping in the sluggish overall economic development," said Stefan Kooths from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW Kiel). "Although a recovery is likely to set in from the spring, the overall momentum will not be too strong," he added. The German economy shrank by 0.3 percent last year, battered by inflation,

high interest rates and cooling exports, and is struggling to emerge from the doldrums. Even though inflation has steadily dropped in recent months, consumer spending was picking up "later and less dynamically" than previously forecast as wages lag, the institutes (DIW, Ifo, IfW Kiel, IWH and RWI) said. And Germany's export sector, usually a key driver of economic growth, was suffering from cooling foreign trade against a fragile global economic backdrop. Uncertain economic policy Energy-intensive businesses in particular have been hit hard by soaring energy prices following Russia's war in Ukraine, contributing to a manufacturing slump in Europe's industrial powerhouse. Meanwhile, Corporate investments have

been dampened by the European Central Bank's interest rate rises, which have made borrowing more expensive, and by "uncertainty about economic policy," the institutes said. They now expect the economy to grow by 1.4 percent in 2025, only slightly below their previous forecast of 1.5 percent. Looking ahead, the institutes expect the recovery to accelerate next year as inflation eases further and demand picks up. The think tanks said they recommended a "mild reform" of the debt brake to allow "more debt-financed investment than before". Habeck is in favour of relaxing the debt rules, but Finance Minister Christian Lindner of the FDP is strongly opposed. Calls have grown for the government to relax its constitutionally

enshrined "debt brake," a self-imposed cap on annual borrowing, to turbocharge much-needed spending on infrastructure modernisation and the green transition. The criticism of Berlin comes after a shock legal ruling late last year three Chancellor Olaf Scholz's budget into disarray, forcing the government to re-think its spending plans. The government recently also drastically downgraded its economic forecasts, expecting output to expand by just 0.2 percent this year. Economy Minister Robert Habeck last month acknowledged the economy was "in rough waters" and in need of a "reform booster." But Scholz's three-way coalition government — made up of the Social Democrats, the Greens.—DNA

## 63,000 dead or missing while migrating over last decade

GENEVA : At least 63,285 people have perished or disappeared on migration routes around the world between 2014 and 2023, with most deaths caused by drowning, the UN migration agency said on Tuesday. A report published by the International Organization for Migration on its Missing Migrants Project showed that the majority of deaths and disappearances — 28,854 — occurred in the Mediterranean, followed by Africa and Asia. Nearly 60 percent of deaths documented were linked to drowning, and more than one third of those identified were from countries in conflict, including Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria and Ethiopia. IOM's data showed that the deadliest year for migrants in the last decade was 2023, when it recorded 8,541 deaths in part due to a sharp increase of fatalities in the Mediterranean. "The increase in deaths is likely linked to the increase in departures and, correspondingly, shipwrecks, off the coast of Tunisia," the report said, adding that at least 729 people died off the Tunisian coast in 2023, compared to 462 in 2022. "In all prior years, most deaths in the Central Mediterranean were documented off the coast of Libya." With anti-immigration parties steadily gaining influence across Europe for years, governments have attempted to curb migration flows to their countries by pledging funds to countries across the Mediterranean such as Tunisia and Egypt. Earlier this month, the EU pledged a 7.4 billion euro (\$8 billion) funding package to Egypt that Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni described as "the best way to address migratory flows." The governments of several European countries, including Italy, Hungary and Britain, have made curbing immigration a top priority, while elsewhere far-right parties like France's National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen, have gained popularity. Religious leaders are among those who have called for greater compassion toward migrants.—DNA

## 4 bodies recovered, six missing after Indonesia landslide

JAKARTA : Rescuers in Indonesia have recovered four bodies including those of two children after a landslide and flooding hit a village on Java island, while six others remain missing, an official said.

Cibenda village in West Java Province became inundated just before midnight on Sunday evening after hours of torrential rain when many villagers were asleep. Ten people were initially reported missing and dozens of homes were damaged, forcing hundreds to evacuate. "Until this morning, four bodies have been retrieved and six more are still being searched," Meidi, head of the local disaster mitigation agency and who like many Indonesians goes by one name, said on Wednesday. Indonesia is prone to landslides during the rainy season and the problem has been aggravated in some places by deforestation, with prolonged torrential rain causing flooding in some areas of the archipelago nation. Earlier this month, flash flooding and landslides on Sumatra island killed at least 30 people with scores still missing. A landslide and flooding swept away dozens of houses and destroyed a hotel near Lake Toba on Sumatra in December, killing at least two people.—DNA

## Turkish forces neutralise PKK terrorists in Iraq

ANKARA : Turkish security forces have neutralised three PKK terrorists in northern Iraq, the National Defence Ministry has reported. The terrorists were neutralised in the Operation Claw-Lock area in northern Iraq, the ministry said on X on Wednesday. Turkish authorities use the term "neutralise" to imply the terrorists in question surrendered or were killed or captured. Türkiye launched Operation Claw-Lock in April 2022 to target the PKK terror organisation's hideouts in Iraq's northern Metina, Zap, and Avasin-Basyan regions near the Turkish border. PKK terrorists often hide out in northern Iraq to plot cross-border attacks in Türkiye. In its more than 35-year terror campaign against Türkiye, the PKK — listed as a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the US, and the EU — has been responsible for the deaths of over 40,000 people, including women, children, and infants.—APP

## China wins WTO dispute with Australia

SYDNEY : China has won a nearly three-year-long dispute with Australia at the World Trade Organization over tariffs on steel products that began during a low point of bilateral relations between the countries, and Australia's trade minister said Wednesday his government accepted the ruling. Beijing took its complaint to the WTO in June 2021 over Australia's extra duties on railway wheels, wind towers and stainless steel sinks imported from China. Trade in these products was worth 62 million Australian dollars (\$40.4 million) in 2022. On Tuesday, the WTO panel adjudicating the case in Geneva, Switzerland, found that Australia's investigating authority, the Anti-Dumping Commission, had acted inconsistently with some articles of the anti-dumping agreement. Australia's Trade Minister Don Farrell said in a statement Wednesday that Canberra accepted the WTO's ruling and supported a rules-based trading system. "Australia will engage with China and take steps to implement the panel's findings," Farrell said. "Australia remains committed to a fully functioning WTO dispute settlement system so that the rights and obligations of all WTO members can be enforced," he added. A container ship rests against wreckage of the Francis Scott Key Bridge as night falls on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, as seen from Sparrows Point.—APP

## India to spend \$3.7 bln to fence Myanmar border

NEW DELHI : INDIA plans to spend nearly US\$3.7 billion to fence its 1,610-km porous border with Myanmar within about a decade, said a source with direct knowledge of the matter, to prevent smuggling and other illegal activities. New Delhi said earlier this year it would fence the border and end a decades-old visa-free movement policy with coup-hit Myanmar for border citizens for reasons of national security and to maintain the demographic structure of its northeastern region. A government committee earlier this month approved the cost for the fencing, which needs to be approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet, said the source who declined to be named as they were not authorised to talk to the media. The prime minister's office and the ministries of home, finance, foreign affairs and information and broadcasting did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. Since a military coup in Myanmar in 2021, thousands of civilians and hundreds of troops have fled from there to Indian states where people on both sides share ethnic and familial ties. This has worried New Delhi because of risk of communal tensions spreading to India. Some members of the Indian government have also blamed the porous border for abetting the tense situation in the restive northeastern Indian state of Manipur, abutting Myanmar. For nearly a year, Manipur has been engulfed by a civil war-like situation between two ethnic groups, one of which shares lineage with Myanmar's Chin tribe. The committee of senior Indian officials also agreed to build parallel roads along the fence and 1,700 km of feeder roads connecting military bases to the border, the source said. The fence and the adjoining road will cost nearly 125 million rupees (\$2.02 million) per km, more than double that of the 55 million per km cost for the border fence with Bangladesh built in 2020, the source said, because of the difficult hilly terrain and the use of technology to prevent intrusion and corrosion.—APP



Islamabad : Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain presenting souvenir to Turkish Ambassador Dr. Mehmet Paçacı.—DNA

## Macron, Lula unveil €1B Amazon investment plan

Brazil and France unveil a 1 billion plan over four years to protect the Amazon rainforest

## FOREIGN DESK

PARIS : Their trip to the city of Belem, the host of 2025 UN climate talks, makes Macron the first French president to visit Brazil in 11 years, seeking a fresh start after spats with former president Jair Bolsonaro over environmental destruction and insults directed at his wife, Brigitte Macron. The investment plan aims to raise "1 billion euros (\$1.08 billion) of public and private investment over the next four years," according to a roadmap published by the French presidency ahead of next year's COP30 summit. The leaders are seeking to promote "a great public and private global investment plan into the bioeconomy" in the Brazilian and Guyanese Amazon, the announcement said, especially as Brazil presides over the G20 for

2024. France, the seventh largest economy in the world, and Brazil, the ninth largest, are considered key players in a geopolitical scene marked by rivalry between China and the United States. Paris sees Brasilia as a bridge to large emerging economies whose voices Brazil is trying to amplify through its presidency of the G20, and membership of the BRICS+ group. "We are living in a Franco-Brazilian moment," the Elysee presidential palace said earlier, highlighting "many points of convergence" with Lula, particularly on "major global issues." "France is an essential, unavoidable actor for Brazilian foreign policy," said the head of Brazilian diplomacy for Europe, Maria Luisa Escorial de Moraes. Tuesday's announcement proposes the creation of a "carbon market," intended to reward countries which invest in natural carbon sinks, such as the

Amazon rainforest. The world's largest tropical forest plays a key role in the fight against climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide emissions. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon halved in 2023 after soaring under Bolsonaro, as Lula's government stepped up environmental policing. The agreement also includes support for "indigenous people and local Amazon communities, which have an essential role in protecting biodiversity through their traditional knowledge and forest management practices," according to the announcement. In Belem, Macron awarded tribal chief Raoni Metuktire with the Legion of Honour, the highest French distinction, for his role as an "international figure in the fight for the preservation of the Amazon rainforest and the culture of indigenous peoples," according

to the French presidency. Metuktire left his home in the Amazon more than 30 years ago to travel the world with his warning of the threats posed by the destruction of the rainforest. A striking figure with his large wooden lip plate and yellow feather headdress, he has taken his message to popes, royals and presidents, with his stature as an environmental campaigner rising with growing awareness of the climate emergency. Mercosur and Ukraine. France and Brazil are working together to manufacture four conventionally powered submarines, the third of which will be launched on Wednesday by both leaders at the Itaguaí naval base, near Rio de Janeiro. Brasilia could also call on Paris to help it develop nuclear propulsion on a fifth submarine. Then there are the more sticky topics, such as

the long-stalled free trade agreement between the European Union and South America's Mercosur bloc, which has recently run into fierce resistance from European farmers. Macron said in January that France opposes the deal because it "doesn't make Mercosur farmers and companies abide by the same rules as ours." While Lula is expected to reiterate his call for the rapid signing of the deal, both Paris and Brasilia have indicated the two-decade old negotiations would not be a major focus of Macron's trip. The war in Ukraine, which Macron wants to be a key focus of the G20, is another point of contention. Lula, who has positioned himself as a champion of the "global South," has insisted that Kyiv and Moscow share responsibility over the conflict and has refused to take a stand against Russia.

**Briefs**

**Hamid demands SIC to probe judges' letter**

**DNA**  
LAHORE: Senior lawyer and a leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Hamid Khan on Wednesday demanded a judicial commission to investigate the issue raised by six judges of high judiciary in a letter to the chief justice. Speaking to the media at the Lahore High Court Bar Association office here, he said "this matter is very sensitive and the Bar has to play a role in the issue." "The six judges have done a great job. This letter is very important; there should be a joint strategy to address the issue raised by them. We have to salute these judges," he added. Hamid Khan said the role of the chief justice of Islamabad High Court had become controversial. The judges brought the matter to his notice but he did not take any action, he continued. The senior lawyer demanded the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to constitute a judicial commission on this issue. The CJP has to play his role. Both the chief justices will be accountable to the people. He said a great responsibility has fallen on the bar associations and they have to move unitedly. Hamid Khan urged the bar associations to start a movement and stressed Lahore Bar's president to play his role. Six judges of the Islamabad High Court on Tuesday wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) pointing out "interference" by intelligence institutions in the judicial affairs.

**US, UK bomb Saada in Yemen**

**AL-MUKALLA:** The US and UK launched a fresh airstrike on Houthi targets in Yemen's northern province of Saada on Wednesday, the latest in a spate of strikes against the Yemeni militia, which has vowed to continue assaults on ships in the Red Sea. Houthi media said that US and UK "enemy" jets carried out one strike on Al-Qutaynat in Saada's Baqom area but did not elaborate on the target sites or if there was any human or property damage. Since January, the US and UK have launched strikes on Saada, Saada, Hodeidah, and other Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, targeting military targets, drone and missile launchers, storage facilities, and ammunition depots in order to force the Houthis to stop attacking ships in the Red Sea, Bab Al-Mandab Strait, and Gulf of Aden. The US Central Command nearly every day reports intercepting and destroying Houthi drones and missiles targeting US and international ships, as well as those preparing to fire on international maritime routes in Yemen. The Houthis say they solely target Israel-linked or Israel-bound ships to pressure Israel to lift its blockade of the Palestinian Gaza Strip.

**US guns pour into Haiti**

**FOREIGN DESK**  
WASHINGTON: Haiti is a state out of action. More than two weeks after the country's prime minister resigned, following a surge of violence in Port-au-Prince, details of a presidential transitional council have still not been revealed. One of the challenges this council will have to face is the illegal trafficking of guns, which has powered the gangs which have taken over. The escalation in violence has sparked an exodus from the capital. Among those leaving is 14-year-old David Charles whose father Israel is nervous with excitement as he waits for his son's bus to arrive in Cap-Haitien. A coach with boarded-up windows pulls up to the side of the road. He smiles in anticipation. His 14-year-old son David soon walks down the stairs with his luggage. They embrace tightly.

**Shangla attack criminals will be brought to 'justice': Zardari**

President visits Chinese Embassy, condoles killing of Chinese citizens



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari visited the Embassy of the People's Republic of China today and offered condolences on behalf of the Government and people of Pakistan over the killing of Chinese citizens

in a terrorist attack in Bisham. He strongly condemned yesterday's terrorist attack, saying that the Pakistani nation shared the grief of the Chinese people. He added that the people of Pakistan stood in solidarity with the Chinese people in this hour of grief. Upon his arrival, the President was received by the Ambassador of the People's

Republic of China to Pakistan, Mr Jiang Zaidong. The Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also present on the occasion. During the meeting, the President said that enemies in the region couldn't accept the fact that Pakistan and China were further strengthening their bilateral ties. He assured the Chinese Ambassador

that the criminals involved in the gruesome act would be apprehended and brought to justice. He further said that all necessary measures would be taken to ensure the security of the Chinese citizens working on various projects in Pakistan. The Chinese Ambassador thanked the President for personally visiting the Embassy to offer condolences. He appreciated that Pakistanis from all walks of life had condemned the terrorist attack. Mr Jiang Zaidong highlighted that Chinese workers had made outstanding contributions towards Pakistan's socio-economic development. He said that terrorists were enemies of humanity and needed to be hunted down for targeting innocent people. He underscored the need for increasing counter-terrorism cooperation and providing enhanced security to Chinese workers in Pakistan. The Ambassador reiterated his country's resolve to further strengthen cooperation with Pakistan and continue its support for CPEC and other projects. While registering his remarks in the visitor's book at the Chinese Embassy, the President stated that the inhuman attack struck at the core of shared values and the enduring friendship between the two countries. "This incident was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship", he added. He also wrote that Pakistan would never allow terrorists to undermine our shared goals for peace, prosperity and security in the region.

**Interference in judiciary not acceptable: SCBA**

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) released a statement regarding the letter written by six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) about interference in the judicial matters. SCBA President Shahzad Shoukat stressed the association's commitment to upholding the rule of law. He expressed strong displeasure over the incident mentioned in the judges' letter. "Interference in the judiciary is not only condemnable but also warrants decisive action," said the SCBA president. The Supreme Court Bar Association reiterated its belief in the independence of the judiciary. It emphasised that any actions perceived as undermining this independence would not be accepted by the association.

**Parvez Elahi shifted to PIMS**

ADIL SHAHEEN

RAWALPINDI: Former Punjab chief minister and senior PTI leader Parvez Elahi was shifted to PIMS as his health deteriorated in Adiala jail. Jail sources said Elahi would undergo medical checkup at PIMS. The former chief minister suffered multiple injuries a few days ago when he fell in the prison. According to the medical reports of Elahi, his fourth rib of right side got fractured after he fell in the wardroom of jail. The former chief minister also suffered an injury to his forehead during the fall and there were visible marks noted on the left side of his head, say the reports.

**Sanam, Aliya granted bails**

DNA

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court on Wednesday granted bails to Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) leaders Aliya Hamza and Sanam Javed in Shadman police station attack case. ATC Judge Arshad Javed heard the bail application of the accused in Shadman police station attack case. During the hearing, the prosecutor took the stand that the women were the part of May 9 incidents. The court granted bails to the accused.

**Reserved seats PHC directs KP speaker to administer oath to MPs**

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Wednesday directed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Speaker Babar Saleem Swati to administer the oath to the lawmakers elected on reserved seats. The decision was announced after a two-member PHC bench comprising Justice Attique Shah and Justice Shakeel Ahmad had reserved the verdict earlier today on a petition filed by the opposition parties in the provincial assembly regarding the swearing-in of the members. Oath-taking on reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been subject to controversy owing to the deadlock between the provincial government and opposition parties, wherein the former has objected to the KP governor's decision to summon the assembly session upon the opposition's request. On Monday, opposition parties including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) had moved the PHC seeking timely oath-taking of members linking it to their ability to participate in the upcoming Senate elections. The issue has become crucial for both the ruling and opposition parties as it will play an important role in the Senate

polls slated for April 2 for filling 11 seats from the province. The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), which has a clear majority in the house, is planning to delay the oath-taking, at least till the Senate polls. With the existing strength of the assembly, the ruling party can win most of the Senate seats in all categories from the province. On the other hand, the opposition parties want the 24 MPs elected on reserved seats to be administered oath before the Senate polls to get the desired number of seats in the upper house of parliament. During the hearing today, Justice Shakeel Ahmad questioned whether the speaker was refusing to administer the oath. To this, KP Assembly Speaker Babar Saleem Swati's lawyer replied in the negative stressing that for the first time, the governor's orders regarding the summoning of the assembly session came via the opposition leader. On Justice Attique Shah's query whether the governor's orders have been challenged, the counsel, once again, replied in the negative. He also further stressed that the speaker can only issue the summons for the assembly when one-fourth of the members submit such a request. On the issue of whether the governor has the authority to summon the session, the court was apprised that Article 109 of the Constitution confers the said official to summon the assembly session.

**PTI announces candidates for Punjab by-elections**

LAHORE: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Wednesday announced its candidates for upcoming by-elections on Punjab's provincial and national assemblies' seats. In a statement, the Imran Khan-founded party's Punjab chapter acting president Hammad Azhar announced the names of PTI-backed candidates for the April 21 by-polls to be held on six NA and 12 PA constituencies in Punjab. However, it is not clear whether the PTI-backed candidates will run for the by-elections as independent or from the platform of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC). The PTI-backed independent candidates who emerged victorious in the February 8 elections joined the SIC in a bid to get reserved seats as the party lost its iconic 'bat' electoral symbol as a result of the Supreme Court's verdict on the party's intra-party polls declared by the Election Commission as "unconstitutional".

**PTI-backed candidates to contest April 21 by-polls:**  
NA-119 (Lahore): Shahzad Farooq  
NA-132 (Kasur): Sardar Muhammad Hussain Dogar  
PP-32 (Gujrat): Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi  
PP-149 (Lahore): Hafiz Zeeshan  
PP-158 (Lahore): Moonis Elahi  
PP-164 (Lahore): Yousuf Meo  
PP-139 (Sheikhupura): Aijaz Bhatti  
PP-22 (Chakwal): Hakim Nisar  
PP-54 (Narawal): Owais Qasim  
Earlier this month, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had issued by-polls schedule for 23 assembly seats across the country, where polling could not be held on February 8 or the seat fell vacant after the general election. The by-elections will be held in six constituencies of the National Assembly, 12 provincial assembly constituencies in Punjab, two each in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and one in the Sindh province. - DNA

**China to develop strategic infrastructure in SL**

Sri Lanka in 2022 ran out of foreign exchange to finance essential imports and declared a sovereign default on its \$46 billion foreign debt

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's prime minister said on Wednesday that China has pledged to develop the island nation's strategic deep sea port and the capital's airport after talks with his counterpart in Beijing. Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena said China - the island's biggest bilateral creditor - would "assist" Sri Lanka's restructuring of external debt, a key condition to maintaining a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout. Beijing's position on debt restructuring has not been made public, but Sri Lankan officials have said China was reluctant to take a haircut on its loans but could extend the tenure and adjust interest rates. Sri Lanka in 2022 ran out of foreign exchange to finance essential im-

ports and declared a sovereign default on its \$46 billion foreign debt. Months of protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa out of office. Gunawardena's office said Premier Li Qiang had promised China would "assist Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process continuously and help Sri Lanka to develop its economy". Gunawardena said Beijing had offered "assistance to develop" Colombo International Airport and Hambantota port, the statement added, without giving further details. A Japanese-funded expansion of Colombo airport had been on hold since Sri Lanka's sovereign debt default. The southern sea port of Hambantota was handed to a Chinese state-owned company in 2017 on a 99-year lease for \$1.12 billion, sparking security concerns in Beijing's regional rival India. India and the United States are both concerned that a Chinese foothold at Hambantota, on the island's southern coast, could boost its naval advantage in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka has insisted its ports will not be used for any military purposes, but New Delhi has objected to Chinese research vessels calling at Hambantota fearing that they could be used for espionage. - Agencies

**Two dead, 10 wounded in Russian attacks on Ukraine**

Moscow has escalated its aerial attacks on Ukraine in the past few weeks, targeting key infrastructure including power stations in retaliation for fatal bombardment of Russia's border regions

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Russian attacks on eastern and southern Ukraine killed two people and wounded 10 others, officials said Wednesday, as Kyiv called for Patriot air defense systems to battle a surge in missile strikes. Moscow has escalated its aerial attacks on Ukraine in the past few weeks, targeting key infrastructure including power stations in retaliation for fatal bombardment of Russia's border regions. A 55-year-old man was killed by artillery fire in Ukraine's southeastern city of Nikopol, Dni-propetrovsk region head Sergiy Lysak said. The governor of Ukraine's southern Kherson region, which is partially occupied by Russia, said one woman had been killed in a drone attack on the village of Mykhailivka. Ukrainian forces retook swatches of the Black Sea territory in late 2022 but Russia has been shelling recaptured towns and villages since. "A 61-year-old local resident was fatally wounded in her own home," the official, Oleksandr Prokudin, wrote on social media. The governor of the neighboring Mykolaiv region said later that a Russian ballistic missile had struck the coastal territory, leaving six wounded, with one in a critical condition. Separately, the governor of the eastern Kharkiv region, Oleg Sinegubov, said three men and one woman all over the age of 50 were injured in separate strikes on towns and villages in the region. The mayor of the region's capital, also

called Kharkiv, said that a strike on a residential neighborhood had left "dead and wounded," but did not give details about casualties. The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 13 Iranian-designed attack drones at Ukraine overnight and that 10 were downed over the Kharkiv region, the neighboring Sumy region and near the capital Kyiv. During an online briefing Wednesday, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for urgent deliveries of air defense systems to ward off an increase in ballistic missile strikes. "The peculiarity of the current Russian attacks is the intensive use of ballistic missiles that can reach targets at extremely high speeds, leaving little time for people to take cover and causing significant destruction," Kuleba said. "Patriot and other similar systems are defensive by definition. They are designed to protect lives, not take them," he said. Ukraine has been forced onto the defensive in the past few months as it struggles with ammunition shortages and a hold up to a \$60 billion aid package from Washington. It has also been forced to concede ground to Russia on the eastern front in recent months, warning earlier this week of "difficult" battles around the eastern city of Chasiv Yar. Russia meanwhile announced that its air defense systems had shot down 18 rockets near the border city of Belgorod, which has recently seen an uptick in fatal Ukrainian attacks. The governor of Russia's Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said one person was wounded during the barrage.

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