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PM Shehbaz Sharif visits Naval headquarters

Detailed News On Page-08

Zardari for boosting ties with UK

Detailed News On Page-04

Danielle trounces Caroline to reach semis

Detailed News On Page-06



Spy agencies' interference

Commission to investigate IHC judges allegations

PM Shehbaz assured CJP Isa that no compromise will be made on the judiciary's independence; Chief Justice says no interference win the judiciary shall be tolerated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: After a high-level meeting with Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday decided to constitute a commission to probe into allegations levelled by the Islamabad High Court's (IHC) judges against the country's spy agencies of interfering in judicial matters. According to a SC handout the , Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Faez Isa said that no one shall be allowed to interfere in the judicial matter. Earlier, the premier-CJP huddle comes after six judges of the IHC – Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kiyani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz – wrote to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to convene a judicial convention over the matter of the alleged interference of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, in judicial affairs. "PM Shehbaz assured CJP Isa that no compromise will be made on the judiciary's independence," Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said in a press conference after the key meeting today. Tarar added that the federal government has responsibility to investigate the matter under supervision of an impartial judicial personality, which may be a retired judge with good reputation, under the Commission of Inquiry Act. At the same time he also announced that a decision in principle has been made to constitute a commission, and the "premier will take up the matter during the federal cabinet meeting tomorrow (Friday). "The federal government considered the content of the judges'

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PTI rejects formation of inquiry commission

Reiterates demand to constitute a larger bench to investigate the most serious issue

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Core Committee strongly rejected the formation of inquiry commission by the federal government to probe contents of the startling letter written by Islamabad High Court's (IHC) judges to Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) detailing the intelligence agencies' interference into judicial affairs. PTI Core Committee held its emergency meeting and vehemently rebuffed the investigation of the letter through an inquiry commission. During the meeting, the forum expressed great concern over the meeting of the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) with the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the most sensitive issue related to the country's judiciary and legal interest. PTI Core Committee reiterated its demand to present the issue before a larger bench of the Supreme Court and to process it in the open court. They stated that the letter of the six judges of the IHC was an indictment against the agencies of the federal government.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting on Anti-Power theft campaign. – DNA

Interior Minister excluded from ECL body

Within the PML-N, concerns linger regarding the potential ramifications of the Interior Minister leading the ECL Committee

ANSAR M BHATTI

IN a noteworthy development, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has been removed from the Exit Control List (ECL) Committee, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assuming direct leadership of the committee. This marks a departure from the previous arrangement where the Interior Minister held this position. The ECL Committee holds the pivotal responsibility of determining individuals' inclusion or exclusion from the exit control list, a matter of considerable significance. Reports indicate a clash between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Interior Minister, reflecting a broader discord on various fronts. Initially, the Prime Minister expressed dissatisfaction with Mohsin Naqvi's appointment as the Interior Minister. Notably, the Prime Minister's initial preference for the role was Rana Sanaulah, but influential entities opposed his appointment. Within the PML-N, concerns linger regarding the potential ramifications of the Interior Minister leading the ECL Committee, particularly concerning possible obstacles for

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Turbat incident

Terrorists used US-made weapons against Pakistan

Before the Turbat incident security forces had recovered the same kind of weaponry from militants behind the terrorist attack in Sambaza, Zhob, on January 22

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan has witnessed a significant surge in terrorist attacks in recent months resulting in precious loss of lives owing to the targeting of civilians as well as security forces by the militant groups across the country. However, a worrying development in recent months is the increasing use of foreign weapons, including those leftover by the United States in Afghanistan, by terrorist organisations such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Balochistan Liberation Army and others. Pakistan has time again complained of modern weapons falling into the hands of militants owing to the hasty withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan – a claim vehemently denied by Washington. Nevertheless, details regarding the weapons and equipment confiscated by the

Continued on Page 06

Five May 9 suspects who were granted bail re-arrested

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Five suspects involved in the May 9 violence, who were granted bail recently by the Supreme Court, have been rearrested under 16 MPO (Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1960). The suspects were arrested soon after their release after the 16 MPO was issued by the Rawalpindi deputy commissioner. They were released from Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi last night after the suspects submitted their surety bonds.

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Briefs

PSX hits all time high

The benchmark KSE-100 index closed at 67,142.12 points

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bullish trend Thursday as the KSE-100 index registered a historic high after gaining nearly 600 points amid positive talks with IMF and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. The benchmark KSE-100 index closed at 67,142.12 points after a change of 594.34 points of 0.89%, up from the previous session's close of 66,547 points. The highest index of the day remained at 67,246.02 points, while the lowest level was recorded at 66,690.94 points. Arif Habib Limited, a brokerage house, noted in a post on X that the PSX saw an all time high when it crossed 67,094-mark, which was the previous high on intraday basis.

Nepra okays hike in electricity tariff

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Power consumers will now have to bear an additional burden of Rs2.75 per unit as the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) approved hiking the tariff for the current quarter of the fiscal year 2023-24. The latest hike was approved in terms of quarterly adjustment worth Rs85.2 billion in total for the second quarter of FY2023-24, having a uniform impact Rs2.75 per unit on each consumer. Currently application two quarterly adjustments of Rs4.43 per unit shall cease to exist from March 30, 2024, as per a statement issued by the power regulatory authority on Thursday. It added that the authority has decided to apply the second quarterly adjustment from April 2024 onward i.e. after the expiry of the existing applicable adjustments.

May 9 case

SC allows mily courts to pronounce reserved verdicts

The apex court's orders came after the Attorney General for Pakistan, Mansoor Usman, requested permission to pronounce the reserved verdicts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday authorised military courts to pronounce reserved verdicts of those May 9 violence cases in which the accused could be released before the Eid-ul-Fitr. The apex court's orders came after the Attorney General for Pakistan, Mansoor Usman Awan, requested permission to pronounce the reserved verdicts during the hearing of the intra-court appeals filed against its decision declaring the military trial of civilians "null and void". Towards the end of the hearing today, the court said that the AGP has assured that statutory concessions would be granted to those with lesser sentences, while permission to pronounce judgment shall be subject to a final decision on appeals.

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ECP likely to 'postpone' Senate polls in KP

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: In a seven-page verdict issued today, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has signalled to postpone Senate election – which is scheduled to be held on April 2 – in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amid ongoing issue regarding oath-taking of the lawmakers on reserved seats in the province. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) on Thursday issued the seven-page verdict on application regarding issuance of

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Gandapur, Naqvi discuss law and order situation in the KP

The high-profile meeting focused on discussing the security dynamics of the province and the recent surge in terrorist activities

ADIL SHAHEEN / DNA



ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi Thursday met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar. The high-profile meeting focused on discussing the security dynamics of the province and the recent surge in terrorist activities. Both leaders expressed their unwavering commitment to eradicate terrorism from the region, emphasizing the need for intensified intelligence-based operations. The talks also addressed the tragic loss of Chinese citizens in a recent suicide attack, with both Naqvi and Gandapur conveying their deepest condolences and assuring full support to the Chinese government and the bereaved families. They vowed to bring the perpetrators and facilitators of the attack to justice, reinforcing that such acts of violence would not weaken Pakistan's resolve against terrorism. Interior Minister Naqvi issued directives for enhanced coordination among security agencies to effectively counter terrorist threats,

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IG Punjab stresses security for economic stability

Attack on Chinese installations and CPEC projects in Pakistan is an attack on Pakistan's economy and freedom, IG Punjab

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has issued an important audio message to the police force. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar said that the attack on Chinese investment and CPEC projects in Pakistan is an attack on the economy and freedom of Pakistan. Target hardening is necessary because the security of Pakistan is linked for the betterment of the economy of the country. IG Punjab said that we have not only stopped terrorist attacks but also defeated terrorists. The attack on civilians is to be foiled together with the people of Pakistan, whether you are on patrol or guarding sensitive installations, on security duty of foreigners, CPEC projects, on duty in government buildings, police sta-

tions, you not only have to protect yourself but also prevent the attack, IG Punjab said, "I assure you that we will continue to work together. God willing, we will defeat all these attacks."

Earlier on, IG PUNJAB held a meeting with police employees, issued orders for relief after listening to the requests submitted by them and their families.

Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar met the police employees and their families at the Central Police Office. He after listening to the requests submitted by the police employees and their families issued orders for the relief. IG Punjab sent the application of Constable Amjad Hussain's son for recruitment on family claim to AIG Admin for the necessary action. He directed to take action according to

merit on the application of Lahore Police Inspector Ghulam Ibn Ali's son for recruitment for the post of junior clerk. He directed DIG Welfare to provide relief on the request of retired Assistant Muhammad Ali for financial assistance for his wife's cancer treatment.

He also directed AIG Development to process the request of data entry operator Rabia Ali for obtaining official residence, ordered DIG Welfare to provide relief on requests for assistance in medical expenses of Head Constable Ali Akbar and Constable Amanat Ali. He asked AIG Admin to take action on request for recruitment of children of Constable Zafar Iqbal and Saifullah on family claim. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar said that all officers should provide relief on the requests and send reports to the Central Police Office.



ISLAMABAD: President ICCI Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari hosted an iftar dinner for the business community. A large number of people attended the event. - DNA

Commissioner offers jobs to rehabilitated drug users

DNA

MULTAN: The Commissioner has taken action to provide job training and employment opportunities for local drug users as they progress through rehabilitation and achieve recovery from addiction.

While paying a visit to the center here Thursday, Maryyam Khan directed to the administration prepare a list of the addicted people keeping in view their interest and ability in a particular field to accommodate them in the future after rehabilitation. She said the addicts face social discrimination and the new program would enable them to survive independently to make ends meet. She held an awareness walk and planted saplings on the occasion along with the drug users and official staff. She talked with the addicted people and inquired about the problems they were facing. She said a comprehensive plan was being prepared with the help of the Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), social welfare institutions and philanthropists for making addicted persons productive for society after restoring their senses. "We have to save our society from the curse of the abuse now and in the future," she remarked.

Leopard poachers penalized for illegal hunting

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Forest Department in Nowshera took action on Thursday against poachers who had hunted down a leopard in the Shah Kot area. The incident, captured in a video shared online by the poachers, once again highlighted the challenges faced by authorities in safeguarding rare wildlife, a private news channel reported. In response, the department imposed a hefty fine of Rs250,000 on the poachers for their illegal act. This incident adds to a series of similar occurrences, underscoring the ongoing struggle to protect leopards in the region.

Empowering women S&P Global Pak investing in women to accelerate progress

S&P Global Pakistan MD Mujeeb Zahur excited about empowering women workforce, breaking barriers, and reshaping narratives

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD :S&P Global Pakistan celebrated March 2024 as 'Women's History Month', aligning with the United Nation's International Women's Day theme for 2024, 'Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress'. In celebration of Women's History Month, S&P Global has undertaken various activities in collaboration with its People Resource Group WINS (Women's Initiative for Networking & Success). These initiatives aim to amplify women's voices, invest in their growth and development, and break down barriers to equality. Mujeeb Zahur, Managing Director, S&P Global Pakistan, shared, "I am excited

about our continued focus towards empowering the women workforce that help them break barriers and reshape narratives. As a part of Women's History Month, our Women's Recruitment Drive is one such initiative that identifies and nurtures female talent for upcoming positions at S&P Global Pakistan. We believe in providing equal opportunities and ensuring a diverse workforce that reflects our values and culture." To inspire and empower its workforce, S&P Global Pakistan has curated inspirational sessions led by accomplished women leaders through its People Resource Group WINS. These sessions provide personal insights into the challenges and successes faced by women in the workplace, serving

as a learning platform for aspiring women entering the job market. Additionally, S&P Global organized a workshop titled 'Resume Building and Networking' to equip women with the skills needed to craft the perfect resume and leverage various networking platforms for professional growth. Samia Qamar, Director People at S&P Global Pakistan, highlighting the company's focus on women empowerment said, "Our aim is to provide a platform for women to share their views and opinions without any judgement and encouraging them to claim their space, and forging pathways to success in a world where opportunities are abundant but not always equally distributed."

Pediatric ICU inaugurated at Hayatabad Medical Complex

DNA

PESHAWAR : In a bid to enhance healthcare services for children, the hospital administration at Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) has unveiled state-of-the-art units for children wards and Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU). The initiative aims to provide optimal treatment facilities for young patients. Moreover, a dedicated team of doctors has been appointed to oversee the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), ensuring specialized care for children in critical conditions. The inauguration ceremony of the PICU was presided over by Ghulam Qadir, Chairman of the Hospital Board of Governors, alongside Hospital Director Dr. Shahzad Faisal, Medical Director Dr. Shahzad Akbar, administrative personnel, and PICU Incharge Dr. Saeed Jamal Shah. Faculty members from various pediatric departments also graced the occasion, highlighting the collaborative effort towards pediatric care.

The PICU features 12 beds, supported by three training medical officers, six nurses, and four respiratory trainers. Additionally, the unit is equipped with two ventilators, two CPAP machines, and an isolation room, ensuring comprehensive care for young patients with critical illnesses. Following the inauguration, all attendees toured the PICU, inspecting the medical facilities and infrastructure dedicated to pediatric care. The hospital administration, along with the Board Chairman, expressed satisfaction with the quality of treatment and care provided to children in the PICU. They pledged continued efforts to ensure the availability of advanced facilities for pediatric patients in the PICU, reaffirming their commitment to improving healthcare services for the community.

Dera police arrest 61 drug peddlers

DERA ISMAIL KHAN : Dera police intensified the crackdown against narcotics, arrested 61 drug peddlers, and recovered 10 kg of ice, 7 kg of hashish, and other drugs during the last week in the limits of various police stations of DIKhan District. While giving the briefing on the operations, SP City Muhammad Ishaq said that on the direction of the District Police Officer Dera Nasir Mehmood Dera police con-

ducted successful operations against the narcotics in the different localities of the city. He said that during the last week, police arrested at least 61 drug peddlers in the various operations against the narcotics. He said that police recovered narcotics worth millions of rupees.

SP City further said that during the campaign, about 10 kg of ice, about 7 kg of hashish, and other drugs were recovered from the possession of the

arrested drug dealers. The police registered 59 cases in the different police stations and started further investigations, he added. "Special teams have been constituted who will conduct regular operations against all those involved in the drug business," he said. He further informed that District Police will continue its operations against drugs and other crimes in the coming weeks and months in all parts of the District.--APP

FIA conducts raids against fake medicine sellers

The accused were involved in buying and selling fake medicines, he added. Fake medicines were seized and handed over to Drug Authorities and the accused was arrested and investigation started

PESHAWAR :As many as 11 raids were conducted against elements involved in fake medicines and electricity theft here on Thursday. According to details, 6 cases were registered against the accused involved in electricity theft and 3 accused were arrested. The accused were stealing electricity from their homes, offices and shops by hooking the main power line, the spokesman said. Raiding operations were carried out in various areas of Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Lakki Marwat with PESCO officials disconnected the illegal connections on the spot. Cable and other equipment used for illegal electricity supply were also seized, FIA spokesman said. A total of four inquiries and one case have been registered against the accused involved in the sale of fake medicines, FIA spokesman said. The accused were involved in buying and selling fake medicines, he added. Fake medicines were seized and handed over to Drug Authorities and the accused was arrested and investigation started.--APP

DC ensures drainage cleaning during rainy spells

DERA ISMAIL KHAN, Mar 28 (APP):Deputy Commissioner Mansoor Arshad on Thursday directed the departments concerned to ensure the cleanliness of sanitation and drainage of the city, especially keeping in view the prevailing rainy spells. He stated this during a meeting held here at his office with Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSC) supervisors and other representatives. The deputy commissioner said that all the available resources should be utilized to ensure drainage and sanitation besides taking quick steps to avoid any issue.

He directed that taking into consideration the monsoon rains, immediate steps should be taken to ensure drainage while the de-silting process should also be improved so that long-lasting results could be achieved. Similarly, the deputy commissioner also urged the masses to ensure full cooperation with the sanitation staff and avoid putting filth, especially polythene (plastic) bags in the drains as it causes drainage problems. He advised that the garbage should be dumped at designated places by WSSC, adding, that it would help in the sanita-

tion process besides preventing littering in the streets. On this occasion, the deputy commissioner expressed his annoyance over the cleanliness and drainage of the city and instructed the WSSC supervisors to be active at the union council level. He said the machinery used for de-silting and other purposes, which were not functional due to technical issues, have also been activated. He said no compromise over the cleanliness of the city would be tolerated and strict action would be taken against the officials involved in any negligence.--DNA

PRCS provides clean water to flood victims

These water treatment plants benefited approximately 42,000 people daily for over three months


SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR :Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) helped around 314,167 number of flood affectees surrounded by stagnant water for months in flood hit areas to access clean drinking water with the collaboration of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). These flood survivors were compelled to consume contaminated floodwater which led to a rise in various water-borne diseases in flood hit areas. In the 19-month flood response and recovery operations, PRCS with the support of IFRC focused on the implementation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services in the flood-affected districts across Pakistan, highlighted a documentary shared on social media. Realizing the high

vulnerability of the flood-affected people to water-borne diseases, the organizations concentrated its focus on the provision of safe drinking water in the flood-hit areas and deployed 13 water treatment plants across seven locations in Sindh, four in Baluchistan and two in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. These water treatment plants benefited approximately 42,000 people daily for over three months in these provinces by providing over 28 million liters of potable water. Apart from that, around 98 hand pumps were also constructed and rehabilitated in the flood-damaged districts, benefiting over 35,000 people. Five solar water filtration plants were also constructed in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces benefiting 12,600 individuals. A further 4,000 household water filters have been distributed in

Larkana, QambarShahdaddot, Shikarpur, Jacobabad, and Dadu districts of Sindh, to ensure the availability of safe drinking water at the household level. "The 2022 floods wreaked devastating damage in our area, inflicting huge losses on the local communities," observed Mumtaz Ali Magasi from Qubo Saeed Khan village, QambarShahdaddot district, Sindh. Mumtaz said that the villagers were faced with a very serious problem of the lack of clean drinking water in the post-flood scenario. The support extended by PRCS/IFRC through the installation of a solar filtration plant in his village has benefitted a large number of people in obtaining clean and healthy water, he added. The people of Qubo Saeed Khan and its adjacent villages are thankful from the core of their hearts to PRCS and IFRC for re-






solving a very genuine problem, Ali remarked. It merits an insertion here that PRCS in collaboration with IFRC has also provided support to 1,500 households to construct permanent household latrines. So far, over 400 permanent household latrines have been constructed, contributing towards minimizing the risk of sanitation-related diseases. Special focus was also given on the capacity building of communities, and for this purpose, hygiene promotion trainings have been conducted, through which 145 PRCS staff and volunteers were trained in Larkana, Shikarpur, QambarShahdaddot, Dadu, and Khairpur districts in Sindh. These trained PRCS staff and volunteers have conducted 1,200 hygiene promotion sessions in 25 targeted communities, reaching almost 40,000 people in the flood-affected areas.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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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

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Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Minister takes up visa issues with the Russian ambassador

Russian Ambassador congratulates Jam Kamal on assuming charge, discusses trade

ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Albert Khorev on Thursday engaged in discussions with Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, aiming to enhance trade connectivity and tap into the true potential of bilateral trade. Federal Minister Jam Kamal emphasized the need for exploring new routes and avenues to bolster trade relations, said a press release issued here. The minister commended the successful initiation of "Kino exports" to Russia by road and expressed the possibility of further increasing trade in this sector. Additionally, he acknowledged Russia's vast market potential, offering Pakistani exporters ample opportunities for growth and diversification. During the meeting, Ambassador Khorev extended an invitation to federal minister Jam Kamal for upcoming exhibitions scheduled in April and July. In a bid to expand trade horizons, the Ambassador proposed the export of "Halal meat" from Pakistan to Russia.

Minister Jam Kamal highlighted concerns regarding visa issues faced by Pakistani truck drivers,



prompting the Ambassador to seek immediate proposals for resolution. The Ambassador of Russia also conveyed the desire of the Russian side to host the 9th session of the Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) in Moscow at an early date.—Agencies

S&P Global Pakistan investing in women to accelerate progress

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: S&P Global Pakistan celebrated March 2024 as 'Women's History Month', aligning with the United Nation's International Women's Day theme for 2024, 'Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress'. In celebration of Women's History Month, S&P Global has undertaken various activities in collaboration with its People Resource Group WINS (Women's Initiative for Networking & Success). These initiatives aim to amplify women's voices,

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tunities and ensuring a diverse workforce that reflects our values and culture." To inspire and empower its workforce, S&P Global Pakistan has curated inspirational sessions led by accomplished women leaders through its People Resource Group WINS. These sessions provide personal insights into the challenges and successes faced by women in the workplace, serving as a learning platform for aspiring women entering the job market. Additionally, S&P Global organized a workshop titled 'Resume

Building and Networking' to equip women with the skills needed to craft the perfect resume and leverage various networking platforms for professional growth. Samia Qamar, Director People at S&P Global Pakistan, highlighting the company's focus on women empowerment said, "Our aim is to provide a platform for women to share their views and opinions without any judgement and encouraging them to claim their space, and forging pathways to success in a world where opportunities are abundant but not always equally distributed."

ICT administration cracks down on social evils

ISLAMABAD: All magistrates have launched rigorous campaign targeting inflation, illegal occupation and panhandling across the Federal Capital's bustling markets and arrested 29 accused during the inspections of 648 areas while imposing a fine of Rs 84,000 to violators. Talking to APP here Thursday, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said this proactive approach aimed at to ensure fair pricing, maintain public spaces, and curb the nuisance of professional beggars during the holy month of Ramadan and beyond. During the inspections of all three Ramadan bazaars, which were set up by the district administration, magistrates accompanied by the district administration teams, apprehended thirteen individuals for flouting price regulations, while a fine of Rs 84,000 was also imposed to the violators. Similarly, district administration teams intensified efforts against alms-seeking and arrested 14 professional beggars from different areas of the city and handed over to different police stations, he said. Furthermore, anti-encroachment operation were also conducted in the Federal Capital and cleared illegal encroachments from different paths, roads and markets, he added. Additionally, stringent measures were taken to regulate petrol stations, leading to the closure of two illegal filling agencies and the arrest of two individuals involved in malpractice. The spokesman emphasized the paramount importance of ensuring the consistent availability of essential commodities at government-mandated rates. This multi-faceted operation underscored a sustained commitment to upholding public welfare and civic order, with aily efforts underway to tackle inflation, illegal occupation, and begging across Islamabad's bustling landscape, he added.—DNA

CCP to sign MoU China's market regulatory

ISLAMABAD: China has made significant investments in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and various Chinese companies operating in the country. This investment is expected to increase manifold after the second stage of CPEC. To facilitate these expanding business activities, the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) is preparing to put in place a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework, said a press release issued here on Thursday. The CCP is poised to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR), marking a significant milestone in bilateral cooperation. The MoU, which has received the final approval from the last Federal Cabinet, aims to enhance information sharing and technical capacity between the two countries. SAMR is a ministerial-level agency under China's State Council responsible for enforcing anti-monopoly laws and regulating markets. The signing of the MoU is expected to usher in a new era of collaboration between China and Pakistan in the field of anti-trust. On October 19, 2023, a high-profile Chinese delegation led by Dr. Gan Lin, Vice Minister of SAMR visited the CCP. Discussions between CCP Chairman Dr. Kabir Ahmed Sidhu and Vice Minister Gan Lin highlighted the strategic importance of a partnership focusing on enhancing market regulations, providing training and capacity building, sharing expertise in cartel detection, and collaborating on research projects to improve regulatory efficiency. The MoU will solidify the partnership between CCP and SAMR by establishing a framework for enhanced cooperation through bilateral meetings, training programs, workshops, research collaborations, experience sharing, exchange of information, and cooperation in the field of competition law and policy.—APP

32 drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders netted

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other lawbreakers here on Thursday arrested 32 accused besides recovering drugs, liquor, kites, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Taxila police netted two thieves namely Waris and Bahadar Ali and recovered cash Rs 12,000, stolen AC and other items. Tax-

ila police in their police managed to net four gamblers namely Mazhar, Muhammad Abbas, Qamar Shehzad and Arshad and recovered Rs 23,660, six mobile phones and other items from their possession. Sadiqabad police netted two proclaimed offenders identified as Robin and Mohsin Raza wanted in two different cases. Kalar Syedan and Naseerabad police arrested four, namely Nisar, Habib, Sajid and Ilyas for operating illegal LPG

and petrol agencies. The spokesman further informed that Rattaamral, Westridge, Naseerabad, R.A.Bazar and Saddar Wah police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and arrested six kite flying ban violators. Police also recovered 240 kites and kite flying string rolls from their possession. New Town, City, Rattaamral, Sadiqabad, Chakri, and Kahuta police rounded up nine accused and recovered over 4.5 kg char-

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Digital transformation can lead country towards progress

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, and GSMA country lead for Digital Transformation, Saira Faisal on Thursday discussed matters pertinent to digital transformation, innovation, and the startup ecosystem. During the meeting, Saira Faisal extended congratulations to Minister of State Shaza Fatima for assuming charge of the Ministry, said a news release. Saira Faisal provided an overview of GSMA's operations, upcoming programs, and their coordination with the Ministry of IT to Minister Shaza Fatima. Shaza Fatima highlighted the ongoing digitalization efforts in Pakistan, and said that digital transformation is crucial for the country's progress. Meanwhile, Umair Nizam, Group Vice President of E-commerce Gateway Pakistan (Pvt) Ltd, also met with Minister Shaza Fatima. Nizam briefed her about the forthcoming tech event, the 24th ITCN Asia 2024, during the meeting.

NHA mobilizes efforts to clear landslide in Zhub-Dhanasar section

ISLAMABAD: The spokesperson for the National Highway Authority (NHA) announced on Thursday that the Zhub-Dhanasar section of Dera Ismail Khan-Quetta Highway (N-50) was currently blocked for all traffic which was affected after landslides at Dhanasar. According to a private news channel, the spokesperson stated that NHA teams have been deployed to the site to clear the road and repair the damaged section. However, it was estimated to take approximately 72 hours to make the road accessible for all traffic. Given the situation, the district administrations of Killa Saifullah, Zhub, and Sherani have been urged to divert traffic to an alternate route via Killa Saifullah - Loralai - DG Khan N-70. Additionally, the district administration of DI has been requested to redirect traffic towards DG Khan and avoid sending vehicles towards DI Khan - Mughal Kot section of N-50.—APP

CWAs to boost overseas employment opportunities

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) has given the task to the Community Welfare Attaches (CWAs) stationed abroad to strategically enhance job opportunities for Pakistanis in the international market. An official source told APP here on Thursday that currently, there were 21 CWAs posted abroad by the Government of Pakistan. The main aim of this task was to evaluate and improve the progress of CWAs in identifying and exploring targeted demand for employment prospects for Pakistani nationals through engagements with foreign employers. This involved the formulation, signing, and execution of Letters of Intent (LOIs) and agreements with foreign companies, critical in amplifying the export of Pakistani manpower. It has emphasized the crucial need for close collaboration between CWAs and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, particularly in sharing information related to employment demands abroad and the necessary skills required for those jobs. This step will facilitate the design of training programs specifically tailored to the skills demanded by foreign companies, ensuring that Pakistani workers are well-equipped and aligned with global standards. While underscoring the significance of this initiative, highlighted its dual impact, not only in enhancing employment opportunities for Pakistanis abroad but also in contributing to the economic growth of the nation. Furthermore, he stressed the essential role of CWAs in catering to the needs and resolving issues faced by overseas Pakistanis during their stay abroad. This comprehensive approach is designed to ensure the well-being and seamless integration of Pakistani expatriates in their respective host countries. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development reiterates its commitment to spearheading initiatives that fortify global employment prospects for Pakistanis. This strategic meeting signifies a significant stride towards realizing this vision and underscores the Ministry's dedication to the welfare and prosperity of overseas Pakistanis.—DNA

Briefs

Govt. taking every possible step to increase IT exports, FDI

He commended Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima, for her dedicated efforts in promoting the IT industry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Thursday said that the present government was diligently pursuing measures to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and boost IT exports. During a discussion with a high-level delegation from the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), led by its Chairman, Muhammad Zohaib Khan, Shaza Fatima highlighted the critical role of the IT industry, particularly in providing international-level training to youth and creating employment opportunities for them. The Chairman P@SHA extended congratulations to Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima Khawaja for assuming the office. The minister said that Pakistan's IT professionals can serve as the premier choice for international companies and urged P@SHA to assist in bridging the demand-supply gap of IT professionals. Zohaib Khan reaffirmed P@SHA's commitment to collaborating with the Ministry of IT for the economic stability of the country. He commended Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima, for her dedicated efforts in promoting the IT industry.

Development of SMEs govt's top priority

Women's workforce can be better utilized in the economic development of the country, he added

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Industry and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain reaffirmed on Thursday that the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the government's top priority. While presiding over a high-level meeting, the minister received a detailed briefing about SMEDA's working from its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), said a news release. The minister said that small and medium industries were playing an important role in the country's economic development. The government will facilitate SMEs to achieve economic development. SMEDA should focus on human resource development to work effectively, he added. Rana Tanveer said that women play an important role in the economic development of the country and urged SMEDA to focus on women's entrepreneurship. Women's workforce can be better utilized in the economic development of the country, he added.—APP

President for further boosting bilateral cooperation with UK

Jane Marriott felicitated President Asif Ali Zardari on assuming the office of the President of Pakistan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK) enjoy cordial relations, rooted in history and shared legacy, which have been reinforced by high-level interactions and people-to-people contacts over the years. He stressed the need to further strengthen trade and economic ties for the mutual benefit of the two friendly countries. The president expressed these views while talking to the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Both sides exchanged views on matters of bilateral importance. During the meeting, the president expressed his warm sentiments for His Majesty King Charles III and the Princess of Wales, Catherine Middleton and wished them good health. He also mentioned that the people of Pakistan held His Majesty the King in high esteem. Talking about the economic situation of the country, the president stated that the stabilization of the economy was the priority with a key focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation. The president highlighted that climate change posed a serious challenge to Pakistan as it was among the most vulnerable countries to climate change. He informed the High Commissioner that Sindh had mangrove forests, covering an area of 600,000 hectares, which supported the coastal ecosystem, besides contributing to environmental sustainability. He said that Pakistan had huge potential for solar and wind energy and their proper utilization could



help the country meet its energy requirements. Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari has called for focusing on the development of the Gems and Jewellery sector of the country, saying that exporting value-added products can help Pakistan earn valuable foreign exchange. He also urged the need for better marketing and projection of gemstone products from Pakistan to tap into the global gem and jewellery market.

The President expressed these views during a meeting regarding the development of the Gems and Jewellery sector in Pakistan, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Pakistan Gems and Jewellery Development Company (PGJDC), Mr Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhry, and senior government officials attended the meeting. CEO of PGJDC apprised the meeting about the strategic plan for the development

of the Gems and Jewellery sector, besides highlighting various challenges and opportunities in this regard. Speaking on the occasion, the President said that Pakistan's gems and jewellery sector had huge potential which needed to be fully exploited for the country's development. He underlined the need to encourage foreign companies to invest in this sector which would not only help improve the country's economy but would also

open up opportunities for the local population through employment generation. The President urged the need to focus on the training and skill enhancement of the local workforce, besides promoting diversification and industrialization of the gems and jewellery sector to increase its contribution to the country's economy. Jane Marriott felicitated President Asif Ali Zardari on assuming the office of the President of Pakistan.

Costly electricity most significant barrier to exports

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, said on Thursday that the high cost of electricity is the primary barrier to exporting goods. He said that the per capita use of electricity has been steadily declining for the past five years, and the capacity charges will grow if the demand is not increased. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that the power sector deficit should not be addressed by frequent tariff hikes but through the imposition

of taxes on the elite. The continuous increase in the cost of electricity, he said, is severely affecting the people and production sector. A substantial increase in production and exports is impossible without making electricity cheaper. He said that the current price of electricity is the biggest obstacle to exports and project-based development.

According to an estimate, a ten percent increase in the price of electricity reduces its use by three percent, he informed. Due to the high cost of electricity, many industries and people have started using other sources, including gas and solar power. Therefore, the burden of capacity payments is

increasing for the public. If the demand for electricity does not increase by 15%, the capacity payments will increase by 50 percent. The power sector is losing trillions of rupees, which is why electricity is getting more expensive. However, there is no focus on lowering the electricity price and compensating for the deficit through taxes on the elite. The payments made to private-sector power plants are in dollars. Therefore, the rupee's depreciation increases the volume of payments, indicating a need to link them to the local currency. Rather than investing in highly efficient power plants, costly gas is

currently going to captive power facilities that are only moderately efficient. Reallocating the same gas to efficient power plants can decrease the generation cost. We should incentivize industries to re-join the grid, thereby reducing capacity charges. He said that IPPs should be able to engage in bilateral agreements with private customers to sell any excess capacity to them, further distributing the burden of capacity charges. It is expected that more industries and commercial businesses will go off-grid by setting up private energy-generating capacities, which will drive up capacity prices per unit, he warned

Foreign journalists experience China's new quality productive forces

ISLAMABAD: Foreign journalists experienced China's new quality productive forces in Jiangsu, Global Times. "This initiative plays a crucial role in promoting cultural understanding and exchange. By exposing African journalists to the cultural, historical, and economic diversity of the province of Jiangsu, it fosters intercultural dialogue and strengthens ties between our two regions," Elhassan Ben Yahia, a journalist from the Moroccan Press Agency (MAP) said. Ben Yahia is one of about 33 foreign journalists from 32 countries and regions, including Egypt, Namibia, Tunisia, South Sudan, and Benin, who recently made a journey to East China's Jiangsu Province to explore China's economic advancement and cultural richness. The international media exchange program, "Travelogue of China," was jointly hosted by the China Public Diplomacy Association and huanqiu.com. During the weeklong journey starting from March 19, these foreign journalists visited some of China's high-tech industrial parks, an ecological dredging project, Changtai Yangtze River Bridge and China Communications Construction Co (CCCC) in Wuxi, Taizhou and Changshu. The journalist group firstly visited the Xishan Electric Vehicle Industrial Park to understand and experience the world's top-selling two-wheeler Yadea electric vehicles. The firm's products mainly cover electric bicycles, electric motorcycles, electric mopeds and electric scooters. Besides their headquarters in China, Yadea has a US office, a German operation center and branch in Vietnam. Yadea's business spans more than 100 countries with over 70 million users. The company holds over 1,900 national patents, with its core technology focusing on converting kinetic energy into electricity and utilizing high-end power batteries, greatly improving energy efficiency and extending battery life. "I was impressed by the technological advancements of Yadea Technology Group and their commitment to sustainable mobility solutions. Seeing their diverse range of electric vehicles and learning about their global presence highlighted the significant impact of Chinese innovation in this field, especially when they let us try their products and witness their latest technology in terms of battery charging and security," said Ben Yahia after riding the electric bikes. Another journalist also expressed his admiration for Yadea electric vehicles. "I have observed that Yadea electric vehicles are mainly exported to Europe. I hope that our country, Benin, can also have these, which will greatly improve our lives," said Héribert-Label Elisée Adjovi from Benin. Besides high-tech applications in the transportation field, the visit to Hodo Group also left a deep impression. Established in 1957, the company has played a role in the growth of the clothing, tire, and pharmaceutical industries and is currently ranked as the 80th strongest entity in China's manufacturing sector.—DNA

Rs 64 billion disbursed under Benazir Kafaalat scheme

ISLAMABAD: The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has disbursed over Rs. 64 billion among more than 61,00,000 beneficiaries from across the country under the Benazir Kafaalat scheme. The disbursement of the quarterly tranche (Jan-March) of Rs.10,500 of Benazir Kafaalat scheme is continued across the country smoothly. "Till March 27, at 3:00 pm, over Rs. 64 billion has been disbursed among more than 55,00,000 beneficiaries of Benazir Kafaalat programme which makes 59.6 percent of the total beneficiaries", an official source revealed. The payment process is continued across the country, including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan, simultaneously to disburse the increased payment of Rs. 10,500 per household among over nine million registered beneficiary families. The beneficiaries have been advised to receive their full payment through the agent/representative of their nearest designated bank and contact the toll-free number 080026477 or the nearest Tehsil offices in case of any deduction. Besides Benazir Kafaalat stipend payments, the disbursement of education stipends is also being carried out across the country. In some areas, the special Ramadan grant is also being issued to the beneficiaries, the official source added. The special control room has been activated in the BISP headquarters to address the complaints of the beneficiaries promptly. However, the beneficiaries can also contact them on WhatsApp numbers including 03018472836/03028240958 (Sindh), 0318472831 (South Punjab-I), 03175370095 (South Punjab-II), 03028240972 (Central Punjab), 03028240977 (North Punjab), 03185761507 (Balochistan), 03175370081 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), 03155213394 (Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan). The messages from the Benazir Income Support Program are sent only from 8171, and messages from any other number should not be trusted. The officials of BISP have been directed to ensure the smooth disbursement of Kafaalat payments to the women respectively without any deductions. The staff has been deputed to monitor the process of payment disbursement and take immediate action against the agents responsible for deductions from the beneficiary's payments. The BISP is currently supporting 9.3 million deserving families and acting as a lifeline for those facing economic hardship. The Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCT) program, also known as the "Benazir Kafaalat Programme," is the core initiative of BISP and was launched in 2008. Since its inception, the UCT/Kafaalat initiative has grown to the extent that it is now the largest single cash transfer program in Pakistan's history.—DNA

Punjab Maryam Nawaz orders policy formulation

An advanced mechanism must be created to increase the export of dairy products, she ordered

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz ordered policy formulation to export buffalo meat and milk to China. China imports US \$17 billion worth of meat and US \$2 billion worth of milk annually, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. In a meeting on the Livestock Department, the CM reviewed the livestock related measures. The CM stressed that only vaccinated and tagged cattle would be brought to cattle markets and slaugh-

terhouses, adding that authentic data of cattle should be prepared and regularly updated. She directed the authorities concerned to pay special attention to research and development. Maryam Nawaz was briefed on the export potential of livestock sector. She said more work was needed for disease control and breed improvement. She ordered to create disease control department in Punjab. She said the foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) control programme should be made more effective, adding that

vaccination for the disease should be produced locally in large quantities. An advanced mechanism must be created to increase the export of dairy products, she ordered. The authorities concerned appraised the CM that up-gradation of vaccine production labs would cost Pakistani Rs 360 million, and up-gradation of zoonosis centre would cost Rs 299 million. It was also briefed that the breed improvement could increase yield by up to 15-25 percent. Earlier, the Chief Minister was apprised that livestock ac-

counts for 14.36 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Punjab produces country's 62 percent milk, 43 percent meat, 33 percent mutton, and 65 percent poultry meat. The CM was also briefed that China imports US \$17 billion worth of meat and US \$2 billion worth of milk. The CM ordered to present a report on volume of poultry trade with Gulf countries and China. The CM agreed to a proposal to provide motorbikes for veterinary doctors, and vans for mobile dispensaries.

Ramadan festivities "Maah-e-Isar O Aman" starts at Lok Virsa

ISLAMABAD: Ramadan festivities titled "Maah-e-Isar O Aman" featuring Tilawat and Naat competition started here on Thursday at the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage -Lok Virsa. Lok Virsa has planned an array of activities to make this Ramadan truly special and will continue till Eid. According to Lok Virsa, Ramadan festivities will daily start from 5 PM onwards featuring Tilawat and Naat competitions spiritual reflections to devotional performances. The festivities will also feature cultural food stalls daily from 5 PM onwards, Tilawat and Naat Competition before iftar, and development performance after iftar from 6:45 PM. We do have an amazing Islamic calligraphy exhibition lined up for all art lovers as well." Executive Director Lok Virsa Uzair Khan told APP. He said that Lok Virsa is delighted to announce an enriching event that celebrates the beauty of Ramadan -the Naat and Tilawat Competition.—APP

Police bust dacoit gang; arrest three accused

RAWALPINDI: Police have busted a dacoit gang by arresting three of its active members allegedly involved in dacoities and other crimes and seized a snatched Mehran car, six stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Morgah police managed to bust a dacoit gang and arrested three members of 'Shaka' gang namely Bilal, Zohaib and Zahid. He informed that police recovered a stolen car, six motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. The spokesman said that the arrested accused were being shifted to jail for identification parade, adding, police were trying to arrest other members of the gangs. Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nisar Nawaz directed police teams to accelerate operations against gangs and other lawbreakers, he added.

SNGPL intensifies efforts against gas theft

ISLAMABAD: Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has ramped up its operation against gas theft, disconnecting 36 connections that were diverting gas illegally to other consumers. The task force has also seized a substantial number of compressors from the region. According to Shahid Akram, the spokesperson of SNGPL, the operation also resulted in the confiscation of 42 meters that had been unlawfully relocated to different locations. Legal action has been initiated against the individuals found to be involved in the crime. Akram reiterated that the operation will persist until all illegal connections in the region are severed. He said, the efforts of SNGPL underscore its commitment to curbing gas theft and ensuring fair distribution of resources among consumers.—APP

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

Question of extremism

THE British government has been grappling with the question of extremism for years now. It has failed even to define extremism in any clear fashion, and has been struggling to fight back against an avalanche of criticism that its counter-extremism policies are Islamophobic. The genocide in Gaza has focused minds in the British elite, because of the massive sympathy for the Palestinians visible on the streets. The desperate attempts to cast pro-Palestine protestors as genocidal is a desperate attempt to split the movement. The government is trying to reframe "extremism" in such a way that more radical supporters of Palestinian liberation are demonised, criminalised and disavowed by the rest of the movement. The minister leading this is the toxic Michael Gove, the most pro-Zionist minister in the government. He has a history of involvement with Zionist lobby groups, and for example, was the first chairman of the Neoconservative and Islamophobic think tank Policy Exchange. It's no coincidence that the new policy he is introducing was dreamt up by Policy Exchange in a paper published in 2022. It recommended: Firstly, a consolidated Centre for the Study of Extremism within government, dedicated to the research and diagnosis of Islamist and other forms of extremism. Secondly, a separate communications unit dedicated to publicly combatting disinformation about the Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies. Thirdly, a due diligence unit, which develops and monitors criteria for engagement with community organisations. All of its main proposals were adopted by Lord William Shawcross in his review of Prevent, published in 2023. Shawcross is famously Islamophobic and his review was even denounced by Amnesty. He was appointed as a senior Fellow at the Policy Exchange in 2018, prior to being appointed to the Prevent Review in 2021. The division appears to be between those pushing for a Likudnik scorched earth approach and those who favour a "sophisticated engagement" strategy - as it was described by the Zionist think tank Reut and their collaborators at the US Zionist spy agency, the Anti-Defamation League in a report in 2016. Back in 2010, the Reut Institute urged Israel's "intelligence establishment" to "drive [a] wedge between soft and hard critics" abroad. The former should be subject to "sophisticated engagement strategies" while the latter should be subject to "sabotage" and "attack", it said. This is not just a political and strategic difference, but a question of defending the millions in state and Zionist funding ploughed into the maintenance of hundreds of jobs in sophisticated engagements, such as the interfaith industry. Shawcross's recommendations were all accepted by the government, and thus the new policy has effectively been written by a leading Islamophobic think tank. Underlying all this, the danger is that the definition best fits genocidal Zionist groups and their supporters within government, most notably Michael Gove himself. The penetration and capture of key elements of security policy by the Zionists is nothing if it is not, as the new so-called definition puts it, an attempt to "undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights" in the service of attempting to "negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others", most obviously Muslims and Palestinians and their supporters.



Crocus concert hall atrocity

WHY is it that the EU and the US are so adamant about who is behind the Crocus Concert Hall atrocity, that they will not wait out the investigation? Within 55 minutes of the attack, the US spokesperson said 'Ukraine wasn't involved'. Now the US is saying - definitively - that only ISIS was involved. "No concrete advance warning - nothing was transferred to us", Russia's Washington Ambassador insists. Why are Western states so certain? It is most unusual for Intelligence services to pronounce within the hour. Though the actual perpetrators are now known, the key question remains: Who stands behind the attack? Things are not always as they seem. At the moment, there is insufficient evidence to say - let alone with absolute certainty - that the attack committed in Moscow was planned, prepared and executed to some Islamic State master-plan. ISIS-K has been operating for some years, more as a 'rat-run' extending from Turkey to Syria; to Afghanistan and Iran. It is a franchise on behalf of which terrorist acts are committed, funds raised, and resources prepared. ISIS-K, which originated amongst Tajik dissidents in northern Afghanistan, unites certain groups and conducts active operations largely against the Taliban movement. It provides an umbrella for terrorist actions too in northern Iran. It has had no particular interest in Russia. Behind ISIS have stood certain Muslim States - and their Western backers. The details of the arrested perpetrators and their mode of operation however, does not comport with the notion of their being ideological supporters of ISIS. They may have ostensibly been broadly Islamist, but were in reality mercenaries motivated by the lure of money. ISIS recruits expect and get martyrdom. These men simply jumped in a car, wanting to escape. In an ISIS operation, they would have continued the massacre - until shot dead. There are many other inconsistencies to the ISIS claim. The assailants may have been pious Islamists, but likely not ISIS. Even their oath with the left hand raised was wrong. The Amaq statement too, is problematic in several respects. In the past Amaq has claimed attacks in Iran, with subsequent Amaq communiques having to be 'corrected'. Livestream coverage of an attack is unheard of. Ultimately, the EU's ruling elites seek to 'trans-nationalise' power upwards from member states to Brussels. Here lies the seeds of the present putative panic: When it became evident that Ukraine's conventional military efforts were a flop, a number of hawks in the US and Europe quickly swung to singing the praises of asymmetric warfare - on Russia and its civilian population, itself. This asymmetry began slowly: a few random drone attacks that did little damage. This then accelerated to missiles fired into the centres of Belgorod killing civilians; then it became an attack on a Russian transport Ilyushin plane transporting prisoners; and then moved to drone attacks on Russian refineries and naval drone war on Crimea. The process accelerated. And on the eve of last week's Russian elections, there was the attempt by purported dissidents to disrupt the elections by invading Russia in order to seize small towns and Russian civilians to hold as hostages.

"Six judges' allegations: Yet challenges in substantiation.."

Qamar Bashir



Therefore, handling allegations of interference and intimidation by spying agencies in the absence of concrete evidence presents a significant challenge for the Supreme Judicial Council. However, despite the difficulty in proving such allegations, the Council may still take appropriate steps to address the situation and uphold the integrity of the judiciary. They do so by employing various techniques and methods. Evidently, in the absence of direct evidence, the Council will have to rely on witness testimonies and corroboration from multiple sources to substantiate...

IN a remarkable development, six judges of the Islamabad High Court have penned a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council underscoring deeply troubling allegations of blatant, aggressive, and intimidating interference by the executive branch in both lower and higher judiciary affairs. The accusations range from manipulating bench formations to exerting undue pressure on judges to sway decisions in critical cases. Moreover, there are claims of defiance against judicial directives, orders, and judgments, often enforced through coercive measures such as the use of brute force or intimidation tactics like throwing crackers at residences, abducting close relatives, and covert surveillance. Such allegations, if substantiated, raise profound questions about the sanctity of judicial independence and the rule of law. The noteworthy aspect of this situation is the decision to make the letter public. With decades of experience in government circles, it's clear that officials, including judges, are obligated to maintain confidentiality in their official correspondence. Various regulations, such as the Efficiency and Discipline Rules for government servants and the Judicial Code of Conduct, emphasize the importance of confidentiality, especially in legal proceedings. The relevant Article V of the Judicial Code of Conduct stresses that judges should avoid engaging in public controversies, particularly political ones, to uphold the integrity of their position. Typically, matters concerning the Supreme Court are communicated to the public through its public relations department, often pertaining to administrative issues or clarifications on court actions. However, in this instance, the letter addressed to the Supreme Judicial Council on March 25, 2024, was made public the following day, March 26, 2024. This move likely aimed to achieve several objectives. By revealing allegations of interference by intelligence agencies, the judges aimed to highlight potential threats to judicial integrity. They likely hoped that public scrutiny would compel authorities to address the issue promptly and reinforce the importance of judicial independence. However, making internal correspondence public carries risks, including undermining confidentiality and inviting political or legal repercussions. Depending on how the allegations are perceived, it could also affect public confidence. While transparency is essential for accountability, it must be balanced with protecting the judicial process's integrity and minimizing potential fallout. Whether the letter was leaked without the consent of the Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Commission, or the six judges who wrote it, remains unclear. However, the gravity of the allegations made by these judges cannot be overstated. Accusing the executive branch of blatant interference in the judiciary, including manipulation of

bench formations, intimidation of judges, defiance of judicial directives, and even resorting to acts of violence and threats against judges and their families, constitutes a direct assault on the foundational principles of democracy, rule of law, and judicial independence. If proven true, these allegations would not only undermine the credibility and integrity of the judicial system but also pose a significant threat to the fundamental principles of justice and separation of powers. However, both the judges and Supreme Judicial Council know very well that the spying agency operatives are professional trained and proficient to leave no trace of evidence of their alleged interference and intimidations to the judges or their victims or targets. They employ sophisticated protocols including encryption, secure communication channels, anonymous communication platforms, steganography, covert operatives, and deniable operations to ensure their communications and actions remain untraceable and without evidence. Utilizing advanced encryption methods, secure networks, and anonymous tools, they conceal their identities and activities, making it challenging for outsiders to intercept or attribute their actions. Covert operatives operate discreetly, while deniable operations provide plausible deniability. This makes proving their involvement in suppression and intimidation activities exceptionally difficult, necessitating thorough investigation and forensic analysis to uncover any traces of their involvement. Therefore, handling allegations of interference and intimidation by spying agencies in the absence of concrete evidence presents a significant challenge for the Supreme Judicial Council. However, despite the difficulty in proving such allegations, the Council may still take appropriate steps to address the situation and uphold the integrity of the judiciary. They do so by employing various techniques and methods. Evidently, in the absence of direct evidence, the Council will have to rely on witness testimonies and corroboration from multiple sources to substantiate the allegations. Witness testimonies, especially from the judges themselves and other individuals who may have been subjected to intimidation or interference, can provide valuable insights into the nature and extent of the alleged actions. Moreover, given the gravity of the situation, it may be necessary for the Supreme Judicial Council to collaborate with other relevant institutions, such as law enforcement agencies or independent investigative bodies, to ensure a comprehensive and transparent investigation. Any attempts to obstruct or undermine the investigation must be met with swift and decisive action to uphold the rule of law and protect the judiciary from undue influence or intimidation. The Council may enlist the help of independent experts

or investigative agencies to conduct forensic analysis or investigations into any suspicious activities or incidents reported by the judges. Although direct evidence may be scarce, expert analysis of circumstantial evidence or patterns of behavior may reveal potential links to interference or intimidation tactics. SJC may provide strong protections for whistleblowers who come forward with information about interference or intimidation. SJC can encourage individuals with knowledge of such actions to step forward and provide valuable testimony. Ensuring confidentiality and protection from retaliation can help overcome barriers to reporting. In cases where traditional investigative methods may not yield sufficient evidence, the Council could consider establishing a public inquiry or commission with broad powers to investigate the allegations thoroughly. Such inquiries can compel testimony, gather evidence, and make recommendations based on their findings. Given the sensitive nature of the allegations and the challenges in investigating espionage-related activities, the Council may seek assistance and expertise from international organizations or experts with experience in dealing with similar issues. Regardless of the outcome of the investigation, the Council can implement measures to enhance judicial integrity and resilience against potential interference in the future. This may include strengthening security protocols, providing training on identifying and responding to intimidation tactics, and promoting a culture of transparency and accountability within the judiciary. While proving allegations of interference and intimidation by spying agencies may indeed be challenging, the Supreme Judicial Council has a responsibility to thoroughly investigate such claims and take appropriate action to safeguard the independence and integrity of the judiciary. Even in the absence of direct evidence, the Council can still take steps to address the underlying concerns and uphold the principles of justice and the rule of law. Ultimately, the Supreme Judicial Council's response to these allegations will be a crucial test of the judiciary's independence and its ability to uphold the rule of law in the face of external pressures. It is essential for the Council to demonstrate its commitment to justice, accountability, and the protection of judicial independence by thoroughly investigating these allegations and holding accountable those responsible for any wrongdoing. Failure to do so would not only undermine public trust in the judiciary but also jeopardize the foundations of democracy and the rule of law in Pakistan.

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

Into the future: A tech-driven governance model in Punjab

Abdul Rashid Shakir



The project for the rehabilitation of 509 arterial and connector roads in the province has already begun by the Communication and Works department, which has been directed to complete the rehabilitation of all major roads of the province to ensure ease of commute within this fiscal year. Rigorous planning is under way to construct Pakistan's first IT City

DATA-driven well-informed project planning, outcome-focused good governance, and technology-based third party monitoring and feedback are key to responsive service delivery and public satisfaction over various government initiatives. Ubiquity of social media and the rise of citizen journalism have made the public sector even more vulnerable to criticism and query. The conventional ways of service delivery and public engagement have become counter-productive at the best. Very much cognizant of this pressing paradigm shift in the statecraft, Punjab's first female Chief Minister, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, has embarked on a rigorous journey of revamping the conventional models of service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. With a smart cabinet of talented young professionals, she is hell-bent on overhauling decades' old governance model that was least responsive to the true public needs and expectations. In the very first month after assuming responsibilities as the CM of country's biggest province of over 127 million people, she has taken multiple meetings on improving governance in education, health, hygiene, communication infrastructure, IT, industry, agriculture, solid waste management, environmental protection, public safety, social welfare, transport and women empowerment. It goes without saying that the Government of Punjab, under the vibrant leadership of CM Maryam, is introducing simultaneous interventions to overhaul all ailing and non-responsive departments. The CM believes in data-driven, effective project planning of all government initiatives meant for public welfare and socio-economic uplift. The government's landmark initiative of Ramadan Nigahban programme is a glaring example, wherein agreed-upon data of BISP and NADRA beneficiaries has been utilised, cleansed and verified through door-to-door verification by the representatives of district administration concerned before the distribution of Ramadan

relief hampers of 18 kilograms each, at the doorsteps of verified beneficiaries. The delivery of approximately 6.5 million relief hampers has been digitally documented using discrete QR code on each hamper through an online app developed by the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB). However, the CM has stressed upon making the data more credible and inclusive for any future government intervention, by removing anomalies thereof. She has, therefore, directed to build Punjab's first-ever socio-economic registry by conducting door-to-door surveys of the entire 127 million population of the province. The project for the rehabilitation of 509 arterial and connector roads in the province has already begun by the Communication and Works department, which has been directed to complete the rehabilitation of all major roads of the province to ensure ease of commute within this fiscal year. Rigorous planning is under way to construct Pakistan's first IT City, Knowledge Park, Film City and 100k low-cost housing units for the less-privileged class. CM Maryam has also directed for the meticulous brainstorming to launch a scheme under Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) to award 500 undergrad scholarships to talented students of deserving families to study in IVY League or other best-ranking international universities. Other initiatives include the revamping and re-launch of Sehat Card, along with Air Ambulance and 1122 Motorway Ambulance Service. Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) and National Radio and Telecommunication Corporation (NRTC) have signed an agreement to implement smart safe cities projects in 18 more cities of the province by the end of this year, raising the tally of smart cities in Punjab to 21. An MOU has also been signed between Transport and Mass Transit Department and the Bank of Punjab for the provision of 20,000 petrol and e-bikes to students on interest-free, easy

monthly instalments since May of this year. Moreover, the Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) has been directed to revamp its courses and curriculum in line with the needs of the labour market after conducting a skill mapping exercise, both in the local and international job markets. The Sports and Youth Affairs department has been tasked by the CM to present a comprehensive plan to revamp major sports, along with the rehabilitation and construction of required sports infrastructure in the province. In order to facilitate the industrial sector of the province, the establishment of Economic Corridor Development Authority based on industrial mapping of Urban Unit has also been envisaged. Chief Minister Maryam makes maximum use of online tech apps and dashboards to ensure effective monitoring of various public sector programmes. Other than the Ramadan Nigahban programme, the 'Suthra Punjab (Clean Punjab)' programme is another example in which district administrations of different districts are sending 'before and after' pictorial and video evidences of the cleanliness drive in their respective areas. The CM also responds to people's complaints on social media platforms such as X (Twitter). An example in this regard is the provision of a wheelchair to a disabled student of 6th grade from Fort Abbas, who appealed to CM Maryam for help via social media. Moreover, in addition to her surprise visits and public interactions, a dedicated complaint number of the CM, 0800-02345, is another way of soliciting public feedback to gauge efficacy of her government's service delivery vis-a-vis people's expectations. Given the vivid clarity of focus and unprecedented commitment to cause, it can rightly be understood that this overhauling effort to make the service delivery more responsive to public needs would prove instrumental in winning over public confidence and satisfaction in various government initiatives.

Briefs

Commission to investigate IHC judges' allegations

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letter an extremely serious matter as no one should be allowed to meddle in any institutions' affairs, and it should be probed." To a question, Tarar categorically rejected speculations of concealing facts or slowing down probe process. He said such complaints should not be shied away and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led government always publicised outcomes of every probe through commissions. The letter underscored that the code of conduct for judges prescribed by the SJC provides no guidance on how they "must react to and report incidents that are tantamount to intimidation and interfere with judicial independence". A day earlier, a full court meeting of the apex court was held in the federal capital to deliberate on the judges' letter that sought guidance from the SJC "with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on the part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with the discharge of his/her official functions and qualify as intimidation". The two-hour huddle, convened by CJP Isa, took place after bar associations of Sindh, Lahore, Islamabad and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as senior lawyers demanded a probe into the letter which arguably might have serious consequences for the country's judiciary.

PTI rejects formation of inquiry...

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The forum noted that the inquiry of the startling letter of the serving judges of IHC through a retired judge was a mockery of an independent, impartial and transparent investigation. PTI Core Committee asserted that in their letter, the IHC judges exposed the fundamental challenges to the very existence of the judiciary before the CJP and the SJC. They went on to say that the mandate theft government was the biggest beneficiary of the ongoing lawlessness and unconstitutional interference in the country. The participants stated that an unelected prime minister who seized the power through stealing public mandate was neither capable to conduct any kind of far investigation nor any will such inquiry would have any credibility. PTI Core Committee demanded that the Chief Justice should provide justice to his fellow judges instead of leaving the future of the judiciary at the mercy of the administration consisting of touts.

Gandapur, Naqvi discuss...

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while Chief Minister Gandapur declared law and order as the top priority of his administration, promising to leverage all resources to safeguard the citizens of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The meeting concluded with a strong message of resilience, as both leaders agreed that the fight against terrorism is pivotal for the nation's survival and pledged full cooperation to overcome this challenge.

Interior Minister excluded...

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the party's leadership in the future. As this decision unfolds, it remains uncertain whether Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's stance will endure or if there will be a reversal, akin to recent instances such as the appointments of the IRSA chairman and head of the Economic Coordination Committee, where the prime minister had to reverse his decisions after pressure from the powers-that-be.

Babar meets Chairman PCB amid captaincy rumours

Naqvi and Azam had a detailed conversation about the possibility of the latter take charge as captain of the national side once again

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

KARACHI: Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam met chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi, amid rumours about change in captaincy of the national side, on Thursday in Lahore. According to sources, Naqvi and Azam had a detailed conversation about the possibility of the latter take charge as captain of the national side once again. It must be noted that Shaheen Afridi replaced Azam as skipper in T20 cricket and Shan Masood in Tests last year. The development comes after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said that it will take the decision on Shaheen's future as the captain of the T20 side after the fitness camp, which will conclude on April 8. While talking at a presser after the announcement of the selection committee on March 24, PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi didn't talk much on Shaheen's future as captain. "Even I don't know who the cap-



tain will be," Naqvi said. "Whether Shaheen continues or a new captain comes in will be determined after the fitness camp [starting on Monday]. "There are a number of technical factors we will consider, the details of which I do not want to go into. We want a long-term solution, whether it's Shaheen or a new man. And then we intend to stick by that man, instead of just changing a captain just because you lose a match or captain," he added. Azam stepped down as the skipper of the national side from all formats, ending his years-long stint in the leading position, in November following a humiliating World Cup campaign. The former skipper was under fire for several months after Pakistan failed to perform in the Asia Cup and continued the same momentum into the World Cup - where they crashed out before reaching the semis.

Azam was previously appointed white-ball captain in 2019 and as Test skipper in 2020, but the Green Shirts have not won any ICC or Asia Cup titles under his leadership.

Danielle trounces Caroline Garcia to reach Miami semis

MIAMI: Red-hot Danielle Collins recorded a powerful 6-3, 6-2 victory over No. 23 seed Caroline Garcia of France to reach the Miami Open semifinals at Miami Gardens, Fla., for the second time in her career. Next up for Collins will be a match against No. 14 Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia, who rallied past No. 5 Jessica Pegula of the United States 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Collins had 22 winners and needed just 80 minutes to dispose of Garcia and improve to 4-0 all-time in the matchup. She converted a blistering 89.7 percent of her first-serve points (26 of 29) and didn't face a single break point. "I think, depending on the matchup, some people are more favorable against others," Collins said. "I



think Caro comes out here and fights her butt off. She hits some really strong shots ... and I don't think the set scores are a reflection of how close the match really is. "Against someone like Caro, it forces me to be more concentrated, because I know I don't want to give her an inch." The 30-year-old Collins also reached the Miami semis in 2018 when she lost to Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia. Six years later, the former World No. 7 has won five straight matches. She lost her first set of the tournament to Bernarda Pera and has since won 10 consecutive sets. Djokovic splits from Ivanisevic with bitter sweet message

"I feel like I've made a lot of physical improvements over the last couple weeks and made some adjustments within my game technically," Collins told the Tennis Channel. "I think that's helping me a lot with the accuracy and precision of my shots and being more consistent with my points." Collins, the 2022 Australian Open runner-up, has been extra hyped up due to the possibility of this being her last time playing in Miami. Earlier this year, the Floridian said she plans for this to be her final year on tour. "With the way I'm playing, there's certainly a lot to be pumped about," Collins said. "I like to show the positive body language and the fan support I'm getting here is amazing." Garcia hit 12 winners but won just 11 total points against Collins' serve. Alexandrova is through to the semifinal of a WTA 1000 event for just the second time in 32 attempts. She got to the semis at Madrid in 2022. Against Pegula, Alexandrova prevailed despite putting just 60 percent of her first serves in play. The match was tied 4-4 in the third set before Alexandrova got the decisive service break and then served out the victory. "It was extremely difficult for me because (Pegula) played amazing," Alexandrova said. "In the third set, there were some times the kind of rallies where I couldn't understand how it was possible (for her) to return that ball, but it always (came) back. "I just tried to play every single point (like) I knew she was going to be everywhere, so I need to do something, and I was trying to wait and use any opportunities that I got." The women's semifinals are scheduled for Thursday, with the Collins-Alexandrova clash following a matchup of fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan and 27th-seeded Victoria Azarenka of Belarus. - Agencies

UAE board probes Usman for contract breach

ISLAMABAD: The Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) is currently investigating whether Usman Khan's declaration of his intention to play for Pakistan violates his contract with the UAE board. As per a report on ESPNcricinfo, the ECB is undertaking a thorough examination of the matter to evaluate potential breaches of the contract not only with the board itself but also with the white-ball leagues in which he has participated in the UAE as a local player, including the ILT20 and the T10. The outcome of this review will be concluded within the next fortnight and it could have significant consequences for Usman. It is likely that he may face a prohibition from participating in league cricket in the UAE. If a breach of contract is determined, it is also likely to affect the validity of the player's work permit, which he has utilised to reside in the UAE and fulfil the residency requirement for eligibility to represent the UAE in international cricket. He still has 14 months remaining before meeting this criterion. Meanwhile, Usman contends that he has not violated any contract, asserting that his contract includes a termination clause with a 30-day notice period. The report added he is prepared for whatever penalty the ECB imposes on him and that the prospect of representing Pakistan, particularly after receiving an invitation from the PCB following the PSL, was too appealing to resist. PCB inquired of Usman whether he maintained a desire to represent Pakistan, to which he affirmed. This Monday, he was selected to join the Pakistan squad, presently undergoing training alongside the Pakistan military as part of a PCB endeavour to enhance player fitness. He joined the squad on Sunday evening. Remember, while giving the interview to the same publication a few weeks back, Usman seemed to diminish his prospects of representing Pakistan, emphasising the ease of acquiring NOCs to participate in leagues worldwide as a UAE player and highlighting the benefits of being regarded as a domestic player in the UAE's limited-overs leagues. - Agencies



SC allows mily courts to...

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The court also directed the AGP to submit an implementation report regarding the case to the registrar as well as sought details of those who were sentenced to less than three years. It then adjourned the hearing till the fourth week of April. During the hearing of the case, Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar addressed the AGP and said: "Try to release them three to four days before Eid." "Yes, we will try," Awan said, responding to the SC judge. Faisal Siddiqui, a lawyer representing one of the clients challenging military trial feared the released could get arrested again under the 3 MPO after coming out. The AGP said 20 people could be released before Eid. "There are three steps to be followed for the release of 20 persons." The first step, he stated, was to pronounce the reserved judgement; the second to confirm it; and the third step would be to grant leniency to those with lesser sentences by the chief of army staff.

ECP likely to 'postpone' Senate...

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orders for administering of oaths to the lawmakers and suspension of the Senate poll till the administration of oaths to the extent of KP province. Right to vote is a fundamental right and no voter cannot be deprived of this fundamental right, read the verdict, adding that the commission has ample power to issue such directions and make such consequential orders to ensure that election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law. "Therefore, in case of non compliance of directions and order issued under Article 218(3) read with Section 4(1) and Section 8(c) of the Act, the Commission may in addition to any other action may extend the time for completion of the Senate election to the extent of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa till the administration of oath to members of the Provincial Assembly against the including the applicants," it added. Earlier, opposition parties in the KP Assembly moved the Peshawar High Court (PHC) seeking the court's intervention on the issue of oath-taking of members on the reserved seats.

Terrorists used US-made...

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security forces indicate that the militants have been using US-made weapons in their attacks inside Pakistan in recent months. Security sources have said that the terrorists involved in the recent Turbat attack were armed with US-made weaponry including an M32 multi-shot grenade launcher and M16A4 assault rifle. On January 27 earlier this year, US-made weapons were also recovered from a terrorist named Naik Minallah in North Waziristan. Before that, security forces had recovered the same kind of weaponry from militants behind the terrorist attack in Sambaza, Zhob, on January 22. Separately, weapons seized from militants at the Pak-Afghan border on January 19 were also foreign-made, the sources added.

Five May 9 suspects who were...

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The five suspects - Owais, Saifullah, Nasrullah, Kamran and Waqas - were booked in the May 9 violence case registered at the New Tow Police Station. A number of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers and others were arrested after protests broke out across the country following Imran Khan's arrest in the Al-Qadir Trust case. Last week, a three-member bench comprising Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Mussarat Hilaali, had granted bail to five suspects booked in the May 9 violence case.

Lionel Messi drops retirement hint

LONDON: Lionel Messi has stated that he won't let his age dictate his retirement plans, expressing uncertainty about his future once that moment arrives. Argentinian forward Messi, widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time, has amassed an impressive collection of 42 trophies throughout his illustrious career. These include ten La Liga titles, seven Copa del Rey victories, four Champions League triumphs, a World Cup, and a Copa America. Additionally, the diminutive Argentine has clinched an unprecedented eight Ballon d'Or awards, three more than his closest competitor, Cristiano Ronaldo. However, approaching his 37th birthday this summer, Messi finds himself in the twilight phase of his career, currently playing for MLS outfit Inter Miami. Speaking on his retirement plans, Messi told Big Time: "I know that the moment I feel that I am no longer able to perform, that I no longer enjoy [playing] or [can] help my teammates, I will quit. "I'm very self-critical of myself, I know when I'm good, when I'm bad, when I'm playing well and when I'm playing badly. "When I feel it's time to take that step, I'll take it without thinking about age. If I feel good, I'll always try to keep competing because it's what I like and I know how to do." Messi added: "I haven't yet thought of what I'm going to do when I retire. Today I try to enjoy the day-to-day, the moments, without thinking about life after [football]. - Agencies

All-Pakistan 3x3 Ramadan Cup basketball tournament begins

According to Federal Basketball Association Secretary Ouj E Zahoor, a large number of basketball clubs and departments from around the country are participating in the event

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Under patronage of the Federal Basketball Association (FBBA), the All Pakistan 3x3 Ramadan Cup Basketball Tournament will be starting from today (Thursday) at Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad. According to Federal Basketball Association Secretary Ouj E Zahoor, a large number of basketball clubs and departments from around the country are participating in the event which will be played under floodlights. He said that Federal Basketball Association and the Pakistan Basketball Federation, with the support of the Pa-

kistan Sports Board have been at the forefront of nurturing and promoting basketball in the country. This tournament is a testament to their unwavering commitment to developing sports infrastructure and providing platforms for athletes to showcase their skills. "The tournament, spanning several days, will showcase the growing talent in three distinct categories including Mens Departmental Tournament, Club Tournament for men and the Womens Tournament", Ouj said, adding that the mens departmental tournament will see fierce competition among 12 teams from prestigious departments including Wapda, Army, Navy and Police.

Meanwhile, the Club Tournament is expected to be a grand affair with 48 teams from various cities across Pakistan competing for the top spot and womens tournament will feature 12 teams, highlighting the growing interest and participation of women in basketball. Ouj E Zahoor said that this years 3x3 Ramadan Cup is more than just a tournament; it is a celebration of basketball and its rapidly growing format, 3x3, which has been gaining international acclaim and popularity. The event is set to provide a significant boost to the sports visibility and interest among the youth and sports enthusiasts across Pakistan.

Chelsea march into Women's Champions League semis

The Blues led 3-0 from first leg and made it a four-goal advantage through Mayra Ramirez's opener

SPORTS DESK

PARIS: Chelsea reached the semi-finals of the Women's Champions League on Wednesday despite a 1-1 draw at home to Ajax, while Lyon also progressed after brushing aside Benfica in France. Mayra Ramirez put Chelsea into a first-half lead on her European club debut before Chastity Grant equalised for Ajax in the second half. Chelsea prevailed 4-1 on aggregate following a 3-0 win in the first leg in Amsterdam. "Ajax did really well, they came out as we expected them to," said Chelsea midfielder Erin Cuthbert. "Small margins in football, we could have put a little bit more away, give ourselves a bit more breathing room, but the job was really done in the first leg." Ajax nearly took the lead in the opening 20 minutes when goalkeeper Zecira Musovic had her clearance charged down by Tiny Hoekstra, but the ball rolled against the post and went agonisingly wide. Just after the half-hour mark, Ramirez opened her Champions League account with a composed finish after being set free by Guro Reiten. Now four goals to the good, Emma Hayes' side looked set to cruise into the final four. Grant put a dampener on the night for Chelsea when she ran on to Hoek-

stra's through ball and her slightly scuffed finish squirmed its way through Musovic. With the score level on the night, Chelsea's aggregate lead was insurmountable for Ajax although Musovic did redeem herself in the last 10 minutes when she made excellent fingertip saves to deny Romee Leuchter and then Danique Tolhoek. Earlier, braces from Delphine Cascarino and Kadidiatou Diani gave eight-times titleholders Lyon a 4-1 victory at the Groupama

Stadium to claim the tie 6-2 on aggregate. Marie-Yasmine Alidou equalised minutes after Cascarino's opener at the end of the first half, but the 27-year-old hit a second shortly after half-time before two injury-time Diani goals gave Lyon a comfortable victory. "There was a lot to be pleased about," Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor told the club's channel, OLPLAY. "The comeback at half-time was beautiful and hurt the Portuguese mentally, but we

had to be more clinical in the first half." Lyon created several good early chances but failed to find a way past Lena Pauels in the Benfica goal until the 43rd minute. Cascarino gave Lyon a two-goal buffer on aggregate when Eugenie Le Sommer chased down an underhit backpass, won her challenge with Pauels and then had the presence of mind to lay the ball back to the French international, who duly finished with a delightful chip over the stranded 'keeper and two retreating defenders. But Benfica struck back instantly to reduce the deficit to one goal when Alidou bundled home Lucia Alves' cross, following a sublime defence-splitting pass from deep by Kika Nazareth. Lyon made two changes at half-time, and the move soon paid off when Cascarino doubled up with a fine individual effort six minutes into the second half. Picking the ball up in midfield, she drove forward before unleashing a powerful shot from outside the area. One minute into added-time, Diani tucked away Lindsey Horan's knockdown in the box to cement Lyon's spot in the semi-finals. The margin of victory then became even greater five minutes later when Diani miscontrolled the ball and Catarina Amado's clearance actually glanced off the French forward and into the net.



Briefs

Japan Moon probe survives 2nd lunar night

TOKYO : Japan's unmanned Moon lander woke up after surviving a second frigid, two-week lunar night and transmitted new images back to Earth, the country's space agency said Thursday. "We received a response from SLIM last night and confirmed that SLIM had successfully completed its second overnight," the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said in a post on the official X account for its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) probe. "Since the sun was still high in the sky last night and the equipment was still hot, we recorded images of the usual scenery with the navigational camera, among other activities, for a short period of time," it added. A black-and-white photo of the rocky surface of a crater accompanied the post on X, formerly Twitter. The SLIM lander touched down in January at a wonky angle that left its solar panels facing the wrong way. Around three hours after the landing — which made Japan only the fifth nation to touch down on the Moon — JAXA decided to switch SLIM off with 12 percent power remaining to allow for a possible resumption later on. As the sun's angle shifted, the probe came back to life in late January for two days and carried out scientific observations of a crater with a high-spec camera.—Agencies

Ukraine's FM visits India for peace

KYIV : Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he had arrived in New Delhi on Thursday to advance Kyiv's vision of the path to peace in Ukraine and to strengthen ties with India. "Building on the dialogue between (Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy) and (Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi), we will pay specific attention to the peace formula," Kuleba wrote on social media platform X. Ukraine hopes to hold a summit of world leaders without Russian participation in the coming months to advance its blueprint for peace, a "formula" that calls among other things for the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory. Ukraine foreign minister mused about 'punching' Russia's Lavrov. Russia has dismissed the Ukrainian diplomatic initiative as a non-starter. Modi held separate phone calls last week with Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin ahead of Kuleba's visit. India has traditionally had close economic and defence ties with Moscow and refrained from criticising Russia over its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, instead increasing purchases of Russian oil to record levels.—APP

IMF calls for financial sector reforms in Switzerland

BERN: Switzerland needs "strong financial sector reforms" in the wake of the state-engineered rescue takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS, the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday. "The state-facilitated acquisition of Credit Suisse by UBS has stabilised the financial markets, but the experience and prospects also call for strong financial sector reforms," the IMF said after concluding its review of the Swiss economy. The IMF is the latest international body to raise concerns about the new enlarged UBS and the risks it poses to the Swiss economy. Its comments follow warnings from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development earlier this month. The Financial Stability Board, a grouping of central bankers, treasury officials and regulators from the group of 20 top global economies, has also highlighted the risk a failure of UBS would pose to Switzerland and urged Bern to strengthen its controls on banks.—DNA

Marcos vows response to China in disputed waters

Philippines President Marcos says allies have 'assured' Manila of help to 'protect' Philippines sovereignty

NEWS DESK

MANILA : Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Thursday vowed to respond to China in the disputed South China Sea where the two maritime neighbors are engaged in a tussle amid overlapping claims. "Over the succeeding weeks there shall be, implemented by the relevant national government agencies and instrumentalities, a response and countermeasure package that is proportionate, deliberate, and reasonable in the face of the open, unabating, and illegal, coercive, aggressive, and dangerous attacks by agents of the China Coast Guard and the Chinese Maritime Militia," Marcos said on X. His statement comes as

the China Coast Guard has tried to block Manila's supplies to its grounded warship BRP Sierra Madre in disputed waters in the vast sea. Beijing has used water cannons against Filipino vessels to stop them from reaching the rusting ship. Manila has said its personnel were injured and vessels damaged. The maritime neighbors, China and the Philippines have conflicting claims over the Second Thomas Shoal — also known as the Ayungin Shoal, Bai Co May, and Ren'ai Jiao — which is a submerged reef in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Without naming any nation or organization, Marcos said Manila has been "in constant communication with representatives of relevant allies, partners, and friends in the international com-



munity." "They have offered to help us on what the Philippines requires to protect and secure our sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction while ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific," said the Filipino president. Marcos' statement also comes following a phone call by US De-

fense Secretary Lloyd Austin with his Filipino counterpart where he reaffirmed Washington's commitment to a mutual defense treaty with the Philippines and criticized as "dangerous" China's use of water cannon and disruption of a Philippine resupply mission over the weekend. "I have given them our requirements and we have been assured that they will be addressed," Marcos added. The Philippines president stressed Manila seeks "no conflict with any nation, more so nations that purport and claim to be our friends but we will not be cowed into silence, submission, or subservience." "Won't allow Philippines to act willfully" China Thursday said it won't allow Manila "to act willfully," state media reported. Defense Ministry spokesman Wu

Qian accused the Philippines of "harassment and provocations" and said such actions were the "immediate cause of the recent escalation of the South China Sea issue." "Counting on the support of external forces," Wu claimed the Philippine side had "violated" international law and the spirit of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Manila "frequently infringed upon China's sovereignty, made provocations and created troubles, and spread misinformation to mislead the international community," he said, reacting to the US and Filipino statements blaming the Chinese side for obstructing resupply missions to the grounded warship.

PKK terrorizes countries that tolerate it: FM Fidan

Türkiye will never allow the establishment of a terrorist corridor stretching from Iraq to Syria, no matter who stands behind it : Fidan

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA : Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the PKK terrorizes countries that have tolerated its activities for years, as he noted that Türkiye continues to take action against the terrorist group. "Now that terrorist organizations cannot find a safe haven in Türkiye, they are seeking refuge abroad. Some of our neighbors and other countries have become preoccupied with solidifying their positions," Fidan said during an Iftar dinner program in Istanbul. Türkiye will never allow the establishment of a terrorist corridor stretching from Iraq to Syria, no matter who stands behind it,

Fidan said, adding that the country has taken all necessary measures on every issue concerning national security and will continue to do so. "We will not wait for permission from anyone for this. In the new era, in solidarity with our neighbors, with a spirit of regional awareness, we are determined to eradicate the scourge of terrorism completely," he added. Fidan also condemned PKK terrorist group attacks Sunday on Turkish nationals in two Belgian cities. Saying that Türkiye demanded rapid action from Belgian authorities, Fidan said: "I personally called my Belgian counterpart that same night, emphasizing our sensitivity

and expectations." Diplomatic efforts were swiftly mobilized, with Turkish diplomats traveling to the region to assist affected nationals. The minister credited the common sense of citizens and the intervention of Belgian authorities for bringing the situation under control before it could escalate further. Highlighting similar provocative attempts in France and a recent attack on the Turkish Consulate-General in Hanover, Germany, the minister emphasized the need for swift action and justice. We took immediate action in Ankara and Berlin, stating that we expect the perpetrators to be brought to justice," said Fidan. On

Tuesday evening, following a pro-PKK demonstration in Hannover, around a dozen PKK followers tried to break the windows of Türkiye's Consulate-General building in the city center. No one was injured in the attack, but the building's windows and main entrance door were damaged. The attack on the consulate followed acts of violence by PKK supporters in recent days in Belgium, where shops and cultural centers of the Turkish community were targeted. In its nearly 40-year terror campaign against Türkiye, the PKK has been responsible for the deaths of some 40,000 people.

Faye scores big win in Senegal Presidential Poll

DAKAR: Anti-establishment figure Bassirou Diomaye Faye has comfortably won the Senegalese presidential election with 54.28 percent of votes in the first round, official provisional results showed Wednesday. He placed well ahead of the governing coalition's candidate, former prime minister Amadou Ba, who garnered 35.79 percent. The victory for Faye, who was only freed from prison 10 days before the election, still has to be validated by Senegal's top constitutional body, which could happen in a few days. Faye, 44, who has said he wants a "break" with the current political system, is set to become the youngest president in Senegal's history. It would be the first time since independence from France in 1960 that an opponent has won in the first round. Aliou Mamadou Dia, who came third out of 19 candidates officially on the list, won just 2.8 percent of the vote, according to figures read out at the Dakar court by the president of the national vote counting commission, Amady Diouf. While his victory in Sunday's vote was already clear after the publication of unofficial partial results, the margin of Faye's win was confirmed by the vote counting commission, which falls under the judiciary. The turnout of 61.3 percent was less than in 2019 when outgoing President Macky Sall won a second term in the first round, but more than in 2012. The announcement of the official provisional results seems to clear the way for a handover of power between Sall and his successor. The political crisis triggered by Sall's last-minute postponement of the vote, and the subsequently rushed electoral timetable, cast doubt on whether the handover could take place before the incumbent's term officially ends on April 2. But a swift handover now seems feasible in the West African nation, which prides itself on its stability and democratic principles in a coup-hit region, provided no appeals are made. Presidential candidates have 72 hours after the results are announced by the commission to appeal to the Constitutional Council. The Constitution states that if no appeals are made in 15 days, "the Council shall immediately proclaim the final results of the ballot." But if an objection is made, the Council has five days to rule and could, in theory, annul the election. Faye, who has never held elected office, is set to become the fifth president of the West African country of around 18 million people. His fellow presidential candidates, and Sall, have recognized his victory. Sunday's election was preceded by three years of tension and deadly unrest, with Senegal plunged into a fresh political crisis in February when Sall decided to delay the presidential poll. Dozens have been killed and hundreds arrested since 2021, with the country's democratic credentials coming under scrutiny. Faye himself was detained for months before his release in the middle of the election campaign.—DNA

Emmanuel Macron poses 'a danger' to Europe: Matteo

PARIS : At a Pan Western meeting of nationalist parties, Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Matteo Salvini called French President Emmanuel Macron "a danger" to Europe for his refusal to rule out the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine. "I think that President Macron, with his words, represents a danger for our country and our continent." Matteo Salvini, Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Salvini added, "I don't want to leave our children a continent ready to enter World War III", as backlash against the Western-led war continues to grow in Europe. Some believe that Macron is using Russophobia as a way to bring together a European Union which is increasingly being split by demands for more national sovereignty. The idea that Russia is a threat and that that's what's going to make Europe exist, I think, is an illusion. People aren't buying it. As a matter of fact, people understand whether it is in Germany or whether it is in France, that in fact, this war in Ukraine, which was unnecessary, and which was wanted by the West and by NATO, is actually hurting them very badly. Within two years, Macron has gone from major criticism over urging the West not to humiliate Russia, to being one of Europe's leading War Hawks. Recent public opinion polls in France, however, show a different trend. Studies show that nearly 80% of the French do not want their soldiers sent to Ukraine. Macron's sustained belligerence has been met with major resistance, if not rejection, in all quarters, extending from Washington to the highest ranks of the French armed forces. French President Emmanuel Macron does not rule out the possibility of deploying Western troops in Ukraine. There are leaked reports that the generals are extremely worried about Macron making these belligerent comments when France is in no condition whatsoever to defy or to challenge Russia. I mean, even the British; Sunak, for example, saying he's got to send troops to Ukraine, what troops? The British can't fill a football stadium with their army, the army that they could put in the field; they couldn't even fill a football stadium.—DNA

UAE, Egypt conduct humanitarian airdrop into N.Gaza

GAZA CITY: The United Arab Emirates' Defense Ministry said Wednesday that it carried out the largest humanitarian airdrop operation in the northern Gaza Strip, totaling 90 tons. The ministry said on X that it was carried out as part of Operation Birds of Goodness and was the 16th airdrop of humanitarian and relief aid in the northern Gaza Strip by joint crews from the UAE Air Force and Egyptian Air Force. "This is the largest aerial drop, conducted through 3 aircraft carrying 90 tons of food and relief aid," it added. It said "the drop operation took place over buffer zones in the northern Gaza Strip that are difficult to reach." This brings the total aid dropped since the launch of the operation to 664 tons of food and relief aid, according to the statement. "Birds of Goodness" comes within the framework of "Operation Chivalrous Knight," which began on Nov. 5, 2023, based on the directives of UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. On Feb. 29, Operation Birds of Goodness was launched to continue for several weeks, "aiming to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian brothers due to the war," according to a previous statement from the UAE's Defense Ministry. Israel has waged a deadly military offensive on Palestinian territories since an Oct. 7 cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas which killed around 1,200 people. More than 32,000 Palestinians have since been killed and some 75,000 injured amid mass destruction and shortages of necessities.—APP



Islamabad :Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja in a meeting with delegation of Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA).DNA

Russia alleges US diversion from Moscow attack: Kremlin

Kermlin says the United States is attempting to hide "something" related to the recent terrorist attack

WEB DESK

MOSCOW : The Kremlin says the United States is attempting to hide "something" related to the recent terrorist attack at a concert hall in the capital Moscow. Four armed assailants broke into the Russian capital's Crocus City Hall on Friday and went on a shooting spree at the people who were attending an event. The Daesh-K, an offshoot of the Daesh terrorist group, has claimed responsibility for the massacre that killed at least 143. Russia, however, blames

Ukraine and its Western allies over the carnage at the suspected gunman, who were arrested early Saturday, were fleeing toward Ukraine, according to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). Kiev has strongly rejected the allegation. "It's strange, to say the least, that the Americans have dared to announce a single narrative. This suggests at the very least that they are trying to shift attention away from something," said Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday. He added that such claims came in before Moscow had formulated an official version of events,

since Russian law enforcement is still working on the case. While admitting that the assailants were Takfiri terrorists, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that many questions remained unanswered, adding that such terrorist attacks fit the pattern of hostile actions against Russia by Ukraine's foreign sponsors. "If Kiev had not actually been involved in the attack, Washington's first reaction would have been to stress the need for an investigation." arlier on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also said that it was strange why

Washington insisted only on the Daesh-K narrative, noting that the US is obviously biased and trying to "get Ukraine out of harm's way." "In order to ward off suspicions from the collective West, they urgently needed to come up with something, so they resorted to ISIS (Daesh), pulled an ace out of their sleeve, and literally a few hours after the terrorist attack, the Anglo-Saxon media began disseminating precisely these versions," Zakharova added. She argued that if Kiev had been blameless in the massacre, Washington would have called for a full investigation, but now both the White

House and the State Department simply say that "Ukraine has nothing to do with this." "Based on what data and what information? Only one thing is clear — they began to excuse the Kiev regime in order to excuse themselves. Because everyone understands perfectly well that there is simply no independent [Ukraine] without Western financial and military assistance," Zakharova further said. Putin has already suggested that Ukraine reaped benefit from the attack and that Kiev might have played a role, saying that the Ukrainian side had prepared a "window" for the gunmen to escape across the border.

Uganda introduces first interest-free Islamic banking

KAMPALA : Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni officially launched national operations of the country's first interest-free commercial Islamic bank, allowing it to operate following Islamic principles. Museveni said at the launch ceremony for the Salaam Bank in the capital Kampala that Islamic banking has the potential to significantly contribute to the development of Uganda's financial sector and attract more Muslims to invest in the country's economy. The government does not believe in discrimination and treats all Ugandans equally, regardless of religion or tribe, he said, adding that this attribution has allowed the country to develop socially and economically. "I encourage you to fight poverty and create wealth," he remarked. "Some people were initially opposed to the establishment of Uganda's Islamic University. I said no, let it operate. It has now produced a large number of graduates in various professions, including non-Muslims.—APP

Bulgaria-Romania border: Schengen still distant

VIDIN : When Bulgaria and Romania partially join Europe's Schengen zone on Sunday after more than a decade of negotiations, hundreds of weary long-haul drivers like Anton Antonov won't have much to celebrate as land border controls won't be disappearing. The 48-year-old Bulgarian and other drivers will continue facing long queues at the congested Vidin-Calafat border post separating the two Balkan countries, which are only opening up travel by air and sea with Schengen nations. "On this crossing, it's always a wait of a minimum of seven to eight hours" before truckers can cross the Danube river via the "New Europe" bridge, Antonov told AFP at dawn after having spent the night sleeping in his cabin while waiting in the kilometre-long queue on the Bulgarian side. A lack of parking spaces, proper toilets and showers turns those long waits into nerve-wracking ordeals for truck drivers and slow down trade with the rest of Europe. The hopes of EU members Bulgaria and Romania to fully join the Schengen zone were dashed by Austria, which finally relented in December about allowing them to join by air and sea from March 31. Croatia, which joined the EU after Romania and Bulgaria, even beat them to the punch in January 2023 by becoming Schengen's 27th member. Created in 1985, the vast visa-free zone includes 23 of the 27 EU member states as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.—APP

Naryshkin discusses coop with N.Korea amid visit

MOSCOW : Russia's intelligence chief discussed deepening bilateral cooperation between his country and North Korea amid a visit to the capital Pyongyang earlier this week, Moscow said on Thursday. A statement by the press bureau of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service said Sergey Naryshkin held "detailed negotiations" with North Korean State Security Minister Ri Chang-dae during his visit on March 25-27. "Topical issues of the development of the international situation, ensuring regional security, and deepening Russian-North Korean interaction in the face of attempts to increase pressure from external forces were discussed," the intelligence service noted. Separately, the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported that the two sides reached a "complete consensus of views" on the issues discussed during the talks that were held in a "comradely and amicable atmosphere." Moscow-Pyongyang relations have grown since an official visit by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to Russia last September when he met President Vladimir Putin.—APP

Briefs

Sindh announces public holiday on April 4

"The Government of Sindh has been pleased to declare 4th April, 2024 (Thursday) as Public Holiday on occasion of 45th Martyrdom anniversary of Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Ex-Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan throughout the Province of Sindh"

DNA

KARACHI: The Sindh government on Thursday announced a public holiday on April 4 on the occasion of the death anniversary of former prime minister and late Pakistan Peoples (PPP) founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. In a notification, the provincial authorities said: "The Government of Sindh has been pleased to declare 4th April, 2024 (Thursday) as Public Holiday on occasion of 45th Martyrdom anniversary of Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Ex-Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan throughout the Province of Sindh."

It said all government offices, autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, corporations, and local councils under the administrative control of the provincial government except those engaged in essential services will remain closed. In addition to this, the provincial government declared April 1st as a public holiday for members of Christian community only on the occasion of "Day After Easter" for all public and private offices, autonomous bodies, semi-autonomous bodies and corporations under the administrative control of the Sindh government.

Punjab Assembly approves budget

DNA

LAHORE: The Punjab Assembly approved the budget for the financial year 2023-24 on Thursday. Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan presided over the budget session. The proceedings started with voting and discussions on the annual budget and fiscal demands. A total of 42 such demands were presented in the House, along with seven cut motions. Opposition members initiated the debate by voicing their objections to certain budgetary allocations. Suni Ittehad Council leader Imtiaz Sheikh, attacked the treasury saying charity seats for women which sparked a contentious exchange of views. Addressing the speaker, Imtiaz Sheikh expressed dissatisfaction with the allocation of charity seats for women, leading to a heated argument between Imtiaz Sheikh and government member Khalil Tahir Sandhu. Subsequently, opposition members gathered around the speaker's dais and chanted "Shame Shame" slogans.

Eight died in road accident in Buner

DNA

BUNER: Eight people including five women, two children and a driver are among those who died in an accident when a pick-up fell into a deep ditch in Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to police, the ill-fated vehicle was going to Shahi from Swari Bazar. It is reported that the brake failed and the driver lost control of that vehicle. All the deceased persons belong to the same family, police said. Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the bodies to the nearby hospital.

PM all praise for Pak Navy for safeguarding maritime interests

The prime minister also laid a wreath at the Shuhada monument and afterwards was introduced to the Principal Staff Officers of Naval Headquarters

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the Naval Headquarters here wherein he appreciated the services of Pakistan Navy to safeguard the maritime interest of the country despite limited resources. The prime minister, who was accompanied by the federal ministers, especially lauded the professional response of the Pakistan Navy to foil the recent terrorist attack on Naval Airbase Turbat. Upon arrival, the prime minister was welcomed by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf and was presented Guard of Honour by a smartly turned out naval contingent. The prime minister also laid a wreath at the Shuhada monument and afterwards was introduced to the Principal Staff Officers of Naval Headquarters. During the meeting, matters pertaining to the Regional Maritime Security milieu and operational readiness of the Pakistan Navy were discussed. The Naval Chief apprised the prime minister on roles, capabilities



and future modernization plans of the Pakistan Navy. Later on a detailed briefing was presented by Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) on the prevailing maritime environment, challenges being faced by Pakistan Navy and its response to meet the challenges. The prime minister was especially apprised about the capability requirements of Pakistan Navy to meet the current and future challenges being faced by the country in the maritime domain. He was also apprised of the measures to benefit from economic prospects of the maritime sector. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stressed that a strong economy held the key to meet all the challenges faced by the country. Towards the end, the prime minister also visited the Command Operations Centre of Pakistan Navy. The naval chief thanked the prime minister for his visit and reposing his confidence in the Navy. He also assured that Pakistan Navy with Allah's help would continue to defend the country's sea frontiers and maritime interests and would shoulder the responsibilities with honour both during peace and war.

Ex-AJK PM seeks end to state institutions' meddling

Farooq demands resignation of CEC, IHC CJ

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Former Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi stressed the need that it was high time the state institutions should put to a halt the ongoing practice of meddling into judicial and political affairs because it was not only badly damaging the country but it also weakening Pakistan's stance on Kashmir dispute at global stage. Addressing a press conference along with Opposition Leader in AJK Assembly Khwaja Farooq Ahmed, Qayyum Niazi said that Pakistan was grappling with serious issues; hence all state institutions should perform their duties within the constitutional framework to make Pakistan, economically and politically stable and strong country. PTI AJK President termed the six judges' letter to Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) as an important development in political and constitutional history of the country because it clearly exposed everything how the judges were influenced, intimidated and coerced

by state institutions to get favorable decisions. Qayyum Niazi said that people of Pakistan showed great courage and voted for Imran Khan and PTI on February 8 despite all adversarial circumstances and state coercive tactics but PTI overwhelming majority was converted into minority and the entire polls robbery plot was exposed by former Commissioner Rawalpindi through forms 47. He said that it was really unfortunate that the nation gave clear cut mandate to PTI to form the government but no relief was given to Imran Khan rather his party was deprived of its mandate through results manipulation. Qayyum Niazi stated that it was all done under nefarious London Plan as all the sins of corrupt clique were forgiven rapidly and was imposed on the nation while the leader of the nation Imran Khan was implicated in false, fabricated and politically motivated cases to keep him out of electoral arena. He recalled that under same strategy, PTI AJK government was ousted despite being in majority as the party's lawmakers were coerced and

pressurized to switch their loyalties. Qayyum Niazi that Kashmir situation warranted politically, economically and diplomatically stable and strong Pakistan to pursue the Kashmir case effectively at global stage and could put a presser to resolve the issue as per the UN-agreed resolutions. However, he said that only Imran Khan could fight the case of Kashmir effectively because he was the world's known leader and enjoyed public mandate. He lamented that muslim world remained tightlipped on the bloodbath of Palestinians and only Imran Khan could have taken up the issue at world level. Therefore, Niazi demanded that Khan should be released instantly to make Pakistan economically and politically strong and stable so as to fight the case of Kashmir and Palestine effectively. Speaking on the occasion, Leader of the Opposition in AJK assembly condemned the scheduled meeting between PM Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to discuss situation created after six judges penned a starling letter to SJC.

Arvind Kejriwal to remain in jail in corruption case

NEW DELHI: A court has extended Indian opposition leader Arvind Kejriwal's custody until Monday in a corruption case. The Delhi chief minister has denied allegations that he received kickbacks in a now-scrapped alcohol sales policy. The ruling comes a day after the US reiterated that it encouraged a "fair" legal process in the case. Mr Kejriwal was arrested last week amid criticism from opposition parties that the government was stifling them ahead of general elections in April and May. He was produced in court on Thursday, which had earlier been set as his last day in custody. Mr Kejriwal told the court that the case against him was a "political conspiracy" and that there was no concrete evidence to back the claims against him. But SV Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED), India's financial crimes unit, said that Mr Kejriwal had been "evasive in his replies".

After the hearing, Mr Kejriwal's lawyer Ramesh Gupta told reporters that the chief minister had "no objection to being in custody" but that he "opposed the grounds on which his remand is being sought". Mr Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of political vendetta. The BJP denies the allegation, saying it is acting against corruption. Mr Kejriwal is the third AAP leader to be arrested over the alleged corruption case. An alliance of more than 20 opposition parties have planned a protest rally in Delhi on Sunday against his arrest. The BJP has alleged that the now-scrapped alcohol policy - which ended the government's monopoly on liquor sales - gave undue advantages to private retailers. The ED has accused AAP leaders of receiving kickbacks to be used in state elections. The party denies the allegation.

On Wednesday, US State Department spokesperson, Mathew Miller, reiterated that the US was closely following Mr Kejriwal's arrest and actions taken against opposition parties in India. "We encourage fair, transparent, timely legal processes [in both cases]. We don't think anyone should object to that," Mr Miller said. He had made similar remarks on Tuesday, which prompted India to summon a senior US diplomat in Delhi to register its protest. India had criticised his remarks on Tuesday and issued a fresh statement on Thursday as well. "The recent remarks are unwarranted. In India, legal processes are driven by the rule of law. Anyone who has similar ethos, specially fellow democracies, should have no difficulty in appreciating this fact," a spokesperson from India's Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday. - Agencies

Israeli forces war crimes continue in Gaza strip

NEWS DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 174 on Thursday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes, shelter centers and aid convoys, and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, killing and injuring scores of citizens, despite the UN resolution, adopted on Monday by the UN Security Council, calling for an immediate ceasefire for the holy month of Ramadan. According to media sources, a child called Ibrahim an-Najjar died of malnutrition and dehydration at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza. Wafa news agency said that the child's death brought to 30 the number of the famine victims in Gaza. Meanwhile, eyewitnesses said that there are about 30 martyrs in the industrial area (Karni) in the east of Gaza City, saying the ongoing Israeli bombardment prevented their evacuation from the area. A citizen was also killed by Israeli gunfire in Hamad City in the north of Khan Yunis, south of Gaza, while three others were killed and 20 others were injured in an airstrike on a house in ash-Shuja'iya neighborhood in the east of Gaza City. Palestinian media sources affirmed that the Israeli occupation forces continue to execute, detain and abuse civilians at Al-Shifa Hospital and in the neighborhoods around it in northern Gaza. Al-Shifa Hospital and its nearby areas have been under Israeli siege and attack for 11 days. Over 200 civilians have been massacred and hundreds have been detained in the Israeli military campaign against the hospital.

PA announces a new Cabinet

RAMALLAH, West Bank: The Palestinian Authority has announced the formation of a new Cabinet as it faces international pressure to reform. President Mahmoud Abbas, who has led the PA for nearly two decades and remains in overall control, announced the new government in a presidential decree on Thursday. None of the incoming ministers is a well-known figure. Abbas tapped Mohammad Mustafa, a longtime adviser, to be prime minister earlier this month. Mustafa, a politically independent US-educated economist, had vowed to form a technocratic government and create an independent trust fund to help rebuild Gaza. Mustafa will also serve as foreign minister. Interior Minister Ziad Hab Al-Rih is a member of Abbas' secular Fatah movement and held the same portfolio in the previous government. The Interior Ministry oversees the security forces. The incoming minister for Jerusalem affairs, Ashraf Al-Awar, registered to run as a Fatah candidate in elections in 2021 that were indefinitely delayed. At least five of the incoming 23 ministers are from Gaza, but it was not immediately clear if they are still in the territory. The PA administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Its forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power in 2007, and it has no power there. It has little popular support or legitimacy among Palestinians, in part because it has not held elections in 18 years. - Agencies

Nine people die in Iran crash

TEHRAN: Nine people were killed in a car crash in northeastern Iran on Thursday, the worst single accident since the start of the Persian new year holiday, state media reported. Police say 585 people have died on the roads since the start of a holiday season that runs from 19 March to 1 April, and sees many Iranians travel to visit family. The latest accident in Semnan province east of the capital Tehran saw two vehicles crash and catch fire, reported IRNA state news agency quoting the emergency services. IRNA reported that the death toll for the holiday season last year was 1,217. The high number of deaths has been blamed on the poor condition of parts of the road network, careless driving and the low quality of the vehicles. A police official in 2022 accused local car makers of delivering "unsafe" vehicles to the public while charging them the same price as foreign companies. Several overseas car firms quit Iran in 2018 after the US reimposed sanctions over the country's nuclear program. - Agencies

Earthquake jolts Islamabad, Peshawar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A 5.3 magnitude earthquake jolted Islamabad, Peshawar, and upper regions of the country including Swat on Thursday. According to initial reports, tremors were felt in the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, and Swat district. Additionally, tremors were also felt in the cities of Muzaffarabad, Lower Dir, and Malakand. According to the earthquake monitoring center, the intensity of the earthquake was recorded at 5.3 on the richter scale, with a depth of 130 kilometers underground, and the epicenter was in the region of the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border. Due to the earthquake, people came out of their homes and continued to recite prayers. Currently, no information about any loss of life or property damage due to the earthquake has been received.

Pakistan to provide all possible security to Chinese

The spokesperson said the ongoing Israeli barbarism on unarmed Palestinian people must also end



SAIFULAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office said on Thursday that the government will ensure all possible security of Chinese citizens residing in Pakistan. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said during the weekly briefing that Pakistan condemns all types of terrorism. The Pakistan government was in touch with Chinese counterpart, she said and added that Pakistan and China are neighbours and have strong brotherly relations. She assured Beijing that a thorough investigation of Bisham incident was being conducted and the perpetrators would not go unpunished. Regarding Kashmir and Palestine situation, she said that the ongoing Indian atrocities in its occupied valley should end. Pakistan would continue to support Kashmiris until they get right to self-determination, Ms Baloch added. The spokesperson said the ongoing Israeli barbarism on unarmed Palestinian people must also end.

ZAMANA

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