



# Islamabad POST

Wednesday, April 03, 2024

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**Spain to recognize Palestinian statehood by July, says PM**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Turkiye urges NATO action on terrorism**

Detailed News On Page-07



**Ben Stokes to miss T20 WC 2024**

Detailed News On Page-06



## IHC CJ says

# Judges get 'mysterious' threat letters

Suspicious letters handed over to Counter-Terrorism Department for further investigation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Just a day after the Supreme Court of Pakistan took suo motu notice over allegations of the Islamabad High Court's chief justice and other judges against spy agencies, the IHC chief justice among eight judges received "suspected anthrax-laced letters", Geo News reported citing sources on Tuesday. A police team comprising experts launched a thorough probe to collect facts and ascertain powdery substance after the eight IHC judges received "suspicious letters containing suspected anthrax powder along with a threatening message". The letter was sent by a woman named Resham without mentioning her address, the sources said. They added that a staffer of a judge accidentally dropped the envelope containing the suspicious powdery substance and later he felt extreme irritation in eyes and burns on skin around his lips. Following the incident, Islamabad Inspector General (IG) and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) police have been summoned to the Islamabad High Court. All suspicious letters have been handed over the police for further investigation. The development came just a day after the Supreme Court took suo motu notice and formed a seven-member bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faiz Isa to hear the matter after the six IHC judges blamed spy agencies for meddling in judicial affairs. The seven-member bench will hold the maiden hearing on the issue tomorrow (Wednesday). Apart from the CJ the bench also comprises Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi,

Continued on Page 06

## Aitzaz moves SC to form commission

Ahsan urged the apex court to establish a three-member commission comprising sitting judges of the SC

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Senior lawyer Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan and the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LH-CBA) moved the Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday seeking an investigation into the allegations of spy agencies' interference in judicial proceedings. Ahsan urged the apex court to establish a three-member commission comprising sitting judges of the SC "to determine the officers and operatives of the ISI or other persons, if any, are or were involved in such unlawful acts and to report its finding to this [Supreme] Court". Last week, six judges of the IHC - Justices Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan,

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran Reza Amiri Moghadam called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

## Amid Gaza war US anti-Muslim incidents hit record high

About 3,600 of those incidents occurred from October to December, CAIR said

WEB DESK

NEW YORK: Reported discrimination and attacks against Muslims and Palestinians reached a record high in the US in 2023, driven by rising Islamophobia and bias as the Israeli bombardment of Gaza raged late in the year, data from an advocacy group showed on Tuesday. Complaints totalled 8,061 in 2023, a 56 per cent rise from the year before and the highest since the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) began records nearly 30 years ago. About 3,600 of those incidents occurred from October to December, CAIR said.

Continued on Page 06

## Border tension escalates between Baku, Yerevan

Azerbaijan says Armenian troops fired along border

NEWS DESK

BAKU: Azerbaijan has accused Armenian troops of opening fire along their volatile shared border, the latest flare-up in tensions between the Caucasus arch-foes despite ongoing peace talks. Azerbaijan's defence ministry said on Tuesday, "Units of the Armenian armed forces on April 1 opened fire with small arms at Azerbaijani army positions" near the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Continued on Page 06

## PPP grabs 11, PML-N 6

# Ruling alliance grabs majority Senate seats

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has postponed the Senate elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has taken the lead in the Senate polls with 11 seats, while Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) clinched six seats. The Muttahida Qaudmi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) secured an independent candidate Faisal Vawda secured one seat each. The polling for the 19 vacant seats was held in the National, Punjab, and Sindh assemblies while elections on 11 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's seats were postponed by the Election Commission over the "denial" of oath-taking to the lawmakers elected on reserved seats. Overall 356 lawmakers cast their votes in the upper house of parliament's elections, whereas,

Continued on Page 06

## Omar Ayub notified leader of opposition in NA

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) stalwart Omar Ayub has been notified as leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, the lower house secretariat said in a statement on Tuesday. NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq has declared Ayub as the opposition leader after completing the due process to appoint the opposition leader.

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

### MQM-P threatens to quit govt

If our people continue to be killed, we will leave the government

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Senator Faisal Subzwari Tuesday said his party will quit the federal government if the people of the port city continue to be killed amid the rise in street crimes across Karachi. Lamenting the 15-year-long rule of PPP in the province, the MQM-P senator said the demands for an operation would have come forward if such killings were happening elsewhere. "If our people continue to be killed, we will leave the government," he said, speaking with journalists in Karachi.

### Gohar terms Al-Qadir case as baseless

Gohar raised concerns about the disqualification case against Imran

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan dismissed the Al-Qadir Trust case as baseless, drawing parallels to the Toshakhana issue. Barrister Gohar said that he visited the detained PTI founder and discussed the ongoing legal proceedings related to the Al-Qadir Trust case. He asserted that similar to the Toshakhana case, the allegations against the PTI founder in the Al-Qadir Trust matter lack substance. Barrister Gohar expressed confidence that once these cases are reviewed by an independent judiciary, they will be dismissed.

## PTI demands probe

# Bushra Bibi being slow poisoned: Imran

Former premier requests court to order Bushra's medical examination by a doctor from Shaukat Khanum hospital

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: PTI founder Imran Khan claimed on Tuesday that his wife and former first lady had been poisoned while incarcerated at Bani Gala sub-jail and asked for her medical checkup by a doctor of his choosing. During the hearing of the £190 million corruption reference in Adiala jail, the former premier informed Judge Nasir Javed Rana that there had been an attempt to poison the former first lady and added that she has marks on her skin and tongue as a side effect of the "poisoning". "I know who is behind it," said the PTI founder. He added that if any harm came to Bushra, the army chief should be held responsible as members of an intelligence agency are controlling everything in Bani Gala and Adiala jail. Imran further urged the court to order Bushra's medical examination by Dr. Asim of Shaukat Khanum

Continued on Page 06

## Gandapur warns

# Won't allow oath-taking on reserved seats

"We will fight this and will not back down," the chief minister says

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: After the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) postponed the Senate polls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Chief Minister Ali Amin

Continued on Page 06

# Pak FY24 economic outlook remains bleak, warns WB

The multilateral donor said Pakistan's economy stabilised with improved economic management and new external inflows, while a sustained recovery, with improved growth prospects, and poverty reduction would remain a challenge

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank (WB) on Tuesday projected Pakistan's economy to grow by only 1.8% in the current fiscal year ending June 2024, stressing the need for structural reforms, as inflationary burdens have sent nearly 40% of the population below the poverty line. According to World Bank's latest "Pakistan Development Update: Fiscal Impact of Federal State-Owned Enterprises," the modest economic recovery in recent months is attributed to stringent monetary and fiscal policies, ongoing import control measures to safeguard limited foreign reserves, and subdued economic activity amidst low confidence levels. "A clearly articulated, ambitious, and credible economic reform agenda is required to reduce uncertainty and restore confidence. Risks remain very high, and key policy constraints to sustainable economic growth remain unaddressed. Policy buffers to manage any shocks remain depleted, with high

Continued on Page 06

## Budget cut imperils HE institutions

SIFC decision to further slash state funds to universities is a serious risk to higher education

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's top investment body's decision to cut state funding by Rs24 billion to public universities threatens the survival of higher education in the country, said the newly-appointed minister for federal education. On Monday in a question and

Continued on Page 06

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## PCMEA delegation calls on IG Prisons

LAHORE : A delegation of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) called on Inspector General of Prisons Mian Farooq Nazir in his office here on Tuesday. The delegation discussed training inmates in jails in manufacturing carpets by hand according to the market demand as per the modern requirements. In the first phase, a delegation of Carpet Training Institute (CTI) and PCMEA will visit Kot Lakhpat Jail to review the infrastructure and after the exchange of proposals, a formal Memorandum of Understanding MoU will be signed regarding the pilot project and mutual cooperation in the future. PCMEA Senior Vice Chairman Usman Ashraf and CTI Chairperson Ijazur Rehman lead the delegation, while Major (ret) Akhtar Nazir, Riaz Ahmed, Shahid Hasan Sheikh, Saeed Khan, Mian Atiqur Rehman and Mohammad Riaz were also present. DIG Headquarters Salik Jalal, DIG Inspection Qazi Aslam and AIG Industry Rana Razaullah Khan were also present. In the meeting, there was a discussion regarding the existing infrastructure for the production of handmade carpets in the prisons of Punjab, the working methods of the prisoners and the quality of the raw material.

IG Prisons Mian Farooq Nazir said that some jails of Punjab have regular infrastructure for manufacturing carpets by hand. "We are also improving the quality of raw material and in future it is directed that high quality wool will be used for the manufacture of carpets". "We would be happy to have a joint venture to teach inmates modern skills as per market demand". After exchange of proposals and a formal MoU, looms should be installed on a priority basis in those jails where infrastructure is not available and training of prisoners should be arranged, he said and added that the Prisons Department will provide its full support and facilities in this regard.—APP

## SNGPL cuts 2,436 connections for gas theft

LAHORE : Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) during its on-going gas theft crackdown, disconnected another 2,436 connections in Punjab, KP and Islamabad with Rs 28.73 million fine imposed. According to a spokesman for the SNGPL, in Lahore, the regional team disconnected 21 connections on illegal use of gas and 3 FIRs were lodged against gas thieves. In Multan, 844 connections were disconnected for the illegal use of gas while another 943 on the use of a compressor and 31 FIRs were lodged against gas thieves. The team also imposed a fine of Rs 6.08 million against gas theft cases. In Rawalpindi, the team disconnected 6 connections on illegal use of gas.—DNA

# KASBIT hosts first Inter-University space technology Hackathon

The purpose of the competition was to inspire Pakistani students to dream big and aim to solve complex problems in technology. New advances in AI create the challenge of making basic-level tech work redundant

DNA

KARACHI: KASB Institute of Technology (KASBIT) hosted the award ceremony for its First Inter-University Space Technology Hackathon on Monday, 1st April, in Karachi. The competition was sponsored by the Dr. Farid A. Khwaja Foundation. Over 40 students, across eight teams from six universities participated in the competition. The teams made projects which solved problems and challenges in space tech. The top prize went to the team from FAST, who designed a system to self-navigate a Lunar rover in a path which optimizes for energy efficiency. The second award was won by a team from the University of Karachi who built a track and navigate system to help satellites avoid space debris. The third winner was a team from NED, which made an interactive dashboard and chatbot for displaying anomalies on a space system. The KASBIT team got a special prize for diversity. Prof. Dr. Farid Akhtar Khwaja, Aezaz-e-Kamal, was the Chief Guest at the ceremony. Dr. Khwaja spoke about the genesis of Pakistan's space program and motivated the students by telling them about the rich history of Pakistanis in science and technology. Dr. Kashif, the Rector of KASBIT hosted the competition



and highlighted why STEM education is critical for Pakistani youth. The purpose of the com-

petition was to inspire Pakistani students to dream big and aim to solve complex problems in

technology. New advances in Artificial Intelligence create the challenge of making basic-level

tech work redundant. It is imperative for Pakistani students to raise their level and get motivat-

ed and mentored on subjects in advanced technologies.

## Health activists stress need for increasing taxes on cigarettes

Dr. Dogar stressed the pivotal role of increased cigarette taxes in deterring tobacco use among youth and low-income individuals

ISLAMABAD : Health activists, in a press release by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), emphasized the critical need for the government to prioritize health and economic agendas by increasing taxes on cigarettes. This call comes in tandem with the imminent commencement of negotiations on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Agreement and the crucial Budget Planning for 2024-25. With a focus on long-term public health and economic stability, Malik Imran Ahmad, Country Head of CTFK, emphasized the interconnected relationship between reduced tobacco consumption, improved health outcomes,

and enhanced revenue streams. He affirmed that prioritizing tobacco taxation in the forthcoming budget would not only safeguard public health but also propel the nation towards achieving its fiscal targets and commitments. To Propel Health and Economy Forward, Ahmad advocated for a 26.6% Federal Excise Duty (FED) increase on cigarettes, a move projected to recuperate 19.8% of healthcare expenditures associated with smoking-related diseases. He emphasized that this measure aligns with the impending IMF Agreement negotiations, contributing substantially to revenue generation crucial for budgetary allocations. In his statement, Ahmad

further highlighted that the government would benefit from increased revenue from tobacco products, potentially averting the need for an increase in petrol prices and subsequent rises in commodity prices. This strategic approach would provide much-needed relief to the public amidst economic challenges. Dr. Khalil Ahmad Dogar, Program Manager at SPARC, stressed the pivotal role of increased cigarette taxes in deterring tobacco use among youth and low-income individuals. Dr. Dogar reiterated that higher prices serve as effective deterrents, particularly for price-sensitive demographics such as

youth and the low-income population. He urged the government to leverage tobacco taxation not only to curb smoking initiation among youth but also to fortify public health initiatives and healthcare services. Dr. Dogar emphasized that policymakers must fulfill their electoral promises by taking decisive action against the tobacco industry. This includes continuous and consistent raises in tobacco taxation, the implementation of a single tax tier system, across-the-board implementation of the Track and Trace System, and maintaining a clear separation from the tobacco industry.—APP

## Admin monitoring exam centers to ensure merit, transparency

RAWALPINDI : Chairman, Rawalpindi Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RBISE) has said that the district administration on the directives of the Chief Secretary Punjab was monitoring the 9th first annual examination 2024 centers to ensure merit and transparency. According to a RBISE spokesman, Chairman RBISE, Mohammad Adnan Khan had visited various exam centers in connection with 9th First Annual Examination 2024 and reviewed all the arrangements. The Chairman visited Government Graduate College Chaoasidan Shah, Government Boys and Girls Higher Secondary School Basharat, Government Boys and Girls Higher Secondary School Sehgalabad, Government Boys and Girls High School Khanpur, Govt. Boys and Girls High School Malhal Mughlan. On complaints about non-implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued by the board in Government

Graduate College Chaoasidan Shah Exam Center, the chairman immediately suspended the staff and appointed new investigators. The Chairman ordered the authorities to take departmental action against the arrested accused. The Chairman said that on the instructions of Chief Secretary Punjab, the administrations of the respective districts were monitoring the examination centers established in the districts and tehils of the division on daily basis. The spokesman further informed that Deputy Commissioner, (DC) Chakwal Madam Qaratul Ain, District Police Officer, Chakwal Samiullah Farooq, DC Attock, Rao Atif, DC Murree, Zabeer Shirazi and Assistant Commissioners of various tehils also visited various examination centers and reviewed the arrangements. The Assistant Commissioner, Noorpur Kallar Kahar caught the staff at govt. boys high school red handed for

allowing the students to use unfair means. A FIR had been lodged against the Superintendent and all the staff and recommendation was also forwarded to the authorities concerned for a departmental inquiry. He informed that Controller of Examinations, RBISE, Prof. Sajid Mehmood Farooqui visited Govt. High School Kasran, Govt. High School Nara, Govt. High School Toba Domain, Govt. High School Khandana and Govt. High School Jafar in connection with the 9th First Annual Examination 2024. All the examination centers were being closely monitored, he said adding, strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against cheating mafia. The spokesman informed that the examination staff of two examination centers, Chaoasidan Shah and Noorpur Kallar Kahar, had been suspended and new staff was appointed to ensure merit and transparency.—APP

## Secretary stresses effective data system for childcare

QUETTA : Secretary Health Balochistan Abdullah Khan emphasized that to make the data system of monitoring of maternal and child care, nutrition targets and health facilities effective in the districts of the province. DG Health Dr. Farooq Hot, Additional Secretary Health Arif Achakzai, Director Public Health Dr. Faheem Khan and other officials participated in the meeting held on the other day. The meeting presided over by secretary health department discussed district-wise classification of health facilities related to maternal and newborn child and other health indicators. Secretary Health Balochistan Abdullah Khan while talking to the participants of the meeting said that according to data, these districts will be evaluated on the basis of desk monitoring to assess the number of health facilities, human resources, physical resources and quality of service delivery in the districts. In the meeting, it was decided that to devise a comprehensive strategy for availability of health care services at the Tehsil level due to the scattered population and remote areas of the province. "Tehsil level" data collection mechanism for evaluation/monitoring of PHC facilities will be devised." A strategy will be made for the MNCH program and the nutrition program to work together with the support of health department for proper utilization of resources.—DNA

## Minister Health approves promotion of 305 nurses

PESHAWAR : Minister Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Tuesday approved promotion and placement of 305 nursing staff promoted through departmental promotion committee in the Health Department. Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah stated that The Director General of Health Services will issue announcements regarding the placement of these nurses in various hospitals of the province. Following the approval of the Minister of Health, the services of these nurses will be assigned to different hospitals across the province. Out of these nurses, 156 have been promoted based on education, and 136 on seniority. The Minister of Health emphasized that promotion in service is a fundamental right of employees, and placements will address the shortage of nurses in various hospitals of the province. On the other hand, Minister of Health, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, chaired a meeting with a delegation representing Young Doctors Association, Provincial Doctors Association, and other forums led by Doctor Nabi Jan Afridi focal person to health minister for health community. During the meeting, discussions were held regarding the installation of prepaid electric meters at Lady Reading Hospital doctor's hostel and concerns of medical officers regarding this matter. The Minister of Health instructed the relevant authorities to take immediate action on this issue. It is worth noting that doctors involved in this matter protested vehemently yesterday.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Safdar Khan Chief Executive Officer of Serene Air receiving the Shield from Khurshid Barlas Founder Chairman of Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry during the meeting at his office and Fahad Barlas Convener Exhibition was present at the occasion.—DNA

## CONDOLENCE

APNS expresses profound grief over the sad demise of

**Mrs. Hameeda Merchant**

mother of

**Mr. Raihan Ali Merchant**

May Allah the Almighty rest her

soul in eternal peace

and grant courage to the

family to bear this loss.



All Pakistan Newspapers Society



## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### April

- April 04/Senegal National Day  
 April 07/W. H. O. World Health Day  
 April 12/Somalia Armed Forces Day  
 April 15/DPR Korea The Day of the Sun  
 April 16/Denmark National Day  
 April 17/Iran Army Day  
 April 17/Syria Independence Day  
 April 18/Zimbabwe Independence Day  
 April 24/Holy See Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate  
 April 25/DPR Korea Armed Forces Day  
 April 26/Tanzania National Day  
 April 27/Sierra Leone Independence Day  
 April 27/South Africa Freedom Day  
 April 30/Sweden Birthday of His Majesty  
 April 30/Netherlands Birthday of Queen

## Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

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



## Enquiry

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



## Hospitals

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



## Departments

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

## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq met with Leaders of Opposition Parties in National Assembly at Parliament House.—APP

# Saudi Arabia to digitize society in a decade

It was underscored and appreciated that Saudi Arabia with a population of around 40 million has made great strides in information technology, and its desire to digitize the society has transformed it within a span of less than a decade

### FAISAL SHIEKH

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a roundtable on Saudi Arabia's E-Governance as a model for Pakistan on Tuesday highlighted that Saudi Arabia with a population of around 40 million has made great strides in information technology, and its desire to digitize the society has transformed it within a span of less than a decade. The roundtable conference titled E-Governance in Saudi Arabia: Opportunities and lessons for Pakistan was organized here at Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with WE World News. CEO National Information Technology Board (NITB), Dr Babar Majid Bhatti was the chief guest, and the forum was also graced by Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique, who had also served as an envoy in Saudi Arabia. President IPRI Dr Raza Muhammad, Director Research Brig (R) Dr Raashid Wali Janjua, also participated in the dialogue.

It was underscored and appreciated that Saudi Arabia with a population of around 40 million has made great strides in information technology, and its desire to digitize the society has transformed it within a span of less than a decade. The speakers said that it is the sagacity of Saudi Arabia to diversify its economy from being oil-based to one on digital revolution. It, likewise, took a leap forward in acquiring the best of talent and expertise from world over in pursuit of setting up an infrastructure for e-commerce and ultimately e-governance. Dr Bhatti took pride in saying that today Saudi Arabia is number one on the index of countries who have transformed after starting from a scratch in 2017. This primarily is an outcome of its vision to create a backbone of data and to disseminate it in the national mainstream. He also said that the industry is looking for catalyst and transformers, and not merely those who can sit on the problem by evaluating

academic debates. Some of the great accomplishments that came the Saudi way are National Cybersecurity Authority (NCA), a monolithic landscape of development intended to tap the best of talent, and the highest level of commitment from the leadership. While drawing parallels, it was noted that though Pakistan possesses some of the great talent and industrious initiatives, it is lack of digital foundations that ails it. This is why Saudi Arabia today is successfully erecting a triangular pyramid of digital society, digital economy and digital governance; and this is rapidly transforming its economy from oil to digital in context. It was illustrated that the need for any evolving society that wants to digitize it is to have a strategy at the outset and backed by a roadmap of sustainability. The terms used in this context is Business Process Speed Engineering (BPSE), and that forms the crux for development and innovation. Dr Bhatti observed that Saudi Arabia had laid out a practical strategy with specified ob-

jectives, along with a consistent model. He noted that it's time to relate the academia with the industry, and he coined the idea of having Industry PhDs. Moreover, Saudi Arabia had proved that Research & Development needs to go hand-in-glove with industry, academia and the government. Vice-Admiral Hasham noted that Saudi Arabia is number four in terms of Smart Cities in the world, and the credit goes to the personal involvement of Saudi leadership and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman deserves praise for it. The fact that he sits on many of the boards related to development and digital context makes him lead from the front, it was pointed out. Ambassador Hasham said that 85 percent of Saudi society has access to E-governance, and this is no mean success. Likewise, more than 50% of its revenue at moment is from non-oil resources. The participants pointed out that Pakistan's fundamental problem as it takes the digital and e-governance route

is lack of facilities to opt for digital financial transactions. This aspect must be studied at length, and similarly by setting up smart cities, Pakistan can address many of its governance-related problems in a better way by documenting it on digitization. In this regard, stress was laid on digital literacy in Pakistan and the need for a transparent infrastructure. Irritants such as high cost of energy, lack of infrastructure and absence of regulations are hindering Pakistan from making strides in e-format headway. The discussants evolved that a state-sponsored policy to facilitate private sector is the need of the hour in order to harness the best of potential that Pakistan possesses, and streamline the same into e-governance. It was also noted that e-procurement can cut down 60% of transaction cost, and boost efficiency. The reason why Saudi Arabia has progressed is that it has taken out red-tapism from its bureaucracy, and evolved it on a format of ease-governance.

# Autism Spectrum Disorder affects speech

ABBOTTABAD: Head of Psychiatry department Ayub Medical Complex (AMC) Abbottabad Professor Dr. Aftab Alam Khan Tuesday highlighted the challenges posed by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on the occasion of the World Day of Children's Nervous Diseases. He expressed these views while addressing an awareness seminar at AMC. Dr. Aftab Alam said that ASD, a mental developmental disorder affecting speech, movements, and behaviors, has seen a significant rise in prevalence over the past two decades. Citing data from the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Aftab Alam Khan noted that one in every 100 children globally is diagnosed with ASD, with a particularly rapid increase observed in some regions such as the United States, where one in 35 children is affected. While the exact causes of ASD remain unidentified, Dr. Aftab Alam Khan pointed to several factors including genetic predisposition, advanced parental age, prenatal exposure to certain medications, and environmental influences. He highlighted the profound impact of ASD, noting that 40% of affected children struggle with speech, with many exhibiting delayed speech development until around 18 to 25 months of age. Emphasizing the importance of early diagnosis, the head of Psychiatry department stated that most cases are identified by the age of three, underscoring the need for timely intervention and support. Despite the absence of specific medications and treatments, Dr. Aftab Alam Khan stressed the potential for positive outcomes through early diagnosis and tailored therapies, which can help alleviate symptoms and improve quality of life for affected individuals. In light of these challenges, he urged governmental efforts to establish specialized autism centers, ensuring equitable access to treatment facilities for all residents of Pakistan.—DNA

# Speaker NA calls on President

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday called on President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr. During the meeting, the speaker congratulated the president on assuming his office, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release. Matters related to parliamentary affairs and legislation were also discussed during the meeting.—APP

# Dollar decline has reduced the cost of imports

Mian Zahid Hussain further said that border security gets relaxed during the Eid holidays, taking advantage of smugglers bringing and dumping goods worth billions of rupees into the country, which should be stopped

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Tuesday that the decrease in the dollar's value has reduced the cost of imported goods. However, it is unfortunate that certain importers are preventing the public from enjoying the advantages of reduced costs because of the compromised price control mechanism in the country, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the importers are filling their coffers instead of diverting the benefit of a strengthened exchange rate to the masses, which authorities should notice. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that the import cost of petroleum products has also reduced, but the price of petrol has increased, which is surprising. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the importers are busy filling their pockets instead of benefiting the people despite the fall of many commodities in the international market. He said that the price control mechanism in the country is compromised, which is keeping the masses from benefiting despite unprecedented inflation. He informed the dollar was available for 307 rupees in September last year, which has now decreased to 278. Still, the people are being deprived of its benefits. The business leader said that the price of imported wheat has also reduced, but the masses are getting flour at high prices. For example, the import cost of wheat, pulses, and many other edibles and the production cost of sugar have also been reduced. Still, people need to be given benefits. He said that India has started relieving its people by banning the export of onion and rice. Still, such a decision was not taken in Pakistan, providing an opportunity for exporters and smugglers to take full advantage of the situation at the cost of the masses. The unabated export and smuggling of onion have increased its prices in the local market, compounding the masses' problems. Still, it has been ignored by those running the show. Similarly, the prices of poultry, beef, and mutton are continuously increasing, which is expanding people's anxiety, but profiteering continues unabated. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that border security gets relaxed during the Eid holidays, taking advantage of smugglers bringing and dumping goods worth billions of rupees into the country, which should be stopped.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: April 02 - Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Kistafin called on Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif. —APP

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## Briefs

## Rs 132,000 fine imposed for violating dengue SOPs

RAWALPINDI: As many as 35 FIRs had been registered on violations of anti-dengue SOPs from January 1 to date in various areas of the Rawalpindi district, said District Coordinator Epidemiology Prevention and Control Dr Sajjad Mehmood here Tuesday. Giving details of the penalty actions, the health officer said that the district administration, in collaboration with allied departments, had sealed 38 premises, issued tickets to 83 and a fine of Rs 132,000 was imposed on violations of dengue SOPs in 2024. Dr Sajjad informed that around four confirmed cases had been reported in the district this year, while the number was two in 2023, and one in 2022 during the period. The health officer further stated that during indoor vector surveillance, the teams checked 1,045,853 houses and larvae were detected at 1,564 sites while during outdoor surveillance larvae were found at 300 spots while inspecting 269,547 places. Meanwhile, Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Aamir Khattak directed the officials to accelerate field activities for tracing larvae and expedite surveillance in the graveyards, junkyards and under construction sites which were the vulnerable places of dengue spread. He directed the health department to ensure the availability of required treatment and medicines in the hospitals and display posters and banners in the areas affected by dengue last year.—APP

## Road accident claims life

WAH CANTT: A man was knocked to death by a speeding dumper on the GT Road in the Taxila Police Station jurisdiction, on Tuesday here. According to police sources, the victim identified as Muhammad Sadiq had just finished offering prayers at a nearby roadside mosque when the recklessly driven dumper struck him resulting in his untimely demise at the scene. Authorities have launched a thorough investigation into the incident and have registered a case against the unknown dumper driver.—APP

## World Autism awareness day observed

ISLAMABAD: World Autism Awareness Day was observed on Tuesday across the world, including Pakistan about the acceptance, support, and inclusion of autistic people, and for the advocacy of their rights. The theme of this year's day was "Moving from surviving to thriving". This theme emphasizes the need to change the focus from simply dealing with autism to creating an environment in which autistic people can thrive. In the 76th plenary meeting conducted on the 18th of December 2007, the United Nations designated the 2nd of April as World Autism Awareness Day, which has been observed every year since 2008.—APP

## PAL, AJK Culture Academy to collaborate

ISLAMABAD: Director General Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Culture Academy Faizan Arif and Director General PAL Sultan Nasir on Tuesday agreed to collaborate in enhancing literary relations between PAL and AJK Culture Academy. In the meeting, during the visit of DG AJK Culture Academy to PAL, both sides have agreed to strengthen literary collaboration between the two institutions, said a press release issued here. Director General PAL, Sultan Nasir, briefed him about the role and contributions of the PAL in promotion of literary activities in the country. DG AJK Culture Academy commended the PAL's efforts and expressed the desire for initiating literary exchanges of writers and poets between AJK Culture Academy and PAL.—APP

## PIDE unveils reform agenda For economic revival

Former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and Vice Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Dr. Nadeem ul Haque, emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to address Pakistan's economic challenges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has launched an ambitious reform strategy, "ISLAAH: Immediate Reform Agenda - IMF and Beyond," to propel Pakistan towards economic stability and growth amid its looming financial crises. This initiative, embodying the ideals of rethink, reform, and revive, responds to Pakistan's urgent need for external financing exceeding USD 120 billion over the next five years, as highlighted by the recent IMF Report. PIDE's strategy is a clarion call for a systemic overhaul to ensure economic progress and prosperity, moving beyond the narrow interests that often dominate the discourse on reform in Pakistan.

Former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and Vice Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Dr. Nadeem ul Haque, emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to address Pakistan's economic challenges. The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has outlined an agenda aimed at tackling key areas such as regulatory modernization, tax reform, market liberalization, energy sector efficiency, and improvements in agriculture and banking. A central component of this strategy is the implementation of a 'Regulatory Guillotine' to eliminate burdensome regulations hindering business growth and innovation. The PIDE VC further added that the agenda outlines a series of innovative reforms designed to rejuvenate Pakistan's economic landscape. These include debt restructuring and intensified cooperation with the IMF, comprehensive tax reforms for a more business-friendly environment, and strate-



gic opening of the economy to prioritize exports and modernize import regulations. Additionally, it addresses energy sector inefficiencies, agricultural and banking sector improvements, and the development of real estate and capital markets to encourage investment and deepen capital market participation. The anticipated impacts of these reforms are substantial, promising to catalyze investment, foster job creation, and facilitate higher GDP growth. Addressing the historical event, Dr. Ahmad Waqar Qasim, Dr. Afia Malik, and Dr. Mahmood Khalid Senior Research Economists of PIDE, also took part in presenting PIDE's pioneering study. They stated that PIDE's groundbreaking economic reform initiative aims to streamline governance by addressing the burden of 122 regulatory bodies operating directly under the Federal Government, which currently account for over 50% of the GDP, as revealed by PIDE's Sludge Audits. In our pursuit of econom-

ic efficiency, it's imperative to shift from a system of permissions to clear rules, as permissions not only consume valuable time and resources but also incur significant documentation costs, both directly and in terms of missed opportunities. To achieve this, we must prioritize clear rules, digitization, and market liberalization, putting an end to the bureaucratic penchant for permissions and paperwork, thereby overcoming the 'Permissionistan' syndrome. Drawing inspiration from India's successful reforms in 1991, it's evident that piecemeal approaches won't suffice. Instead, we advocate for the implementation of a regulatory guillotine, a proven strategy adopted by countries like Hungary, Mexico, South Korea, and the UAE, among others. Nadeem ul Haque further stated that amidst the urgent need for tax simplification and policy certainty, this budget season demands immediate attention towards streamlining taxes in a revenue-neutral

manner and ensuring stability for a decade, with a commitment to refrain from introducing new taxes in each budget cycle. The adverse effects of tax uncertainty and instability, as highlighted by the PIDE State of Commerce Report, cannot be overstated, as they have driven investments underground, hindered firm growth, and impeded corporatization and listing. In addressing the income tax regime, we advocate for a uniform tax rate across all sources of income, with provisions for agriculture income losses carry-forward and adjustment, along with the elimination of the presumptive tax regime and taxes on turnover. Furthermore, we call for uniformity in taxation for AOPs, sole proprietors, and corporations, alongside reforms in inter-corporate dividend income and asset sales taxation. Transitioning from withholding taxes to Advance Income Tax mechanisms is also essential. Harmonizing the sales tax system across goods and services, expediting the implementation of POS through outsourcing within six months, and transitioning to a VAT mode with consistent rates are imperative steps forward. Additionally, excise duties should be increased on products detrimental to health and the environment, such as tobacco and beverages, to promote public well-being and sustainability. In the realm of tax exemptions and administrative reforms, it's imperative to halt all forms of concessionary financing and discriminatory fiscal incentives among businesses. Streamlining tax administration through automation to minimize human interaction is essential, coupled with the abolition of the arbitrary 'filer' and 'non-filer' distinction, as well as the elimination of 'FBR Rates' for property valuations.

## Chinese intercropping tech spreads to Pak, upgrading agri practices

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Maize-soybean intercropping, a prevalent cultivation pattern in China, has now found its way to Pakistan, altering the landscape of agricultural practices in the region. Scientists of the National Research Center of Intercropping (NRCI) at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur have just finished spring sowing. This year the intercropping demonstration fields have spread across all provinces of Pakistan, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Tuesday. The journey started with Pakistani scientists acquiring this cutting-edge technology from their Chinese counterparts, envisioning its potential to

revolutionize agriculture in their homeland. Experiment and demonstration trials began in 2018, spearheaded by these scientists at local farms, showcasing their acquired expertise. In 2021, under the vision of former Vice Chancellor of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Prof. Dr. Athar Mehbub, the National Research Center of Intercropping was established, comprising a team of local agronomists, breeders and soil scientists who ever studied overseas especially in China. "This shift is primarily attributed to the pivotal role of maize and soybean as staple grains for both food and feed production, essential for sustaining economies across various nations. In light of Pakistan's agricultural needs, we want

to uplift the country's agricultural sector and improve the economic well-being of farmers," said Dr. Muhammad Ali Raza, NRCI Director & International Researcher at Gansu Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Presently, NRCI is demonstrating three major intercropping systems i.e. maize-soybean, sugarcane-soybean, and cotton-soybean at farmer's fields in every province of Pakistan. Dr. Muhammad Ali Raza and Dr. Sajad Hussain are leading the intercropping demonstrations in about 11 districts of Punjab (Bahawalpur, Khanewal, Layyah, Vehari, Lodhran, Multan, Pakpattan, Kasur, Sheikhupura, Chiniot & Faisalabad), 5 districts in Sindh (Hyderabad, Larkana, Khairpur Mirs,

Thatha & Badin), 2 districts in KPK (Dik & Charsada), and 2 districts in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Muzafarabad & Bhimber), and these initiatives are also making inroads in Balochistan, furthering the adoption of intercropping practices in the region. NRCI is engaging in collaborations with multiple national and international universities and research institutes. University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Sindh Agriculture University (SAU), MNS University of Agriculture Multan, Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI), National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), National Institute for Biotechnology.

## Capital markets witness huge rush

ISLAMABAD: With the start of the third Ashra of Ramadan, Eid shopping had gained momentum and the citizens were thronging bazaars and malls. A great rush is being witnessed in almost all shopping malls and bazaars including Jinnah Super Market, Aabpara, Karachi company, F-10 Markaz and other markets of the city. Several local brands have begun displaying their latest Eid editions of dresses, shoes, and other essential accessories to attract buyers and gain maximum profits. The shopkeepers have decorated their shops with colourful lights to attract customers. A large number of women and children are thronging to markets to purchase clothes, footwear, cosmetics, henna, bangles and other items. As the festival of Eid comes closer, the stalls of beautifully designed colorful bangles, jewellery and mehndi in the markets of the city have been set up which are attracting the customers. Number of famous shops also offering upto fifty percent discount to attract customers. However, the buyers also complaining of the price hike on the occasion of Eid. A customer said that parents and children are unwilling to compromise on purchasing Eid clothes and gifts no matter how much prices rise. The sale of ready-made garments also increased in the last days of Ramadan when garment outlets displayed various ready-made clothes on sale which were attracting customers, said a shopkeeper.—DNA

## ANF recovers 716 kg drugs in nine operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting nine operations across the country managed to recover 716 kg drugs and arrested six accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Tuesday. He said, 745 grams Ice was recovered from a Doha-bound passenger arrested at Peshawar Airport. In another operation, 200 grams cocaine was recovered from a parcel sent to Karachi at a cargo office in Lahore. 150 kg heroin and 166 kg morphine were recovered from Chaman, the spokesman said adding, 110 kg heroin and 52 kg morphine were recovered from Yaro Pishin. In fifth operation, 100 kg hashish was recovered from RCD Road Lasbela area. Some 70 kg hashish and 6.2 kg opium were recovered from two suspects in Pindi Bhattian, Hafizabad. In 7th operation conducted near Northern Bypass Karachi, 50.4 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused, around 30 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects rounded up near Burhan Interchange Attock. In 9th operation, 11 kg hashish was recovered from Orakzai area. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.—APP

## IRSA releases 88,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 88,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 125,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1419.34 feet and was 21.34 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 29,100 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1089.40 feet, which was 39.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 37,400 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 40,900, 34,100, 32,500 and 6,500 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 35,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 18,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

## China's "overcapacity" an opportunity for Global South

ISLAMABAD: (So-called China's "overcapacity" an opportunity for the Global South, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Tuesday quoting scholars. "It's not that they don't want EVs; they just don't want Chinese EVs," noted Marco Fernandes, Research Fellow, Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, Brazil, while taking an exclusive interview with CEN. Who are they? "One of the things that I've been reading in and following recently is the fact that European countries and the United States are afraid of the competition with the Chinese EVs because they are better and cheaper." Fernandes while attending an international symposium held by Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China (RDCY) on March 31 told CEN that the collective West – through its powerful media – is making up a new accusation against China. "The buzzword now is overcapacity," he said, adding China is accused of overproducing some goods (mainly New Electric Vehicles and renewable energy equipment) and facing low domestic demand, which leads it to seek even more foreign markets to sell its production at low prices. Is it true that the prices of Chinese EVs are only low because the state subsidises these companies – harming the "market mechanism" to beat the competition in the global market? "This accusation is based on half-truths. Yes, the Chinese state subsidises many of its companies. So do the US, Europe, and many other countries around the world. It's part of the game of global competition. However, innovation and high productivity also help to lower the prices of Chinese products," Fernandes pinpointed. With high-quality craftsmanship, innovative designs, and competitive pricing, companies like BYD, NIO, Xpeng, Hongqi, and Lynk & Co are now winning hearts and minds in many countries. Not long ago, the idea that Chinese car manufacturers could make Germans feel "intimidated" seemed unthinkable. But today, China's auto exports have surged, reaching a record high of 4.91 million vehicles in 2023 as the country's automakers expanded their presence overseas.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Principal of Islamabad Model School for Girls Mehwish Aftab giving away third position prize to Muhamamd Shaheer on the occasion of annual results.—DNA

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## EU's emission reduction resolution

ACCORDING to European media reports, the head of the European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament Manfred Weber recently said in an interview that China is profiting from the climate policy of the European Union (EU). He claimed that Europe's "ban on the combustion engine was a serious industrial policy mistake from which China is benefiting" and the Green Deal, which encompasses EU climate policy measures, should not become a "China Deal." Weber previously rejected the 2035 internal combustion engine ban in the European Parliament. His statement this time is not surprising. However, his linking of this issue with China "profiting from" the Europe reveals some alarming developments in the European side. The EU has taken a relatively active attitude on addressing climate change and promoting the green transition. The bloc launched the EU "Green Deal," with the goal of becoming the world's first "climate-neutral" continent by 2050. However, ahead of the European Parliament elections in June, there is growing concern among the public that Europe's climate ambitions are shrinking and the EU Green Deal "collides with geopolitical and economic reality." It is a realistic problem for Europe to figure out how the Green Deal will adjust in the next stage and where the green transition will ultimately lead. The world is paying attention to these developments. However, Weber's words represent the most absurd and dangerous direction. Weber appeared to be discussing the combustion engine ban; but, in fact, he was representing a force behind him to provide an excuse for the EU's protectionism in the electric vehicle (EV) sector, while finding a scapegoat for the difficult situation that the bloc's Green Deal is in. This does not hold up under scrutiny. Europe is the continent with the fastest warming climate, with surveys showing that 77 percent of Europeans are very concerned about climate change. Recent reports from the EU also highlight the urgency of continuing to promote green transformation. Because of this, the EU has always set high emission reduction targets. Regardless of any problems that may arise during the actual implementation process, the EU should look for reasons within itself rather than blaming China. On the contrary, the EU's commitments and written laws, if shaken just because China sold a few more EVs, would seem a bit cheap, wouldn't they? However, what is really seen by the international society is that the US and Europe have "flipped pancakes" or "taken small steps back" on the commitments they have previously made. The development of clean energy technology and industry in China provides huge possibilities for its own and global green transformation. Instead of being happy about this breakthrough belonging to all mankind, the West is trying to limit it with various smears and policy barriers. The international community cannot help but doubt: Is the West just "making empty promises" in emissions reduction? This suspicion is actually caused by the West itself, and its negative impact on the global joint efforts aimed at addressing climate change is significant, with even greater repercussions on the West's reputation.

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## Central Asia and China's energy needs

THE Chinese economy has experienced a major breakthrough over the past forty years, catapulting it to the position of the world's second-biggest economy. This breakthrough is now reflected in the Asian giant's foreign policy. While China's global rise in the last four decades has manifested itself across diverse sectors, it has also brought forth various implications in Central Asia, with relations between China and Central Asian Turkic republics rising to a strategic level. A closer examination reveals that Beijing's energy diplomacy is crucial to the fundamentals of China's foreign policy. This is mainly due to China ranking first in the world in energy consumption. As a region with rich oil and natural gas reserves, Central Asia is strategically significant for China's energy diplomacy. In fact, Central Asia has nearly 19 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 45 percent of natural gas reserves. An analysis of China's relations with the Turkic republics of Central Asia over the past 30 years reveals that most of China's engagement with these countries has been in the area of oil and natural gas imports, as well as the construction of pipelines for these imports. For example, Turkmenistan, currently the largest natural gas supplier to China, sells approximately 40 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually through the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China pipeline, which began operations in 2009. The pipeline spans 185 kilometres in Turkmenistan, 529 kilometres in Uzbekistan, 1300 kilometres in Kazakhstan, and approximately five thousand kilometres within China's borders. The 7,000-kilometre pipeline, known as the Central Asia-China Pipeline, comprises four pipelines: A, B, C, and D. Line A started operating in 2009, Line B in 2010, and Line C in 2013. These three lines operate as parallel pipelines and have a total capacity of 25 billion cubic metres of natural gas. Of the 25 billion cubic metres, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan share 10 billion cubic metres, 10 billion cubic metres, and 5 billion cubic metres, respectively. These three pipelines begin in the Saman Tepe region of Turkmenistan and terminate in the Hergas region of China. Over the last 30 years, China has also strengthened and elevated its relations with Kazakhstan in the energy sector to a strategic level. Today, China is the most important actor in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector, and these relations are expected to deepen in the coming period. Additionally, Russia's non-payment of its debt to Turkmenistan prompted Turkmenistan to change its gas export strategy. Thus, Turkmenistan minimised its natural gas sales to Russia and maximised them to China, making China the largest customer of Turkmen natural gas. During a period when Russia was defaulting on Turkmenistan's debt, China attempted to build trust in bilateral relations by extending a \$4 billion loan to Turkmenistan as a goodwill gesture. Turkmenistan, also as a gesture of goodwill, has granted Chinese companies the opportunity to become partners and invest in the South Yolotan Gas Field. However, the most significant aspect of China-Turkmenistan relations is the China-Central Asia Pipeline Project, which spans more than 7,000 kilometres.

# India's anti-minority electoral environment

Air Commodore Khalid Iqbal (R)

The autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir was illegally repealed by the Indian government on 05 August 2019. Likewise, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed in December 2019. Some of the recent moves focused on revitalising these laws for enhancing the dividends of upcoming elections are: on 10 December 2023, the BJP government was able to get a verdict from the Indian Supreme Court (ISC) in favour of the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution, hence giving legal cover to the annexation of IIOJK; on 11 March the "Citizenship (Amendment) Rules 2024" were issued to enforce the CAA 2019; On 16 January, a newly...

IN India, the ascendancy to political power requires attracting the Hindu votes. This reality is well known to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Therefore, historically, some of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party's (RSS-BJP) discriminatory moves against religious minorities come either on the heels of a major election victory or in the run-up to elections. For India's upcoming general elections, the vote is blatantly being sought on anti-minority sentiment. A group of United Nations Special Rapporteurs has urged "corrective actions to protect human rights and attacks against minorities in the run-up to India's national elections". To perpetuate the RSS-BJP rule, the Modi government has incrementally mixed religion with politics in an intoxicating combination that fascinates India's Hindu majority population, especially the extremist factions. Traditionally, airing a strong anti-minority sentiment in general, and radiating hatred towards Muslims, in particular, have been the hallmark of the RSS-BJP electoral campaigns. And, with regard to India's foreign policy, anti-Pakistan and anti-China rhetoric is added to election sloganeering to magnify the jingoistic impersonation of the BJP leadership. The RSS-BJP duo reinforced work on this strategy soon after winning the second term by the incumbent government in 2019. Since then, massive legislation has taken place to ensure legal cover for accruing undue electoral advantage to the BJP by mobilising the Hindu vote through promotion of hate against minorities. Some of these laws remained dormant for over four years until they were given an operative push as the 2024 elections approached. The broader objective of unleashing a whole range of anti-minority laws is to speedily institutionalise the conversion of a secular India into a Hindu state. The mushrooming tide of Hindutva is

causing speedy economic, social, and political marginalisation of minority communities. The autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir was illegally repealed by the Indian government on 05 August 2019. Likewise, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed in December 2019. Some of the recent moves focused on revitalising these laws for enhancing the dividends of upcoming elections are: on 10 December 2023, the BJP government was able to get a verdict from the Indian Supreme Court (ISC) in favour of the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution, hence giving legal cover to the annexation of IIOJK; on 11 March the "Citizenship (Amendment) Rules 2024" were issued to enforce the CAA 2019; On 16 January, a newly built temple in Ajodhya was dedicated to the Hindu deity Ram. This temple was constructed on the site of the historic Babri Mosque that was demolished by Hindu fanatics in 1992, under the protection of the BJP's provincial government; and, on 19 March, fourteen political parties of IIOJK were disbanded, to ensure a BJP walkover in the upcoming state elections. The ISC agreed on 19 March to consider a plea to stay the operation of the CAA Rules on 9 April, just ten days before the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections would begin. The Indian government has refused to make a statement that it would not grant hasty nationality to non-Muslim immigrants while the case trial proceeds at the ISC. By the time the verdict is pronounced, the major damage would have occurred. The SCI appears hand in glove with the RSS-BJP government to disenfranchise a major chunk of Indian minorities before the upcoming election. In the Indian state of Assam, CAA has triggered anxieties that the law, combined with the "National Register of Citizens", may be invoked to pronounce the decades-old residents as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, hence

leading to taking away their citizenship. Indian opposition parties' leadership has labelled the CAA rules "communal and divisive". Congress has stated that "the timing right before the elections is evidently designed to polarise the elections." Some chief ministers of Indian states have even refused to implement the law in their respective states. There has been a continuous downpour of international condemnation of these discriminatory anti-minority laws. Soon after the promulgation of the CAA Act 2019, the "US Commission on International Religious Freedom" (USCIRF) called it "a dangerous turn in the wrong direction". The US government and the United Nations have expressed concerns, calling CAA "fundamentally discriminatory in nature". Pakistan has also expressed concerns over the Indian government's recent move to implement the controversial law. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) has termed the notification of CAA-related rules 2024 "fundamentally discriminatory" and "in breach of international obligations of India." Amnesty International said "it discriminates against Muslims". Amnesty India stated that the law "goes against the constitutional values of equality and international human rights law." Pre-election polls indicate that the BJP and its allies are likely to win more than 400 seats, which is well above the two-thirds majority. Yet the RSS-BJP's appetite for grabbing absolute power is propelling it to stampede the minorities' political rights. The international community, in general, and the UNHCR, in particular, need to persuade India for an immediate course correction.

— Air Commodore Khalid Iqbal (Retd) is Director National Security at Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore Pakistan. He may be reached at [info@casslhr.com](mailto:info@casslhr.com)

## "Beyond interference: redefining the scope of judicial protection"

Qamar Bashir



Rejecting the Terms of Reference (TORs), analysts and jurists argue the letter written by the six judges transcends mere complaints or allegations. Instead, it resembles a decision by a six-member high court bench. After conducting investigations, gathering facts, and recording witness testimonies, the bench unequivocally declared the unlawful elements within the country's prime spying agency and the establishment guilty of blatant and brute...

CHIEF Justice Qazi Faez Esa, nearing the end of his tenure, chose not to address the complaint filed by six serving judges through the Supreme Judicial Council or by convening a full court of the Supreme Court. Instead, he passed it onto the civilian government, which many perceive as being under the complete influence of the powerful establishment. This decision has been viewed as a missed opportunity to restore judicial independence from the alleged overwhelming control exerted by the establishment, which is often equated with the state itself. This control extends to all facets of governance, including the parliament, governments, cabinets, electoral processes, judicial proceedings, and foreign policy decisions, as well as the management of trade, business, investment, agriculture, and livestock. The Chief Justice's decision to avoid addressing the complaint prompted over 300 members of the legal fraternity to stage a protest before the Supreme Court today (31.03.2024), urging the Court to take responsibility for adjudicating the matter under Article 184(3) of the Constitution. They argued that any government-led commission would lack the necessary independence and authority to properly investigate the claims. Analysts, jurists, and lawyers have widely criticized the appointment of Tassaduq Hussain Jilani, who served as the 21st Chief Justice of Pakistan from 2013 to 2014, to head the one-man commission tasked with adjudicating the complaint of six judges. Many have deemed this appointment highly inadequate, inappropriate, and out of context, given Jilani's age—barely two years younger than Pakistan itself. They argue that since the complaint directly implicates the executive branch as the culprit, appointing a commission headed by someone associated with the executive undermines the integrity of the process. It's seen as illogical and unfitting for the accused to be tasked with providing justice to the complainants. Meanwhile, the PTI, emerging as one of the largest stakeholders, has been particularly affected by judicial decisions allegedly manipulated by the establishment. These decisions have targeted the incarceration of PTI's former chairman and top-tier leadership, resulting in significant upheaval within the party. PTI has not only lost its founding chairman, top and second-tier leadership, but also its iconic symbol and brand name. Currently, it has been absorbed into an irrelevant and sectarian party, Sunni Ittehad, thereby alienating sympathizers from other sects. The heavy toll this has taken on PTI appears irreversible at this juncture. The terms of reference assigned to the commission are notable for their focus on investigating direct involvement of officials in judicial interference and recommending appropriate action against implicated agencies, departments, or

state institutions based on evidence uncovered. However, the absence of mention regarding indirect involvement suggests a potential gap in the scope of the inquiry. Additionally, the commission's starting assumption that no interference has occurred places the burden of proof on the six judges, who must substantiate their claims comprehensively with evidence, witnesses, and circumstantial evidence. Failure to do so could lead to the judges facing accusations of lodging false or concocted complaints, adding a significant layer of complexity to the proceedings. Moreover, granting the commission the authority to explore additional matters deemed totally inappropriate. The analysts and jurists believe that the TORs assigned to the commission lack specificity and urgency in addressing the issue of unlawful interference. While they include provisions for investigating interference and recommending action, they may not adequately address the need for proactive measures to prevent future interference or hold accountable those responsible. Additionally, the assigned TORs may not fully acknowledge the complexity of the issue or provide clear guidance on how to address challenges such as fixing responsibility in the absence of concrete evidence. Rejecting the Terms of Reference (TORs), analysts and jurists argue the letter written by the six judges transcends mere complaints or allegations. Instead, it resembles a decision by a six-member high court bench. After conducting investigations, gathering facts, and recording witness testimonies, the bench unequivocally declared the unlawful elements within the country's prime spying agency and the establishment guilty of blatant and brute interference in judicial matters. The bench highlighted that the unlawful elements within the establishment use coercive tactics, including intimidation, blackmail, and eavesdropping, to influence bench formations and court decisions aligning with their political and administrative agendas. Furthermore, by openly defying or frustrating court orders that contradict their objectives, the unlawful elements within the establishment undermines the judiciary's independence. The bench sought guidance from the Supreme Judicial Council on defensive measures to safeguard against such unlawful interference and ensure the judiciary's autonomy to dispense justice impartially and transparently. Analysts and jurists criticize the use of the phrase "interference of the executive". They argue that the type of interference faced by the judiciary transcends constitutional boundaries and legal frameworks. Rather than being categorized as executive interference, it should be characterized as unlawful coercion perpetrated by rogue elements within state institutions. These elements employ illicit

means to manipulate and intimidate the judiciary, undermining its independence and impartiality therefore cannot be legally termed as executive. As such, they should not be regarded as lawful actors but as unlawful elements seeking to subvert the rule of law through coercion and intimidation tactics. Henceforth, the Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Commission should reflect a proactive approach, beginning with the acknowledgment that unlawful interference with the judiciary has already been substantiated. The Commission should then focus on recommending measures to safeguard the judiciary from undue, unlawful, and blatant interference perpetrated by rogue elements within state security institutions. Secondly, the Commission should provide practical and actionable recommendations regarding how the lower and higher judiciary can respond effectively to such unlawful interference. These recommendations should empower the judiciary to maintain its independence and integrity in the face of external pressures. Thirdly, the Commission must address the challenge of fixing responsibility on unlawful elements within the state security apparatus, even in the absence of concrete evidence and witnesses. Given the sophisticated techniques employed by these elements to conceal their activities, the Commission should explore innovative strategies for holding them accountable. Fourthly, the Commission should propose the enactment of new legislation and regulations aimed at establishing dedicated security forces tasked with protecting the lower and higher judiciary from unlawful interference, whether originating from within state institutions or external non-state actors. Lastly, the Commission should recommend mechanisms to ensure the implementation of court decisions and prevent their violation or frustration through selective administrative, legal, or illegal means. These measures should reinforce the rule of law and uphold the authority of judicial decisions in the face of external pressures. The proposed Terms of Reference (TORs) present a comprehensive and proactive approach to addressing the issue of unlawful interference with the judiciary. They prioritize acknowledging the existing problem and recommending concrete measures to safeguard judicial independence and integrity. By focusing on empowering the judiciary to respond effectively, holding accountable those responsible for interference, and proposing legislative reforms, the proposed TORs offer a robust framework for addressing the challenges at hand.

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



## Briefs

## Judges get 'mysterious' threat letters

FROM PAGE 01  
Justice Athar Minallah, Justice Mussarat Hilali, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan. The explosive letter which surfaced last week triggered a crisis and the Supreme Court led by CJP Isa has been under pressure to hear the matter under Article 184(3) of the Constitution. Just a day earlier, over 300 lawyers belonging to different bar associations across the country lauded the judges' and called upon the apex court to hear the matter under its suo motu jurisdictions.

## Aitzaz moves SC to form...

FROM PAGE 01  
Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Saman Rafat Imtiaz - penned a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), expressing their concerns about the "interference" of the intelligence agencies in the affairs of the court. He sought directives for the federal government to dismiss individuals implicated in "unlawful acts", with no entitlement to retirement or other benefits from the national treasury. For those who have already retired, it specified the cessation of any retirement or associated benefits. Ahsan urged the federal government to enact necessary regulations to fulfil the clauses of the petition. His petition referred to Article 184(3) of the Constitution to question the matter of public importance in the six IHC judges letter case.

## Bushra Bibi being slow poisoned...

FROM PAGE 01  
Hospital, adding that he and the party do not trust the doctor who examined Bushra earlier. He also urged to have an inquiry into the matter of Bushra's alleged poisoning. Following the former premier's request, the court directed Imran to submit a detailed application regarding the former first lady's medical examination. Talking to the media during the hearing, Bushra said rumours regarding her being an 'American agent' were circulating in the party. She further said that she was poisoned by "three drops" of a popular toilet cleaner which were added to her food and claimed that a person's health deteriorates after a month of consumption.

## Won't allow oath-taking on reserved...

FROM PAGE 01  
Gandapur reiterated that they won't allow lawmakers elected on reserved seats to take an oath. "Those who became [assembly] members illegally will not be allowed to take oath [...]. We will not compromise on our constitutional right," Gandapur said while speaking to the media outside the KP Assembly in Peshawar on Tuesday. His remarks come after Senate elections were postponed in the province by the ECP after it was moved by the opposition parties in the wake of their ongoing stand-off with the government over the oath-taking issue.

## Pak FY24 economic outlook...

FROM PAGE 01  
levels of debt and tightly constrained foreign exchange reserves," the WB report said. The report said under the current policy settings, and unless a major structural reform programme was durably implemented, growth was expected to remain muted amid continued very low investment, persistent external imbalances (likely necessitating continued import and capital management measures), distortionary fiscal policies, and a large state presence in the economy.



ISLAMABAD: Army and Laycons, A womens category final of All Pakistan Ramadan Cup Basketball Tournament at Pakistan Sports Complex in the Federal Capital organised by Federal Basketball Association. Pakistan Army won this match with 12-5. - Online

## All Pakistan Ramadan Cup

## Army and Wapda annex Basketball tourney titles

Wapda ace players Kaleemullah and Zain ul Hasan again led the winning side by scoring 9 and 7 points respectively while Amir Farooq scored 6 points for the losing side

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Unbeatable Pakistan Army and Wapda A emerged victorious in Women's and Men's departmental categories of All Pakistan 3x3 Ramadan Cup Basketball Tournament, which concluded here at Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad. In a fiercely contested match witnessed between Army and Lycans A Club, Army team displayed exceptional skills and tenacity, battling until the end of the match by securing women's title by 12-5 points. Aamina Mohsin of Army emerged as the player of the night, contributing a stellar performance with 8 points along with Hadiya added 3 points while Mahrukh Ali scored 3 points for Lycans A. In Men's departmental final Wapda A was too strong against Wapda B continued their good show in the tournament and thrashed their op-

ponent by 21-10 points. Wapda ace players Kaleemullah and Zain ul Hasan again led the winning side by scoring 9 and 7 points respectively while Amir Farooq scored 6 points for the losing side. Pakistan

Basketball Federation (PBBF) President Brig (R) Muhammad Iftikhar Mansoor was the chief guest of concluding ceremony who presenting the winning trophies and cash rewards to the winning

teams while Deputy Director General Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Muhammad Saeed Akhtar, Pakistan Basketball Federation Associate Secretary and organizing committee secretary Ouj E Za-

hor, President Federal basketball Association Ejaz Rafi Butt, PBBF Chairman selection Committee Col. (R) Shujaat Ali Rana, National Coach Malik Muhammad Riaz, Muhammad Azam Dar and other dignitaries were also present in the concluding ceremony. Earlier in the semi-final round of the tournament, Wapda A secured victory against Army A by 18-16 points and Wapda B against Army C by 21-19 points in departmental category while Army beat Lycans C by 12-11 points and Lycans A beat Lycans B by 10-5 points in women's category. The 3x3 All Pakistan Ramadan Cup is more than just a tournament; it's 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 sport's visibility and interest among the youth and sports enthusiasts across Pakistan.



## Pakistan's tentative squad for NZ T20I series finalised

Pak likely to announce 18-member squad for NZ T20I series in two days

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) could announce the national squad for the T20I series against New Zealand in a couple of days, Geo News reported. The consultation process has begun to finalise the names in Kakul, Abbottabad, where the national squad is currently taking part in a training camp. Consultation over finalising the names is underway between skipper Babar Azam and national selectors in Kakul, where players are undergoing strict physical training under the supervision of Pakistan Army staff. A day earlier, the captain and selectors held a meeting

with PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi for the same reason. The sources said since it was a home series, an 18-member squad was expected to be announced. Fast bowler Haris Rauf, who suffered a shoulder injury during the recently concluded Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9, is not completely fit and would continue the rehab process. The players under consideration for the five-match series are Babar, Saim Ayub, Muhammad Rizwan, Sahibzada Farhan, Salman Ali Agha, Iftikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Shadab Khan, Usama Mir, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Imad Waseem, Muhammad Amir, Zaman Khan, Usman Khan, Wasim Jr, Irfan Niaz and Abbas Afridi. Whereas, Fakhar Zaman's

hand injury is being reviewed. Meanwhile, there are also reports that the leading pacer Shaheen may miss a part of the New Zealand series in line with the policy of the cricket board to lessen the burden on team's key fast bowlers. The News reported Tuesday that there are ongoing consultations on the matter to protect the pacers from unnecessary burden and test the form and fitness of newcomers. On the flip side, the fast bowlers who are making a comeback have more chances to be included in the T20I series against the Kiwis. There are chances that leading fast bowlers including Shaheen will be rested for the first part of the series or the complete series against the visitors.

## Ben Stokes to miss T20 World Cup 2024

Stokes wants to focus on regaining his fitness ahead of the Test matches this summer

LONDON: England all-rounder Ben Stokes won't feature in this year's Twenty20 World Cup after stating that he is not available for selection on Tuesday. Stokes wants to focus on regaining his fitness ahead of the Test matches this summer, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement. England are the reigning T20 World Cup champions, having bagged their second title in 2022 in Australia. The ECB added that Stokes wants "to get fully fit to bowl" for the upcoming Test series against West Indies and Sri Lanka. Stokes underwent knee surgery in November which affected his ability to bowl regularly. "I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket," Stokes, England's Test captain, said in a statement. "Opting out of the IPL and the World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future. The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling. - Agencies

## Tight at the top as Ipswich lead Championship

Sarmiento's 97th-minute winner stuns Saints as hosts return to top spot

LONDON: Ipswich were left with a slender one-point lead at the top of the Championship as the race for automatic promotion to the Premier League headed towards a thrilling finale. Leeds left it late to see off Hull 3-1 in the final Championship fixture of the day as they went second in the table, just a point behind Ipswich. And Leicester reignited their bid for automatic promotion with a 3-1 win at home to Norwich. They ended the day in third place, a point behind Leeds and two adrift of Ipswich but with a game in hand. Only the top two clubs at the end of the regular season are guaranteed a place in the Premier League, with the teams finishing third to sixth involved in the post-season play-offs that determine the other promoted side. Jeremy Sarmiento proved to be a 'super sub' after scoring a stoppage-time winner as Ipswich, briefly nudged off top spot by Leicester, returned to the summit with a dramatic 3-2 win at home to Southampton. It seemed as if goals from Che Adams and Adam Armstrong had put Southampton on course for victory following Leif Davis's well-struck opener for Ipswich. But Ipswich, who've now won 31

points from losing positions this season, again proved to be masters of the comeback. Nathan Broadhead equalised in the 68th minute before Southampton's Jason Bree was sent off in the 85th minute for dragging back Davis. Ipswich's attitude was summed up when Sarmiento, despite a slip, struck in the seventh and final minute of stoppage time to spark delirious scenes at

Portman Road. "It was right up there," said Ipswich manager Kieran McKenna. "It was another brilliant day, brilliant match to be involved in." Defeat effectively ended Southampton's hopes of automatic promotion, with manager Russell Martin lamenting: "We were the best team, we didn't deserve to lose." Leeds also left it late to reclaim second place at Elland Road.

Goals from Sam Byram and Fabio Carvalho cancelled each other out but an 88th-minute penalty from Crysenio Summerville and Dan James' effort deep in stoppage-time made the game safe for Leeds. James' strike, with Hull goalkeeper Ryan Allsop off his line as the Tigers went in search of an equaliser, capped a difficult week for the Wales winger after he had a penalty saved in a shoot-

out loss to Poland that denied his country a place at Euro 2024. "There was no doubt this was a well-deserved win...but it was a complicated game for us," Leeds manager Daniel Farke told the BBC. "For many of my players it was their third game in six days because they've played on Tuesday or Wednesday on international duty." Goals from Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall, Stephy Mavididi and Jamie Vardy enabled Leicester to complete a comeback after Gabriel Sara gave Norwich the lead. Leicester have topped the table for much of the season, but Monday's success was just their third win in eight league games, with Foxes boss Enzo Maresca saying: "This was important, because we are in the final part of the season." At the other end of the table, Rotherham staved off relegation for at least another week by beating Millwall 2-1 as they ended a run of 15 games without a win courtesy of just their fourth league victory of the season. Birmingham moved two points clear of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win over play-off hopefuls Preston, Jay Stansfield scoring the only goal of the game. - Agencies



## Budget cut imperils HE institutions

FROM PAGE 01  
answer session in the National Assembly, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, the minister for federal education and professional training, was asked when the budget for public sector universities will be increased. In a written response, the minister explained that funds allocated by the federal government to public universities in Islamabad and the provinces has remained stagnant at Rs65 billion since 2018, even when the financial needs of universities have "drastically" increased against the allocated money, from 21% in 2018-19 to 45% in 2023-24.

## Ruling alliance grabs majority...

FROM PAGE 01  
votes of five NA lawmakers were rejected. So far, the ruling party in Sindh - the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) - managed to win 10 Senate seats from the province, whereas, each Senate seat was won by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and an independent candidate. On the general seat, Ashraf Ali Jatoi, Dost Ali Jessar, Kazim Ali Shah, Masroor Ahsan, and Nadeem Bhutto have been declared victors, as per preliminary results. MQM-P's Amir Chishti has been elected senator on a general seat while independent candidate Faisal Wavda also won the general seat in the Senate.

## Omar Ayub notified leader...

FROM PAGE 01  
The NA speaker ratified Ayub's request, after the latter called on the former. Opposition members Gohar Ali Khan and Malik Amir Dogar were also present in the meeting which exchanged views on the opposition leader's nomination. The NA secretariat in a tweet said, "The speaker of the National Assembly declares Omar Ayub the Leader of the Opposition after the completion of the scrutiny process under Rule 39 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the National Assembly." Ayub's name was proposed by the majority of the opposition. "The time for submission of papers for the nomination of the Leader of the Opposition was April 1, 2024, till 6 pm. No other candidate's papers have been received by the stipulated time," the NA said.

## US anti-Muslim incidents...

FROM PAGE 01  
Human rights advocates have similarly reported a global rise in Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian bias and antisemitism since the latest eruption of conflict in the Middle East. US incidents have included the fatal October stabbing of six-year-old Palestinian American Wadea Al-Fayoume in Illinois, the November shooting of three students of Palestinian descent in Vermont and the February stabbing of a Palestinian American man in Texas. CAIR's report said 2023 saw a "resurgence of anti-Muslim hate" after the first ever recorded annual drop in complaints in 2022. In the first nine months of 2023, such incidents averaged around 500 a month before jumping to nearly 1,200 a month in the last quarter. "The primary force behind this wave of heightened Islamophobia was the escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine in October 2023," the report said.

## Border tension...

FROM PAGE 01  
an Azerbaijan exclave along the border with Iran and southern Armenia. The two countries' leaders have repeatedly expressed optimism about the prospect of reaching a lasting peace deal, but lingering territorial disputes between the two countries pose a constant risk of a renewed conflict. Armenia's defence ministry said the claim "doesn't correspond to reality" and accused Baku of firing first.



## Briefs

## Spain to recognize Palestinian statehood by July: PM

WASHINGTON : Spain plans to officially recognize the State of Palestine "before the summer," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said. Sanchez made the announcement during an informal conversation with journalists accompanying him on an official trip to the Middle East, according to local media reports. On March 9, Sanchez said he would propose that Spain's parliament recognizes a Palestinian state. Recently, the leaders of Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and Malta released a joint statement announcing that they will recognize a Palestinian state. The statement said the countries' leaders agreed that "the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region is through the implementation of a two-state solution, with Israeli and Palestinian States living side-by-side in peace and security." —Agencies

## US and UK Sign AI safety partnership

LONDON: The United States and Britain announced on Monday a new partnership on the science of artificial intelligence safety amid rising concerns about upcoming next-generation versions as the two countries plan to work jointly and consider cooperation between their AI safety institutes. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and British Technology Secretary Michelle Donelan signed a memorandum of understanding in Washington to jointly develop advanced AI model testing, following commitments announced at an AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park in November. "We all know AI is the defining technology of our generation," Raimondo said. "This partnership will accelerate both of our institutes' work across the full spectrum to address the risks of our national security concerns and the concerns of our broader society." Britain said in October its institute would examine and test new types of AI, while the United States said in November it was launching its own safety institute to evaluate risks from so-called frontier AI models and is now working with 200 companies and entities. Under the formal partnership, Britain and the United States plan to perform at least one joint testing exercise on a publicly accessible model and are considering exploring personnel exchanges between the institutes. Both are working to develop similar partnerships with other countries to promote AI safety.—APP

## DRC names Suminwa Tuluka as first woman PM

KINSHASA : The Democratic Republic of Congo's planning minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka has been appointed the African nation's first woman prime minister, state television announced. An economist, she takes over as prime minister on Monday from Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, following President Felix Tshisekedi's sweeping re-election on December 20. Tshisekedi officially triumphed with 73.47 percent and the vote passed largely peacefully in a country long torn by violence and instability. The opposition branded the ballot a sham. Voting was officially extended by a day due to logistical snarls and polls were open for days after in remote areas. Parties supporting Tshisekedi garnered more than 90 percent of the seats in parliament, allowing him to legislate with ease. The new prime minister will be tasked with pushing the president's declared priorities of employment, youth, women and national cohesion for the nation of about 100 million people. He first became president in 2019 promising to improve living conditions in the DRC — which boasts mineral riches but has a largely impoverished population — and put an end to 25 years of bloodshed in the east.—Agencies

## PM directs to build Daanish schools in all 3 GB divisions

The prime minister assured the GB chief minister that uplifting the GB people by providing them with education and health facilities was among the federal government's priorities

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday directed the authorities concerned to build Daanish Schools across all three divisions of Gilgit Baltistan to impart world-class education and accommodation facilities to students from low-income groups. The prime minister, in a meeting with GB Chief Minister Gulbar Khan who called on him, also constituted a committee to look into the issues faced by GB that would present its recommendations after consultation with the stakeholders. The prime minister assured the GB chief minister that uplifting the GB people by providing them with education and health facilities was among the federal government's priorities. He also sought recommendations on the ways to exploit the immense tourism potential of GB, besides instructing to expedite work on Attabad and Harpo hydropower projects. Prime Minister Shehbaz also sought a strategy for execution of solar power projects in Gilgit Baltistan. Federal Law and Justice Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Economic Affairs Minister Ahmad Khan Cheema and relevant senior officers attended the meeting which deliberated on the uplift of GB's



education, health and tourism sectors. The meeting was briefed about the progress on Attabad and Harpo hydropower projects. It was told that the said projects would help provide an uninterrupted power supply to GB. The prime minister was told that work on Naltar Expressway has been completed to contribute to the progress and prosperity of the area.

## Kremlin : Israeli attack on Iranian consulate is 'act of aggression'

Russia's FM Kremlin said that Such aggressive actions by Israel are absolutely unacceptable and must be stopped

WEB DESK

MOSCOW : The Kremlin said on Tuesday that a suspected Israeli air strike against the Iranian consulate in Damascus was an act of aggression, and called on Israel to cease such "absolutely unacceptable" actions. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed revenge against Israel for Monday's attack which Iran said killed seven of its military advisers, including three senior commanders. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Russia was not rushing to conclusions, but "such strikes are a violation of all the foundations of in-

ternational law and an act of aggression." Russia's foreign ministry condemned the attack. "We strongly condemn this attack on the Iranian consular mission in Syria," the foreign ministry said. "Such aggressive actions by Israel are absolutely unacceptable and must be stopped." "We urge the Israeli leadership to abandon the practice of provocative military actions on the territory of Syria and other neighboring countries," it said. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said in a statement that seven Iranian military advisers died in the strike including Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior commander in its Quds Force, which is an elite foreign espionage and

paramilitary arm. Israel has long targeted Iran's military installations in Syria and those of its proxies, but Monday's attack was the first time Israel hit the vast embassy compound itself. Guards among 8 reported killed as Israel strikes Iran consular annex in Syria At least eight people, including a top Iranian commander, were killed after an Israeli airstrike hit a building near the Embassy of Iran in Syria's capital Damascus on Monday, according to reports by Iranian media outlets. "Israeli missiles... destroyed the building of an annex to the Iranian embassy... in Damascus, killing eight people," said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The report, carried

in most of the country's official outlets, gave no further details. The SNN agency earlier said the Iranian consulate and ambassador's residence were targeted, without giving further details. "Hossein Akbari, ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus, and his family were not harmed in the Israeli attack," Iran's Nour news agency said. In a statement, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)'s public relations wing announced the killing of Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior commander of the IRGC's Quds Force in Syria and Lebanon, its deputy Gen. Hadi Haj Rahimi and five other military personnel in the strike.

## 6 Peru Ministers resign over President's Rolex scandal

LIMA : Six Peruvian cabinet ministers resigned Monday in a reshuffle that came amid a probe of how President Dina Boluarte obtained Rolex watches. Interior Minister Victor Torres resigned first, two days after police under his command raided and searched the president's house and office, as Peru was engulfed in a scandal dubbed Rolexgate. A few hours later, five more ministers resigned. They served in the capacities of foreign trade, women's affairs, education, rural development, and production. The resignations occurred two days prior to Gustavo Adrianzen, the newly appointed prime minister, and his cabinet being sworn in before congress in a vote that had been scheduled for a month, though the government did not provide an explanation for them. Boluarte swore in six new ministers on Monday night to take the place of the departing ones. Following a cabinet meeting, Torres announced his resignation for personal reasons. However, many saw his exit as retaliation for the president's target raids over the weekend. In Congress, he has also faced a great deal of criticism due to a sharp rise in street crime. Torres claimed that he and Boluarte had planned his exit. Torres told reporters, "I am leaving because I asked the lady, and she accepted." With six different presidents in the past eight years, Peruvian politics is a turbulent one. The most recent drama started in mid-March when it was revealed by a news program that Boluarte, who has a very low approval rating, owns multiple pricey Rolex watches, and it's unclear how she got them. She earns roughly \$55,000 annually.—APP

## Japan resumes funding to UNRWA

TOKYO: Japan on Tuesday said it will lift its suspension of funding to the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) as the relief body works to regain trust after an allegation that some of its staff were involved in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel. Japan, the sixth-biggest donor to the agency, and 15 other countries paused about \$450 million in funding following the allegation by Israel in January, throwing the agency's operations in the war-torn Gaza Strip into turmoil. Countries including Australia and Canada have since restored funding to the UNRWA, the largest relief body operating in Gaza, which has been besieged by Israel since the attack. Japan's Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, who met UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini in Tokyo last week, said the agency's role in addressing the Gaza crisis was "indispensable" even as it works to improve governance and manage risks. "Japan will lift the moratorium on its financial contributions to UNRWA and provide assistance while ensuring and confirming the appropriateness of Japan's funds," Kamikawa told reporters, adding that about \$35 million of originally planned funding was ready to be released. A senior foreign ministry official later told a press briefing that Japan could not comment on the veracity of Israel's allegations due to an ongoing investigation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services.—APP

## At least 12 killed in S.Sudan attack

JUBA : Youths attacked a village in eastern South Sudan and shot dead at least 12 people while 15 children are missing, officials said on Tuesday, as local conflicts continued to increase ahead of elections late this year. A civil war from 2013-18 caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and although the main belligerents have since been at peace, clashes continue among armed groups. Activists believe the recent rise in violence is at least partly connected to the elections to choose leaders to succeed the present transitional government. In the latest incident on Sunday, youths attacked Ajwara village in Pibor's Pochalla county, Abraham Kelang, Information Minister of Greater Pibor Administrative Area, said. "Twelve people were killed, 10 injured and there were some cattle that were raided," he told Reuters, adding that most of the dead were elderly. The attackers, from the Murle ethnic group, are also suspected of abducting children. Owety Olung, the acting commissioner of Pochalla County, said. "We have 15 children who are still missing right now. We don't know where they are if they are with the attackers or in the bush," he told Reuters. Pochalla County is mostly inhabited by the Anyak ethnic group. They and the Murle, who mainly live in neighbouring Boma County, have fought sporadically and the violence, partly motivated by cattle rustling, has involved ethnic groups from neighbouring Jonglei State.—Agencies

## Kenyan doctors hold a protest against the govt

NAIROBI : Kenyan public hospital doctors who have been on strike since last month convened in two major cities on Tuesday to discuss their grievances against the government. The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), which represents over 7,000 members, went on strike on March 15 to demand payment of their salary arrears and the immediate hiring of trainee doctors. The arrears arose from a 2017 collective bargaining agreement (CBA), the union said. Doctors are also demanding the provision of adequate medical insurance cover for themselves and their dependants. It also wants the government to address frequent delays of salaries and to start paying doctors who work in public hospitals as part of their higher degree courses.—APP

## Turkish FM urges NATO action on terrorism

ANKARA : Türkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan is set to travel to Brussels to take part in a meeting of NATO foreign ministers and urge member countries to collectively combat terrorism. The top diplomat will also hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the meeting, the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement on Tuesday. The two-day meeting starting on Wednesday coincides with the 75th anniversary of NATO's establishment. Issues including general deterrence, counterterrorism, developments in Ukraine, preparations for the Washington Summit, and the current situation after the inclusion of Sweden and Finland into the alliance are expected to be on the agenda. For his part, Fidan will express Türkiye's expectations regarding the fight against the terrorist group PKK and its offshoots, and underline that it is unacceptable for some NATO members to have relations with terror groups, according to information obtained from diplomatic sources. The minister will further highlight that members imposing sanctions and restrictions on each other in the defence industry goes against the spirit of the alliance, and NATO's security is adversely impacted by such a situation. Fidan is also expected to hold bilateral meetings with British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen, and Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mariya Gabriel on the margins of the meeting.—DNA



ISLAMABAD : Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain receiving souvenir from Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan H.E. Khazar Farhadov.—DNA

## Assessment of Child Poverty in the Republic of Uzbekistan

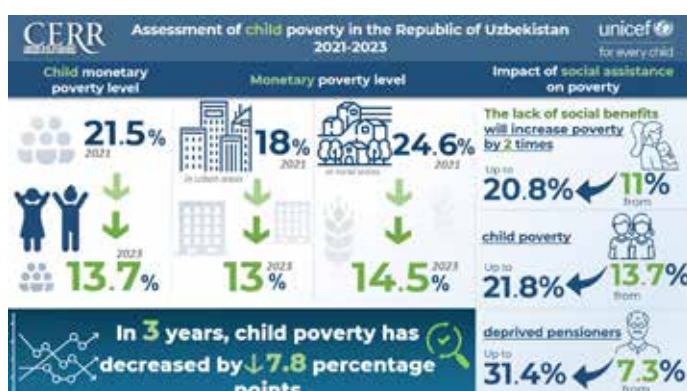
Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR), together with UNICEF, assessed the level of monetary child poverty in Uzbekistan. The study analyzed the impact of the social protection system on the poverty level. According to the calculations, in the absence of social payments, the child poverty rate in the country would have increased by 1.6 times. April 1, 2024. The Center for Economic Research and Reforms (CERR), together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Uzbekistan, conducted an assessment of the level of poverty among the child population, as well as an analysis of the effectiveness of the social protection system. The child poverty rate was calculated based on data from a Household Budget Survey data collected by the Statistics Agency in collaboration with the World Bank. While 10,000 households were surveyed in 2021, more than 16,000 households were surveyed across the coun-

try in 2023. Over the past three years, child poverty in Uzbekistan has decreased by 7.8 percentage points. According to the results, the child poverty rate decreased from 21.5% in 2021 to 13.7% in 2023. Poverty reduction trends vary markedly between urban and rural areas. In particular, in rural areas, the child poverty rate decreased from 24.6% to 14.5%, while in urban areas it decreased from 18% to 13%. The study found

that the regions with the lowest level of child poverty are Navoi region and Tashkent city, while a relatively high level of child poverty is observed in Syrdarya and Jizzakh regions. Social benefits analysis According to the National Agency of Social Protection, the total coverage of social benefits in Uzbekistan in 2023 amounted to 10.8 million people. The coverage of low-income families with child benefits and financial aid amount-

ed to 9 million people from 2.1 million low-income families and 72.5 thousand beneficiary families, with a total amount of payments of 12.3 trillion sums. In order to increase the efficiency of investments in the social protection system, as well as the effectiveness and reforms, the CERR analyzed the distribution of social benefits among various groups of households. The effectiveness and targeting of the social protection system was assessed by analyzing the distribution, coverage, and adequacy of social benefits, as well as their impact on the poverty level. Experts note that the existing social protection system directs most of its resources to the least affluent segments of the population. However, according to the calculations, almost 6% of those receiving social assistance belong to the 20% most affluent households, including 4% of households receiving child benefits. In contrast, old-age pensions are distributed relatively evenly

among all population groups, reflecting a universal approach to ensuring the well-being of the elderly population. Impact of social assistance on poverty level The study analyzed the impact of the social protection system on the poverty level. That way, in case of insufficient income, when incomes are below the poverty line, the absence of social payments would increase the poverty rate from 11% to 20.8%, child poverty from 13.7% to 21.8% and the share of deprived pensioners from 7.3% to 31.4%. Overall, this analysis allows us to assess the effectiveness and targeting of the social protection system, identify its advantages and disadvantages, and propose measures for its improvement in order to ensure more equal access to social benefits and reduce the poverty level in society. Hereby, Uzbekistan demonstrates its commitment to achieving the SDG 1 — to end poverty in all its forms by 2030.—DNA





## Briefs

**'Israel' will 'regret' this crime: Khamenei**

### FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Iranian leader Sayyed Ali Khamenei vowed Iran's men will "punish" the Israeli occupation following the assassination of senior Iranian Revolution Guard Corps members at the hands of the "usurping and despicable" Israeli occupation. Sayyed Khamenei issued this message regarding the martyrdom of Major General Mohammad Reza Zahedi along with a number of others following the Israeli aggression on Iran's consulate in Damascus, Syria. He further affirmed "Our courageous men will exact punishment upon the evil regime. We will ensure they regret this and other crimes, with the will of God." The evil Zionist regime will be punished by our courageous men. This comes after Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called the Israeli aggression against the Iranian consulate in Syria's Damascus, a "new terrorist crime" and considered it a "violation of international resolutions." Raisi also stressed that "the Zionists must know that they will not achieve their goals" reaffirming that the "crime of attacking the consulate in Damascus will not go unanswered." Moreover, Raisi paid tribute to the martyrs, highlighting that "Martyrs Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi were heroes of the Holy Defense," and had been serving in Syria as "senior consultants".

## Germany to send artillery shells to Ukraine

BERLIN: Germany has unveiled a fresh military aid package worth 576 million to restock Kiev's artillery supplies with 180,000 rounds of shells, in support of a Czech-led initiative to procure ammunition for Ukraine. Two years into the Ukraine conflict, Kiev is facing a critical shortage of artillery ammunition, namely due to delays in US assistance caused by disputes in Congress, as heavy cannon fire continues to be exchanged along the 1,000-km front line. Europe intensified its support for Ukraine's military on Tuesday, with Germany and the EU revealing initiatives to expedite supplies to aid resistance against the potential loss of key frontline cities like Avdiivka. Last month, German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius unveiled an aid package totaling 478 million euros, but this did not include funding for the Czech munitions initiative. "The total value of both support measures is therefore over one billion euros," a spokesperson for the ministry told Reuters. Without US military aid, Ukraine has to retreat, Zelensky warns Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that if Ukraine fails to receive the US military aid promised but currently blocked due to Congressional disputes, it will be forced to retreat gradually. - Agencies

## Fire in Istanbul kills 27

ISTANBUL: Istanbul Governorship said Tuesday that 29 people lost their lives after a deadly fire erupted in the Turkish city's nightclub injuring 1, prompting authorities to dispatch emergency help for the victims. Earlier, Turkish media reported that among the injured, seven of them were critical. Authorities have yet to ascertain the cause of the fire in the 16-storey building on Gündoğdu Street in Gayrettepe Yildiz Posta Avenue. Injured victims have been transported to local hospitals, the outlet reported. Local media Hurriyet Daily further reported that the fire erupted during renovations at Masquerade nightclub on the ground floor. Governor Davut Gül said that deceased people were the employees of the club, adding that building had a license from 1987 and that it had been renewed twice. - Agencies

# UAE keen to further boost trade relations with Pakistan

Emirati ambassador, Al Zaabi underscored the deep-rooted and unique relations between Pakistan and the UAE, emphasizing their strength and significance



### STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ambassador to Pakistan, Hamad Obaid Al Zaabi, on Tuesday engaged in a fruitful discussion with Pakistan's Federal Minister for Commerce. The meeting focused on matters of mutual interest and strategies to enhance bilateral trade. During the meeting, Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal, emphasized the strong brotherhood relations between the two nations, which have continued to strengthen over time. He emphasized the need to further bolster these ties on the commercial front. Ambassador Al Zaabi echoed Minister Kamal's sentiments, expressing the UAE's desire to see Pakistan thrive across all sectors. Despite existing challenges, he highlighted the untapped potential for increasing trade volume between the two countries. Al Zaabi underscored the deep-rooted and unique relations between Pakistan and the UAE, emphasizing their strength and significance. Minister Kamal reiterated the vast opportunities for collaboration, particularly in fostering people-to-people business relationships. Both dignitaries expressed their commitment to exploring avenues for enhancing bilateral trade and cooperation in various sectors.

## Sisi sworn in for third term as president

EGYPT'S Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has been sworn in before parliament for the third term in office as president. He won the December election with 89.6 percent of the vote against three unknown candidates. The new six-year term will let him to remain president until 2030. Speaking before parliament on Tuesday, Sisi vowed to "remain faithful to my work, my eyes seeing only your interests and this country's." He said he "renews his vow to continue on the course to build the nation." The president's oath marked what should be his final six-year term as leader of Egypt, according to the constitution. Sisi, the former army chief, came to power after the 2013 overthrow of Egypt's first popularly elected president, Mohamed Morsi. He was elected president the following year and then again in 2018. The president extended the presidential mandate from four to six years and amended the constitution to raise the limit on consecutive terms in office from two to three. - Agencies

## Destruction of Al-Shifa rips heart out of health system

### NEWS DESK

GAZA: World Health Organization spokeswoman Margaret Harris said on Tuesday that the destruction of Al-Shifa Hospital seriously harmed the health system in the Gaza Strip. "Destroying Al Shifa means ripping the heart out of the health system," said WHO spokesperson Margaret Harris. The World Health Organization (WHO) said that the destruction of Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza amounted to "ripping the heart out" of the health system. "It was the place people go to for the kind of care that a really good health system provides, that we in all our societies expect to have should we be in need." Israeli forces pulled out of Al Shifa Hospital and its surroundings, west of Gaza City after a two-week ground onslaught, leaving hundreds dead, mostly children and women, in addition to the massive destruction to the complex's facilities and infrastructure. Gaza's largest hospital has been completely destroyed with a large number of bodies scattered all over and the building itself is in ruins. The Palestinian death toll from Israel's deadly offensive against the Gaza Strip since October 7th, 2023, has now soared to 32,916. Additionally, 75,494 individuals have been injured, with thousands still missing under the rubble and on the streets. The Israeli occupation continues to obstruct ambulance and rescue teams from reaching them. Meanwhile, The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) kidnaped last night and at dawn Tuesday a number of Palestinian citizens and injured others during campaigns in the West Bank and Jerusalem. According to local sources, two citizens were injured during clashes with Israeli forces in Qalandia refugee camp, north of Jerusalem. Israeli police forces also kidnaped six citizens during raids on homes in Qalandia camp and another one during a raid at the Aqsa Mosque in the holy city of Jerusalem. In Nablus, the IOF kidnaped two young men from Qabalan town and Madama village. Another young man was taken prisoner after Israeli special forces infiltrated into al-Yasamina neighborhood in the Old City and opened fire at his legs. In Qalqilya, the IOF kidnaped two young men after assaulting them in Azzun town. One young man also suffered shrapnel wounds during clashes between Israeli soldiers and local youths in the town.

## 'Unacceptable tragedy' Australia summons Israeli envoy

### WEB DESK

Canberra: Australia has summoned the Israeli ambassador over the killing of an Australian aid worker in an airstrike on Gaza, which Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described as "completely unacceptable." Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has "requested a call-in from the Israeli ambassador," Albanese said on Tuesday. "We want full accountability for this. This is a tragedy that should never have occurred," he added. Australian citizen Zomi Frankom was among the seven aid workers who were killed in an Israeli airstrike in central Gaza on Monday. Citizens from Britain and Poland, and a dual citizen of the United States and Canada were also among the victims who were working for the World Central Kitchen. The World Central Kitchen said its aid workers were traveling in a "deconflicted zone" in two armored cars branded with the charity's logo as well as "a soft skin vehicle." Despite coordinating movements with the Israeli military, "the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route," the group said in a statement. The UN says in the absence of any changes in Israel's ongoing genocidal war on Gaza, the coastal sliver is on course to experience all-out famine. Albanese said, "The truth is that this is beyond any reasonable circumstances that someone going about providing aid and humanitarian assistance should lose their life." The premier also reiterated calls for a "sustainable ceasefire," saying, "Australians want to see an end to this conflict."

## Russia will track down masterminds of Moscow attack

MOSCOW: Russian security agencies will find the masterminds behind the terrorist attack on Moscow's Crocus City concert hall, President Vladimir Putin has insisted. It's crucial to establish not only the direct perpetrators of the "bloody terrorist attack" which took place on March 22, but also all the links in the chain leading to its final beneficiaries, Putin said during a meeting with the leadership of Russia's Interior Ministry on Tuesday. "We will definitely get them," the president said of the masterminds of the Crocus City Hall massacre, in which 144 people were killed and more than 550 injured. Mercenary terrorist attacks are "a weapon that is being used against Russia," but those who resort to it must understand that it is a "double-edged weapon," he stressed. There are "no reliable agents" in the circle of people who are ready to execute such crimes, Putin said. "They're

doing anything for money, not guided by any religious or political considerations, only financial ones," he explained, adding that "any information can be easily bought and sold" in such a market. The actions of all law enforcement agencies, supervisory bodies and commercial organizations who were in charge of security at the Crocus City Hall are now being evaluated, the president said. "We have paid a very high price, and the analysis of the situation has to be extremely objective and professional," he insisted. Putin said that a "new level" of security must be implemented at places where large numbers of people gather, such as at sporting venues, shopping and entertainment centers, schools, hospitals, theaters and others. Russia's security agencies and police have been on high alert since the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack. All four suspected perpetrators, who are Tajik nationals, were captured the next day as they were driving towards Ukraine. Several more people who allegedly aided them in preparing and staging the massacre have been arrested since then. Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) has claimed responsibility for the attack on the concert venue. FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov has suggested that the US, UK, and Ukraine might also be linked to the crime, possibly using radical Islamists as proxies. All three have denied their involvement; Washington and Brussels have insisted that Kiev had nothing to do with the massacre. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq calls on, President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari. - DNA

## ECP unveils by-polls schedule

### MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Tuesday announced schedule for by-polls on six National Assembly and 17 provincial assembly seats which would be held on April 21. The top electoral body issued a notification regarding the election programme for vacant NA and PA seats where reelection will be organised next week. According to the notification, the by-polls will be held on six NA, 12 Punjab Assembly, 2 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly, 2 Balochistan Assembly, and one Sindh Assembly seats. A total of 239 candidates were going to participate in the forthcoming by-elections, including 50 contenders for NA seats, of which Pakistan Peoples Party leader Aseefa Bhutto-Zardari was elected unopposed in NA-207 constituency. Another PPP leader Zubair Ahmed Junejo was also elected without facing any contest on PS-80 Dadu seat. Subsequently, 23 candidates were contesting by-polls for KP Assembly seats, 154 candidates for Punjab Assembly seats, and 12 candidates for Balochistan Assembly seats. The ECP spokesperson said polling material has been provided to the provincial election commissioner, whereas, all district returning officers (DROs) and returning officers (ROs) were fulfilling their duties in accordance with the by-polls' schedule. Additionally, the printing of ballot papers was continued since March 30, he added. The spokesperson said that the commission was also in contact with the interior, defence ministries, and provincial law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for peaceful conduct of the by-elections. The NA seats on which by-elections will take place include NA-8 Bajaur, NA-44 Dera Ismail Khan-I, NA-119 Lahore-III, NA-132 Kasur-II, NA-196 Kamber Shadadkot-I and NA-207 Shaheed Benazirabad-I. The elections on NA-8 Bajaur and PK-22 Bajaur-IV were suspended after a candidate contesting as an independent on these constituencies was shot dead.

## N. Korea conducts ballistic missile test

### APP

PYONGYANG: North Korea has conducted a test of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) from its eastern coast, demonstrating its commitment to advancing missile technology capable of reaching US military bases in the Western Pacific. The missile, which was launched from a location near the capital Pyongyang on Tuesday, did not pass over Japan like some of the IRBMs that North Korea has previously launched, but instead, it landed in the waters between the two countries after traveling a distance of 372 miles, the South Korean military reported. Lee Sung Joon, the official representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the recent launch was probably a continuation of North Korea's test in March, which involved a solid-fuel engine designed for an advanced hypersonic missile with an intermediate range. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida informed the press that there have been no reports of damage caused by the missile.

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