



Islamabad POST

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World cannot afford another war, warns UN Chief Guterres

Detailed News On Page-08

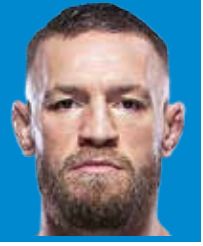
Pope warns against 'spiral of violence'

Detailed News On Page-08



McGregor to face Chandler at UFC 303

Detailed News On Page-06



US not to support any Israeli counterattack

Iran, Israel mull options as world calls for restraint

Israel vows to strike back; UN chief terms ME tensions as tragic; BRICS countries also mulling their options

Puttin fears World War III

DNA

MOSCOW: An attack on Israel by Iran means one thing: There is likely to be a world war where countries globally will take sides 1, said the Russian President Vladimir Putin in his televised address. He further said if you side with the west (United States, France, NATO, Ukraine, UK, Australia) you are likely to find yourself supporting Israel 2. If you BRICS (China, Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa) you will likely find yourself supporting Iran World War III will likely threaten human existence, he added. Moscow expressed "extreme concern over the latest dangerous escalation in the region". It said it had warned numerous times that "the lack of resolution to numerous crises in the Middle East, primarily in the zone of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" would "lead to growth in instability". Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday held phone talks with Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Continued on Page 06

NEWS DESK / DNA

TEHRAN: Iran on Sunday urged Israel not to retaliate militarily to the attack, which Tehran presented as a justified response to a strike that destroyed its consulate building in Damascus earlier this month. "The matter can be deemed concluded," Iran's mission to the United Nations said in a post on X just a few hours after the start of the operation late Saturday. "However, should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe," the Iranian mission warned. Late Saturday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps announced that they had launched "dozens of drones and missiles" towards military sites on Israeli territory. "Iran's military action was in response to the Zionist regime's aggression against our diplomatic premises in Damascus," the Iranian mission to the UN said. The attack, according to the mission, was "conducted on the strength of Article 51 of the UN Charter pertaining to the legitimate defense." However Israel's army said it had shot 99 percent of the drones and missiles with the help of the United States and other allies, declaring Iran's attack "foiled". The Iranian army said Sunday its drone and missile attack on Israel, in retaliation for a deadly strike on Iran's Damascus consulate, has "achieved all its objectives".

Continued on Page 06

UNSC meets in emergency session

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council will hold an emergency meeting Sunday evening over Iran's retaliatory drone and missile attack on Israel, the 15-member body's president has said. A spokesperson for Malta, which holds the rotating presidency this month, said Saturday evening that the Security Council was aiming for the meeting to be held at 4:00 p.m. (01 am Pakistan time Monday) after Israel requested the Council condemn Iran's attack and designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization. Iran had vowed retaliation for an Israeli strike on its Damascus consulate on April 1 that killed seven officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including two senior commanders, and said its strike was a punishment for "Israeli crimes". "Should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe," the Iranian Mission to the United Nations said, warning the U.S. to "stay away". However, it also said Iran now "deemed the matter concluded".

Continued on Page 06



LONDON: Tens of thousands of protesters flocked to the UK streets, on Sunday, to protest genocide in Gaza. The protesters demanded immediate halt to Israeli aggression. - DNA

PTI to hold second rally

Omar asserts Imran Khan's imminent release

Sharif family 'afraid' of prisoner number 804, claims Omar Ayub

STAFF REPORT

QUETTA: Referring to Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan by his prisoner number, Leader of the Opposition in National Assembly Omar Ayub on Sunday claimed that the Sharif family was "afraid" of prisoner number 804. Addressing the media in Quetta, Ayub said the PTI gave awareness to the masses. He also claimed that his party would form the next government once the current governments are dissolved, he claimed, adding that all that the PTI wanted was supremacy of the law and constitution. "This is not old Pakistan. People have now awakened. Despite hurdles, (our) rallies have been successful," he said. The PTI leader also apprised that his party workers were tortured and they were not allowed to wave party flags in Pishin and Chaman public gatherings.

Continued on Page 06

For IMF talks Fin Minister leads delegation to US

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb flew to the United States along with a delegation on Sunday to initiate talks with the International Monetary Fund for a new loan programme. According to sources, negotiations between Pakistan and the IMF for a new bailout package will begin next week, with the country formally making a request to the global lender in this regard. There is also a possibility of a meeting between

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Saudi Foreign Minister to visit Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A high-level Saudi delegation, led by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, will visit Pakistan from 15 to 16 April 2024. The delegation consists of Saudi Minister of Water and Agriculture, Eng Abdul Rahman Abdul Mohsen Al-Fadley, Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, Bandar Ibrahim AlKhorayef, Deputy Minister of Investment, Badr AlBadr, Head of Saudi Special Committee, Mohammad Mazyed Al Towajri, and senior officials from Ministry of Energy and Saudi Fund for General Investments. The visit takes place essentially to expedite follow up on the understanding reached between PM Shehbaz Sharif and HRH Mohammad bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan reacts cautiously

Iranian response due to breakdown of diplomacy

These also underline the grave implications in cases where the UN Security Council is unable to fulfill its responsibilities of maintaining international peace and security

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: "Pakistan is watching with deep concern the ongoing developments in the Middle East [...] Today's developments demonstrate the consequences of the breakdown of diplomacy," the Foreign Office said in a statement. The FO's statement comes after Tehran launched more than 300 drones and missiles at Israel since Saturday in retaliation to the Israeli airstrike on its Damascus consulate that killed several people including Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) senior commanders Mohammed Reza Zahedi and senior commander Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi. Israeli army spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari has confirmed that Iranian missiles struck Israel causing light damage to a military installation in the south of the country, adding that 99% of the missiles were

Continued on Page 06

Balochistan govt to revise security plan

DNA

QUETTA: A day after nine people were shot dead in Noshki, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti on Sunday chaired a high-level on law and order where it was decided that the province's security plan would be revised to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future. Nine people, who planned to reach Europe to live a better life, were shot dead in Balochistan in the small hours of Saturday. The gunmen abducted them from a Taftan-bound bus based on their ethnicity and dumped their bodies under a bridge in a hilly area of Noshki.

Continued on Page 06

President, PM extend Baisakhi greetings

Say Pakistan felt pride over its diverse cultural heritage

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday extended his heartfelt felicitation to the Sikh community on the celebration of Baisakhi. In a message, the president said that the occasion gave a message of love, happiness, peace and affection. Pakistan felt pride over its diverse cultural heritage, President Secretariat Press Wing, in a press release, quoted the president as saying. Pakistan would ensure all steps to facilitate the Sikh community, he further added. The president said that Pakistan was committed to safeguarding the rights of all minorities and they acknowledged

Continued on Page 06

Punjab govt reduces roti price

The price of roti from Rs20 to Rs16, Naan price reduced from Rs 25 to 15

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: As part of her efforts to provide relief to inflation-hit people in Punjab, Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Sunday reduced the price of roti (flat bread made in tandoor) to Rs16 across the province. The new price of roti will come into effect immediately. The first-ever female chief minister had announced last month that all necessary measures would be taken to provide relief to people in the province. Taking to her official X handle, formally known as Twitter, Maryam wrote: "Alhamdulillah! The Punjab government has reduced the prices of roti and fixed it at Rs16."

Amid Gaza crisis a disturbing humanitarian scandal on horizon

Reports indicate that self-proclaimed 'muftis' in Pakistan, some based in Islamabad, have initiated public appeals urging individuals to adopt orphaned children from Gaza. These individuals have even established WhatsApp groups to solicit consent from potential adoptive parents

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: In the midst of the Gaza crisis, a disturbing scandal has emerged in Pakistan, particularly in Islamabad. Certain unscrupulous individuals are exploiting the tragedy in Gaza for their own selfish gain. Reports indicate that self-proclaimed 'muftis' in Pakistan, some based in Islamabad, have initiated public appeals urging individuals to adopt orphaned children from Gaza. These individuals have even established WhatsApp groups to solicit consent from potential adoptive parents. Investigations have uncovered that these individuals are not only soliciting money from families interested in adoption but also disappearing once they receive payment. This exploitation of a humanitarian crisis for financial gain is deeply concerning. When contacted, the Ambassador of Palestine to Pakistan

Ahmed Rabei made it clear that not even a single child had come to Pakistan from Gaza. "This is not true. There is no orphaned child from Palestine, and no child will come from Palestine", the ambassador added. He reiterated that it's highly improbable for orphan children to enter Pakistan without the awareness of the Palestine embassy in Islamabad. The ambassador urged Pakistani citizens to remain vigilant against such deceptive tactics and not to succumb to their schemes. Similar elements similarly took advantage of the situation following the devastating earthquake that struck Pakistan in 2005. Certain individuals and organizations shamelessly established fraudulent charities, purportedly to aid in earthquake relief efforts. However, rather than directing the donations towards assisting the victims, these deceitful entities shamelessly diverted the funds for their personal enrichment.

Summer Camp Season 7

Package	1 Activity	2 Activity	3 Activity
1 Child	55,000	70,000	85,000
2 Children	65,000	80,000	95,000
3 Children	75,000	90,000	105,000
4 Children	85,000	100,000	115,000
5 Children	95,000	110,000	125,000
6 Children	105,000	120,000	135,000

ACTIVITIES

- Swimming
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- Taekwondo
- Kids Yoga

RULES & REGULATIONS

Each activity will run for three consecutive weeks, missing days will not be compensated. The female convenience only available for ladies. 15% discount on all Maisha services and pool bar menu for the participants and their parents. For registration, please scan the QR code and email the participant's birth certificate and photograph to Maisha@serena.com.pk mentioning "summer camp 2024" in the subject line. This offer cannot be combined with any other discounts or promotions. Participants can participate in one activity per day. Participating children are to be accompanied by one of their parents. The timings of the children will be assigned at the time of registration for the entire program, however, changing the time will be subject to availability. Limited seats available. All prices are subject to government taxes.

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KP governor praised for opening residence to public on Eid

Business community praised Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali for opening the Governor House for the public and family during three days of Eid-ul-Fitr

DNA

PESHAWAR : The business community of Peshawar has paid tributes to Governor KP, Haji Ghulam Ali for keeping the official residence open for general public during Eid holidays. "Governor Haji Ghulam Ali not only ended the feeling of deprivation of the people but also won their hearts by keeping the Governor's House open for the public and family," they observed. "The sincerity and love with which the governor received Eid from people will be remembered in history with golden words," comments Salman Elahi and Lal Jan Khan, office bearers of Peshawar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In a press statement issued here on Sunday, Malik Salman Elahi, President Peshawar Chamber of Commerce, Senior Vice President Lal Jan, Vice President Saeed Khan

and President of Flour Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Waheed Khan in their joint statement, praised Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali for opening the Governor House for the public and family during three days of Eid-ul-Fitr. Paying tribute, they said Haji Ghulam Ali has proved on every occasion that he is a governor with a passion for serving the people and always feels happy to be among common men. Governor's house where ordinary people could not even think of going, Haji Ghulam Ali broke this tradition after becoming the governor and ended the feeling of deprivation felt by people and practically proved that Governor's house is not only for special people but also for common man. Like last year, this year too, on the three days of Eid, the governor's house was kept open for the public for three days to share happiness, they added. The repre-

sentatives of the business community said Governor Haji Ghulam Ali has won the hearts of the people not only of Peshawar but of the entire province, be they are special children, school and college students or from other walks of life. He not only invited all of them to the Governor's House and honored them, but also entertained them personally, they said.

They further said that history will always remember their services and efforts for opening the Governor House to the common people in the 76-year history. Ever since Haji Ghulam Ali assumed the gubernatorial post, people from every school of thought including workers of political parties, members of the business community across the province, chambers, youth and those belonging to minority communities have called on him by considering as their representative, they added.



HASSANABDAL: Federal Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif Mehmood addressing the Sikh pilgrims at Gurdwara Panja Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi Mela.—APP

Peshawar legacy: call to preserve historical buildings

DNA

PESHAWAR : Being a gateway to the subcontinent, Peshawar has always remained a strategic city where kings and invaders of various dynasties constructed historic buildings for their families' residences to prolong their rule. Besides Balahisar Fort, historic buildings including Sethi House and Khan Klubs were constructed at the heart of Peshawar City where kings, commanders and monarchs stayed before marching to the subcontinent. Constructed by Mughal rulers in 1800 on Ashraf Road in Peshawar City, Khan Klub was also the main centre of attraction for domestic and foreign tourists due to its boutique style and soothing environment. However, Khan Klub has started losing its eye-catching ancient architecture and woodwork after it was converted into floor godowns and general stores for monetary gains in the recent past. Located at Hastnagri bazaar near Balahisar fort and Chowk Yadgar, Khan Klub's four storey building built on five marla land was presently in shamble condition with no facilities for tourist and art lovers for which it was once famous far and required immediate reconstruction and conservation work before it falls. While passing on Ashraf road near Rampura gate, a visitor would be extremely disappointed after seeing the deteriorating boutique style primitive building with dust on the floor, fodder.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Secy inspects anti-polio drive

Minister Qasim Shah highlighted the significant responsibility falling on parents of unvaccinated children. The parents, he said, lacked sufficient awareness on the issue which posed a risk to the entire nation, adding that such awareness was essential to avoid international sanctions

DNA

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) Health Secretary Mehmoed Aslam Wazir visited various designated polio vaccination spots during Eid and inspected the ongoing inoculation process. He visited various toll plazas and check posts to witness the vaccination process of children. He also listened to the problems of polio workers and assured them of cooperation. Stressing upon workers to realize their responsibilities in the national cause of polio eradication, he directed them to be vigilant to inoculate children who may have

missed vaccination due to their travel from one place to another. The Health Secretary also urged transporters to cooperate with polio workers deputed at toll plazas and check posts for vaccination. In Ghura Bakhail, Bannu district, where three polio cases had been detected recently, around 30 per cent of children still need to be vaccinated. This was revealed at a meeting held under the leadership of Health Minister Qasim Ali Shah, titled 'Reaching the Unreached', organized under the auspices of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) and the Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI). The briefing, organised by ACASUS, focused on collaboration efforts in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Attending the meeting were Special Secretary Health for Polio Eradication Abdul Basit, Director General Health Services Dr Shaukat Ali, Deputy Director Provincial Emergency Operations Centre Zeeshan and personnel from all district Emergency Operation Centres who participated online. Minister Qasim Shah highlighted the significant responsibility falling on parents of unvaccinated children. The parents, he said, lacked sufficient awareness on the issue which posed a risk to the entire nation, adding that such awareness was essential to avoid international sanctions.

Senior medical officer suspended

DNA

LAHORE : In a swift response to alleged negligence, Evacuee Trust Property Board Secretary Fareed Iqbal has taken decisive action by suspending Senior Medical Officer Dr. Tanveer Mushtaq. According to a press release issued here on Sunday, the suspension comes in the wake of investigations into purported

lapses in duty during the Vasakhi mela. During an inspection of the Vasakhi fair arrangements at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hassan Abdal, Secretary Fareed Iqbal and his team discovered multiple shortcomings. These included the absence of Dr. Mushtaq from the medical camp and he was allegedly found asleep in his room. Secretary Fareed Iqbal emphasized the need for strict adherence to duty, especially during such crucial events. The suspension serves as a stern warning to all officials entrusted with responsibilities during public gatherings. Further inquiries into the matter are underway as the Evacuee Trust Property Board ensures accountability and professionalism in its operations, the press release added.

AIOU announces exam schedule

ISLAMABAD: AIOU is conducting online (in camera) Matric and FA programs for international students offered in autumn 2023 semester from April 22. According to the examination of Associate degree (BA, B.Com), BBA, B.Ed and BS programs for local students will commence from April 23 throughout the country. Date sheet is uploaded on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) and roll number slips are uploaded to students' CMS portals. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood has instructed the examinations department to ensure transparency and provide all facilities to the students during the examinations.—APP

Domestic "Tandoor" culture fades in S.Punjab

MULTAN :In the culturally rich region of South Punjab, a cherished tradition of making bread in clay ovens (Tandoor) at the domestic level is slowly fading as the younger generation is being observed showing almost zero interest and preferring to get prepared bread from hotels. Once a common practice in almost every household, the Tandoor was not just a cooking apparatus but a symbol of inclusive community and excellent tradition. A good gathering of rural women could be seen making the bread. Elderly women, the custodians of this age-old practice, not only baked bread for their own families but also ex-

tended their hospitality to neighbours, fostering bonds of good relationship. However, a shift has occurred as younger generations shy away from the labour-intensive process, opting instead for the convenience of commercially baked bread from hotels. Khuda Bukash, an artisan of traditional clay ovens in the village of Pipli in district Vehari, laments the waning interest in this time-honoured craft. "People are no longer interested in acquiring clay ovens," he remarked, noting a preference among women for hotel-bought bread. One of the primary deterrents to the resurgence of domestic "Tandoor" baking is the intricate

preparation process, which requires a difficult arrangement of special clay and leaves from various trees, and the task that can span three to four days. Yet, it imparts a distinct flavour to the bread, setting it apart from its commercially prepared bread. While the elderly people used to like thick and homemade breads, the younger populace leans towards lighter breads, reshaping culinary preferences. However, Mr Bakash stated that the true essence of Tandoor-baked bread is unlocked when it is used with a glass of buttermilk, as it elevates the gastronomic experience to new heights.—DNA



CHINIOT: Farmers harvesting wheat crop starting from 1st of Besakh Month.—APP


Billion Trees: A bygone story

Dr Mumtaz said about 68 percent forests in the country were being used as firewood and 15 percent trees were being lost due to urbanization and community-driven demands

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Unaware of the adverse effects of deforestation and climate change, Amanullah, a 71-year-old wood seller had expedited cutting of timber with a big saw machine in his wood taal eying to earn maximum capital. Engaged extra laborers to cut native and indigenous species into pieces in his wood tall located on main GT Road at Pabbi station in Nowshera district, Amanullah Khan alias Haji Sahib is working against the clock to fulfil the orders placed by the marriages halls, tandoors, hotels and restaurants in Nowshera and Peshawar districts where weeding season will start soon. The sons of well off wood seller and labourers are working against the clock by preparing bundles of endangered shisham, pulai, ber, kikar, poplar, neem, amaltas, soru and jaman in wood taal with plenty of trees' trunks brought from Nowshera, Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda and other nearby districts scattered all around on his business place where wood

dust are exposing labourers to serious health hazards. "With an arrival of Eidul Fitr celebrations and marriage season besides shortfall of gas and high prices of LPG cylinders, the demands of wood have increased manifold in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where one mound (50 kilogram) firewood are being sold from Rs700 to Rs800 depending upon its quality," said Amanullah, adding these timber are being transported from different districts after its purchase from farmers on relatively less prices than open markets. While moving on GT Road between Tarnab Peshawar and Azakakhel Nowshera, a visitor could be extremely disappointed to see a large number of cut timbers' sleepers and even uprooted trunks of trees at wood taals, signifying a high rate of deforestation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. National Forest Policy 2015 has revealed that forests on communal lands, shamalats, guzara and private lands in KP and Gilgit Baltistan were under heightened threats due to population explosion, poverty and socioeconomic imbalances.




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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



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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: Members of the Rawalpindi, Islamabad Tax Bar Association presenting a cheque of Rs two million for the people of Gaza, to the Ambassador of Palestine Ahmed Rabei. The Ambassador thanked the Bar members for their support and best wishes for the Gaza people. The ambassador also thanked the Pakistan government for extending whole-hearted support. The delegation comprised Faisal Irfan FCA, Faraz Fazal Sheikh President RITBA, M Idress Sheikh Advocates Supreme Court, Zafran Yousaf Advocate and Abdul Basir Khan Advocate.—DNA

China's role in advancing Hybrid Rice cultivation

Pakistani Embassy in Beijing hosts Eid Mela

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Experts lauded China's role in advancing Hybrid Rice cultivation in Pakistan, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro. The Chairman of the Pakistan Hitech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA), Shahzad Ali Malik, in a press briefing, highlighted the pivotal role of Chinese expertise in revolutionizing Pakistan's agriculture through hybrid seed technology. This collaboration marks a significant stride towards self-sufficiency and the

bolstering of Pakistan's export potential in key crops including cotton, wheat, edible oils, and pulses. Malik pointed out that the adoption of hybrid rice technology from China has already showcased remarkable yield improvements, setting a precedent for its application across other agricultural sectors. The initiative aims at reducing Pakistan's heavy reliance on imports by enhancing local production capabilities. For cotton, a critical export commodity, hybrid technology promises higher yields and quality, positioning

Pakistan to reduce imports and explore export opportunities. Similarly, the introduction of hybrid wheat and oilseed varieties like soybean and sunflower is expected to boost productivity, quality, and domestic availability, potentially transforming Pakistan into a net exporter of these commodities. Malik also touched upon the issue of pulse shortages, emphasizing that hybrid varieties could significantly enhance local production, thereby decreasing the need for imports and enabling Pakistan to meet its domestic demand more

effectively. This strategic move towards hybrid varieties, in collaboration with China, aims to ensure food security, achieve economic stability, and foster export growth, underlining the crucial role of advanced agricultural technologies in Pakistan's development, he maintained. Meanwhile, The Pakistani Embassy in Beijing hosted an exquisite Eid Mela to celebrate the joyous occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr on Wednesday. The event saw the participation of a large number of Pakistani families, children, students, embassy officials, and

Chinese friends. Organized by the Pakistan Embassy, the Eid Mela captured the spirit of joy, solidarity, and community. It provided a platform for attendees to come together and celebrate Eid with distinct Pakistani characteristics. On this auspicious occasion, Khalil Hashmi, the Ambassador of Pakistan to China, extended Eid greetings to members of the Pakistani community in China. Highlights of the event included traditional Pakistani cuisine, desserts, and a range of activities designed for children.

Bread price in Punjab decreased to Rs 16

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "Punjab government has reduced the price of bread to Rs 16 per loaf from today," said Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif in her message on social networking website X. She added, "All districts of Punjab and the departments concerned have been instructed to ensure strict implementation of the decision." Madam Chief Minister prayed, "May Allah Almighty bring more ease in the lives of people."

Police commences tenants registration drive

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad police on Sunday launched a door-to-door campaign "Knock the Door" to register house workers and tenants in order to improve safety and prevent crime. The officers from the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Islamabad collected data on 242 house servants across 520 houses within Khanna and Bani Gala police station areas,

a police public relations officer said on Sunday. The registration drive is part of an effort to maintain law and order in the capital and keep a check on potentially dangerous individuals by gathering information on tenants and domestic workers, the police aimed to reduce the risk of theft and other crimes committed by people posing as ordinary citizens. The police teams visited various neighborhoods to gather

data and talk to residents about any challenges they face. The officers also advised citizens to verify the identity of anyone collecting data while in plain clothes. The unregistered tenants and employees may pose a risk to public safety, as they can be involved in theft and robbery. Following the campaign, Islamabad police hoped to create a safer environment for residents by using their resources effectively.

ECP empowers ROs, POs

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has granted Returning Officers (ROs) and Presiding Officers (POs) powers equivalent to those of first-class magistrates to ensure the seamless execution of the forthcoming by-elections on five national and 16 provincial Assembly constituencies scheduled for April 21. District Returning Officers (DROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) were vested with magisterial powers as per

the notification issued by the ECP, in adherence to Section 193 of the Election Act 2017. The Presiding officers have the authority to employ these powers during the by-elections across five national and 16 provincial assemblies in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, spanning from April 20 to 22, until the official declaration of final results for the candidates. Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Of-

ficers (DROs) are empowered to take action against candidates who violate the code of conduct set forth by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). These officers have the authority equivalent to that of a Magistrate first class concerning offenses outlined in Sections 169 and 171. They can also initiate legal proceedings under Section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and conduct summary trials as per Chapter XX of the code. It is important to note that by-elections will be conducted on April 21 for 21 constituencies of National and Provincial Assemblies.—APP

Economic growth linked to durable regional peace

ISLAMABAD: SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former president Iftikhar Ali Malik has advocated the cause of achieving durable peace in the region, a prerequisite to economic growth, prosperity and development for all countries of South Asia. Talking to a delegation of traders led by Muslim Khan Buner from KP here Sunday, he said South Asia has long been plagued by instability and conflicts that have hindered the region's progress and potential. One of the major concerns contributing to this instability has been the presence of terrorist sanctuaries on Afghan soil, which have posed a severe threat not only to Afghanistan but to neighboring countries including Pakistan, he added. He said counterterrorism cooperation and collaboration closely with regional and international stakeholders, especially Pakistan, to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries can help eradicate the breeding grounds for extremist elements and bring about much-needed stability. About economic integration, he said, "We must embrace economic integration initiatives within the South Asian region and enhanced economic cooperation can create an environment conducive to peace, prosperity, and development for all." He believed that by taking these steps, the Afghan government can play a pivotal role in shaping a more secure and prosperous South Asia, as this in turn, will foster economic growth, improve living standards, and create a brighter future for all nations in the region.—APP

IRSA releases 132,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 132,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 140,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1414.82 feet and was 16.82 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 29,200 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1107.05 feet, which was 57.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 28,800 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively.—APP

ICP ensures foolproof security during Eid holidays

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) officers and officials performed their duties on 3rd and 4th day of Eid holidays and ensured comprehensive security, traffic arrangements for the citizens. A police public relations officer on Sunday said that the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Operations, Syed Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari himself reviewed security arrangements for Eid holidays. He said that Islamabad traffic police officers and officials ensured the traffic flow despite the pressure of traffic at parks and recreational places and traffic congestion issues were resolved by making effective measures and diversions at various locations. A crackdown was also launched against one-wheeling. Senior police officers requested that citizens to cooperate with traffic police officers.—APP

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Briefs

Devcom announces 'RCS Himalayan Odyssey award'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Devcom-Pakistan (Development Communications Network) on Saturday announced the details of the seventh category of Pakistan Mountains Pride Awards (PAMPA) for 2024, titled 'Raja Changez Sultan Himalayan Odyssey Award for Creative Arts'. In an online artists meetup, the founder of the PAMPA and Executive Director Devcom-Pakistan Munir Ahmed said three artists will be given the RCS Himalayan Odyssey Award for Creative Arts for their best work on the mountain themes. The categories for nominations of the creative arts include paintings, sculptures, and digital art. The best artworks will be chosen from their exhibitions on the themes. The artists can share the details of the exhibition of their artwork to the organizers at the Devcom-Pakistan. A three-member jury comprising the well-known artists will scrutinize all the data of the exhibits and select one artist from each category; paintings, sculptures and digital art for the Award. Briefing about the objectives of the RCS Himalayan Odyssey Award for Creative Arts, Munir Ahmed said primarily, we are adding this category to engage artists from various fields to focus on the challenges confronting the grandeur of mountains, its people and resources that are very vital for the people living downstream. Most of the 250 million people are unaware of what is happening in the highlands. Devcom-Pakistan aspires to engage the artist-community in raising the significance of mountains for life on earth. Besides, the pieces of art will also decorate the buildings and houses with enhanced aesthetics. Munir Ahmed said: Pakistan is blessed with 11 ranges of mountains that have their own characteristics and treasures of natural resources, which are being depleted.

ADB's report validates correct economic policies: Ahad Cheema

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahad Cheema here on Friday termed the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) report for April 2024 as a validation of the government's correct economic policies. "The ADO from the Asian Development Bank is a strong endorsement of the government's correct economic policies," said the minister according to press statement issued by Economic Affairs Division. The minister said, the ADO portrayed positive prospects for Pakistan's economy adding under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the government had started working towards a stable and sustainable economy. Inflation is decreasing in the country and this has also been confirmed by global financial institutions, Cheema said. He said, the government has been working to improve financial discipline, promote investment, and facilitate a better business environment in the country. He said, the previous coalition government during past 16 months had taken necessary measures to stabilize the economy while it also saved the country from default and the economic measures taken by it have stabilized the value of rupee. According to EAD statement, the minister said, the country's agricultural sector was strong and has potential for further growth. The minister said, the government was committed to implementing the recommendations of the ADB and continue to work towards building an economy where opportunities are available for all Pakistanis. It is pertinent to mention here that the Asian Development Bank in its ADO for April 2024 deemed economic reforms crucial for Pakistan and predicted that Pakistan's growth rate would be 1.9% during the current fiscal year.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Zahid Latif Khan and Aftab Ahmad Chaudhry Co-sponsors, promoters of the Capital Holding Company hosted dinner for the Ambassador of Portugal Frederico Silva. The friends from the diplomatic community, business fraternity and parliamentarians were invited to be part of the event. The detailed coverage of the event shall be published in the May issue of Centreline magazine. —DNA

Scholars under BRI program embark on training in China

The program aims at joint cultivation of senior meteorological operational and management staff in satellite meteorology, numerical weather forecasting, climate change and disaster prevention and mitigation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The inaugural cohort of visiting scholars under the Belt and Road Meteorological Visiting Scholar Program official commenced their year-long research and training program in China, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Sunday.

The group consists of seven scholars from meteorological departments and research institutions in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Thailand, and Seychelles. Their focus areas include climatology, climate change, satellite remote sensing, disaster monitoring, meteorology, numerical weather pre-

diction, urban meteorology, and aviation meteorology. The Belt and Road Meteorological Visiting Scholar Program was launched last September. The program aims at joint cultivation of senior meteorological operational and management staff in satellite meteorology, numerical weather forecasting, climate change and disaster prevention and mitigation. As per source from China Meteorological Administration (CMA), international training course on meteorology has been held consecutively since 2003. So far China Meteorological Administration Training Centre (CMATC) - which is also designated as

WMO Regional Training Centre in Beijing (WMO RTC-Beijing) - has carried out 86 international training courses benefiting a total of 1,368 trainees from more than 135 countries. Meanwhile, In Pakistan, growth is forecast to rise at 1.9% in FY2024 (ending on 30 June 2024) and 2.8% in FY2025, up from the 0.2% contraction last fiscal year. Gwadar Pro stated on Sunday quoting Asian Development Bank (ADB) economic forecasts report for Asia April 2024. According to the report, the shift back to positive growth will come from a recovery in both agriculture and industry. However, domestic demand will remain constrained by the surge in living costs and

tight macroeconomic policies. Growth is projected to remain subdued in FY2024 and pick up in FY2025, provided economic reforms take effect. Real GDP is projected to grow by 1.9% in FY2024 driven by a rebound in private sector investment linked to progress on reform measures and transition to a new and more stable government. An expansion in private consumption and a rise in workers' remittances from a move toward a market-determined exchange rate should buttress growth. However, low confidence, to support recovery in industrial output in the latter half of the year. Construction will remain weak due

to elevated construction costs, higher tax rates on property transfers implemented in the FY2024 budget, and rationalization of public investment to consolidate the fiscal position. Growth in services is projected to strengthen in FY2024 as recovery in agriculture and industry benefit services. If reforms are implemented, growth is forecast to restart gradually this fiscal year and improve slightly next year. Inflation is projected to moderate somewhat this year, and more next year, under stabilization policies. Improving women's financial inclusion is critical to strengthen growth.

PIAF stresses need for large scale structural changes in power sector

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol has stressed the need for large scale structural changes in power sector, controlling line losses of DISCOs by using modern technology, and customer-oriented business approach, as the public exchequer has incurred a loss of over Rs400 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23 by the power distribution companies. The PIAF Chairman, quoting the media report, observed that the performance of distribution companies (DISCOs) throughout 2022-23 remained very poor, and the expected power sector reforms were not achieved. Given the ongoing poor performance, it is apparent that, under the existing circumstances, the

current DISCO setup is unlikely to be able to deliver the desired results. No significant improvement has been witnessed on part of some DISCOs in this regard. During FY2022-23, the overall actual losses of DISCOs were 16.38% against the actual loss of 16.69% in FY 2021-22. The actual T&D losses are much higher than the allowed T&D losses for FY 2022-23, which is 12.21%. Unfortunately, the majority of DISCOs have not adhered to the NEPRA given targets, except FESCO, GEPCO, and K-Electric which have managed to keep their losses below the levels or equal to targets set by NEPRA. However, other DISCOs have exceeded these limits, which contributed to a substantial loss of over Rs. 166 billion to the national exchequer. Faheem Saigol said that it is an undeniable fact that

DISCOs are deliberately drawing less power than their demand, despite being provided with an adequate quota on account of loadshedding based on Aggregate Technical & Commercial losses policy. The AT&C based loadshedding is still being carried out and DISCOs particularly PESCO, QESCO, SEPCO and HESCO have considered it an easy path for them to manage the recovery rather than to put the efforts and ensure maximum collection. On recoveries, the report said it is observed that only one DISCO i.e., IESCO has significantly achieved the target of 100% recovery in fiscal year 2022-23. Moreover, GEPCO, FESCO, and MEPCO are nearest to the target and achieved the recoveries of 98 to 99%. Similarly, PESCO, LESCO and K-Electric have crossed the figure of 90%. Moreover, HESCO and SEPCO remained the same as in previous year, somewhere in

middle with reported values of 75.9 and 68.2%. However, QESCO has been witnessed as worst performing DISCO among all with the reported position of 36.9%. On System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI), the report said that none of the distribution companies have been able to meet the SAIFI standard of 13. Regarding System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI), the report said that almost all DISCOs are far away from the set Standard of 14 minutes. On the issue of pending connections, the performance report said that a total of 278,815 connections were not given to the eligible consumers despite the fact that they made payments due to which more than 1100MW demand/load could not be served, which is a serious matter of concern as the ample generation capacity is available.

Arrangements in place for Sikh pilgrims during Baisakhi festival

FAISAL MUNIR / DNA

ATTOCK: The district administration on Saturday finalized security arrangements for the upcoming Baisakhi festival at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassanabd. The District Police Officer (DPO) Dr. Sardar Ghiyas Gul Khan has said a foolproof security plan has been finalized for the Sikh pilgrims. The Sikh pilgrims from around the world will visit Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib in Hassanabd to participate in the Baisakhi festival. The DPO said that the protection of all religious places and followers is the top priority and they would not any miscreant to spread unrest. As per reported by our district representative faisal munir that DPO Attock will supervise a fresh contingent for se-

curity deployed at various places. Around 1,023 police officers and personnel, including six DSPs, 13 Inspectors/SHOs, 143 upper superintendents, 95 head constables, 728 constables and 36 ladies constables will be deployed to monitor the security. He said that apart from this, security cameras, walk-through gates and metal detectors would be installed as well. He said that besides this regular force, 26 sections of elite commandos will be on constant alert and patrol for the protection of Sikh pilgrims while shops close to the gurdwara would remain closed and Rescue 1122 officials would be present on high alert. Sikh pilgrims would not be allowed to leave the temple during their three-day stay from April 13 to 15, and accommodation

would be provided within the premises," he added. Earlier, the DPO while issuing instructions to the officials concerned to provide foolproof security to the pilgrims coming from all over the world, said that the protection of the life and property of the pilgrims is their utmost responsibility. He had directed the traffic in charge to manage the parking and flow of traffic during the festival. He also instructed Rescue 1122 officials to keep three vehicles on standby. District police officer Dr. Sardar Ghiyas Gul Khan said a foolproof security plan has put in place for Sikh pilgrims. The safety of religious places and their followers is our top priority. All Sikh pilgrims can worship freely without fear or danger he added.

Pace of agri development in country is slow

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Murtaza Mughal, President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), said on Friday that the nation's agricultural growth is progressing slowly and needs improvement. He said the lack of water would impact the Kharif harvest, hitting many crops, including the most important cotton crop. Protecting agriculture and farming communities from the effects of climate change is very important; therefore, he demanded it should be given due importance. In a statement issued here today, Dr. Murtaza Mughal said that the population growth is very fast while the overall economic development including the agricultural growth rate is disappointing. He said that climate change must be handled correctly, as it affects agricultural production and millions of farmers.

Positive progress is being made on the economic front

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), Dr. Shahid Rashid Butt, said on Friday that the investment climate in Pakistan is improving, which is restoring the confidence of local and foreign investors. He said that fears of bankruptcy in the country are almost over as the economic situation is improving, which may lead to a reduction in interest rates. Administrative measures against hoarders and profiteers are necessary to reduce the prices of essential commodities and provide relief to the masses, he added. Shahid Rashid Butt said in a statement issued here that the visit of the Prime Minister to Saudi Arabia has remained fruitful, and there is a possibility of an investment of five billion dollars. He said the economy is improving, international institutions are satisfied, inflation is decreasing, and an interest rate cut seems in sight.

China to solarize Pak Railways

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In collaboration with China, a plan is afoot to shift Pakistan Railways to solar energy in a bid to ward off colossal financial damages and lay the foundation of green energy in railway infrastructure. Initially, 100 sites with heavy electricity consumption have been identified and once shifted to solar energy, it would save at least Rs1 billion a year for the entity. According to senior PR officials, the government of Pakistan and Chinese firms have been negotiating to hammer out an action deal, Gwadar Pro reported on Saturday. "Pakistan has started attuning its transport infrastructure to realize its vision of high-quality green and sustainable development," he added.

BMP proposes central bank to review credit policies in SMEs favor

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel has proposed the central bank to review its credit policies by fixing a special quota to finance the small and medium enterprises, as only the large industries have been availing government's all

major concessional export loaning facilities, with very limited financing is left for the SMEs which are the backbone of the economy, contributing around 40 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP). The FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that the government with a view

to help grow the businesses will have to take solid measures to strengthen the industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries. The government will have to make a visible reduction in markup rate to help grow the businesses, particularly the SME sector, as Pakistan needs millions of jobs annually.

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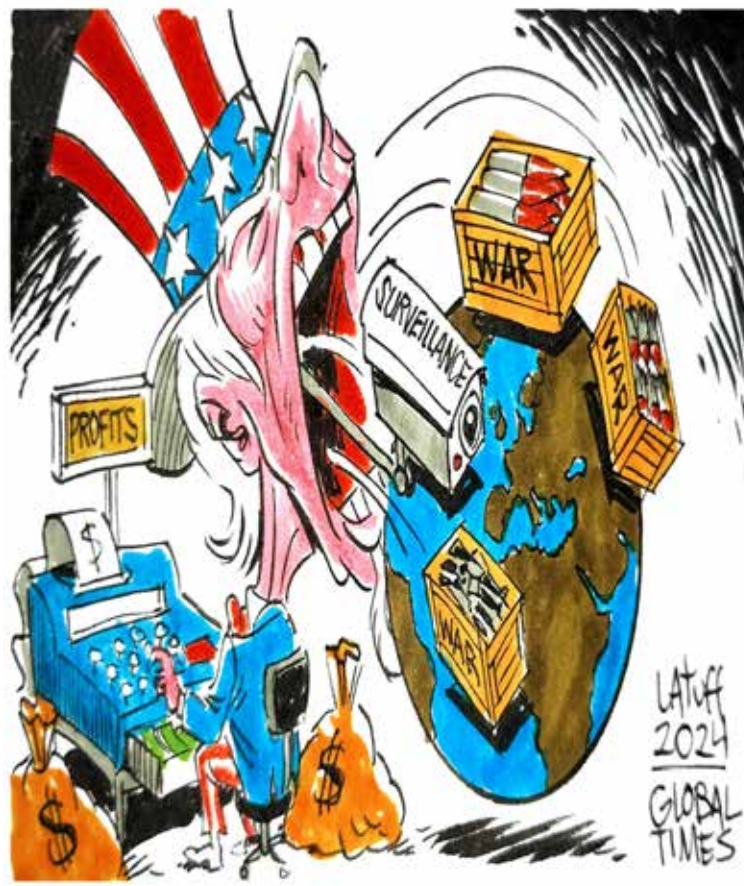
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Iran: A new front of support

Iran's Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian vowed Iranian retaliation following the Israeli occupation entity's recent attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus that killed several top officials and advisors, including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC). He stated the necessity of "legitimate defence with the aim of punishing the aggressor", as the attack marked an unprecedented violation of international law's protection of diplomatic missions. "Israel's" attack was due to the strategic threat the Resistance Axis poses to the Israeli occupation entity, and Iran's unwavering support for the Gaza resistance. It is simply a continuation of the entity's policies of killing Resistance leaders from Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq in the past six months. The foundation of the Resistance Axis today and the focal point is related to Al-Aqsa and the current war on Gaza, with the Israeli occupation entity single-handedly failing to weaken the Gaza resistance, which is considered the most vulnerable in the whole Resistance Axis. The Israeli occupation entity's attack on the Iranian consulate has put it and the Western camp in a bad place, since there is now a legal base for Iran to attack the entity, as its own sovereignty was threatened. The entity is likely attempting to get out of the "impasse" it faces in Gaza by trying to drag Iran and the US into direct confrontation, as the main title these past six months of the war on Gaza is lost. Instead, it wishes for a regional war, such that it appears as though regional nations are fighting to secure their interests, with pressure and attention diverted away from the Israeli occupation's crimes in Gaza. However, Iran is very sensitive to not allow a diversion in strategy, whereby the Israeli occupation entity's hands become free in Gaza, allowing them to intensify their mass ethnic cleansing campaign, as the world's eyes are no longer focused on them. This war has crucially revealed the true nature of the Israeli occupation entity that is built on terrorism since its inception, thereby mobilising the world against the entity and rendering it a pariah in global politics. The Iranian strategy for retaliation inside the occupation entity is such that it will not threaten the occupation entity, to the point where it will warrant direct American intervention and invoke a wider regional war. The outcome of a regional war will be to relegate the war on Gaza to a secondary position and give Netanyahu what he wants. The ramifications of a strong Iranian response that poses a threat to "Israel" is likely to trigger direct American intervention to protect the Israeli occupation entity. Here, the war will expand, since the gap created by the downfall of the Israeli occupation entity will be substituted with the Resistance axis. America will not accept the power balance to shift at the hands of the Resistance axis through the termination of their Western project in the region, as that will deal a decisive blow to America's presence in the region. America would rather announce the bankruptcy of the Israeli occupation entity, which was created initially to protect Western interests. The US has no interest in expanding the war, since direct war with Iran signifies a real threat to the American presence in the region. America's implicit messaging to Iran is that they were unaware of the Israel's strike on the consulate and were not happy with it, therefore signalled for Iran to respond to a degree that would not warrant an intervention. Even if America reallocated its forces regionally in a war with Iran, it would take months of preparation and assembly. To deploy its troops, it would need access to ports and airfields where soldiers can land, with military infrastructure, whereas Iran could attack these and render them unusable.



US's China containment policy: Marshal plan reimposed...

Qamar Bashir



Resultantly, the US and its junior partner Europe and countries of Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific regions are following multifaceted policies to push back China. At the forefront of these policies is the de-risking strategy aimed at reducing excessive reliance on China, particularly in supply chains and markets. This involves diversifying supply chains by sourcing from multiple countries, localizing or reshoring manufacturing operations

While it comes to China US rivalry, two opposite themes emerge. China says that this world is big enough for all of us to share its bounties and immense resources without undercutting each other. While the US leadership says that it may be true, the US will determine the rules of sharing, distribution and use of world resources, and anyone found deviating from this path will be punished. Resultantly, the US and its junior partner Europe and countries of Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific regions are following multifaceted policies to push back China. At the forefront of these policies is the de-risking strategy aimed at reducing excessive reliance on China, particularly in supply chains and markets. This involves diversifying supply chains by sourcing from multiple countries, localizing or reshoring manufacturing operations to reduce dependency on Chinese factories, developing alternative markets, investing in technology and innovation to reduce reliance on Chinese technology, and fostering collaboration and partnerships with other countries or industry players. On the military front, the US is bullying its partners and allies in the Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific region to push back against Beijing by forging bilateral and multilateral initiatives and partnerships reflecting the United States' efforts to address challenges posed by China's assertiveness as part of US policy to encircle China in the Asia Pacific region and beyond as an overarching China containment policy. In addition to the existing groups like QUAD and AUKUS, USA has developed a new alliance with Japan and the Philippines in an attempt to isolate China from its immediate neighbors. The trilateral summit being held in Washington in the second week of April, 2024 has announced joint maritime patrols with the Philippines in the South China Sea, where sovereignty is disputed, and to restructure the US military command in Japan - the biggest upgrade to defense cooperation since the 1960s - to make them more responsive against threats from China. Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) which assumed belligerent posture against China in 2016 was formed by the US with Japan, Australia and India focused on maritime security, infrastructure development, supply chain resilience and to share concerns over China's increasing assertiveness and influence in the Indo-Pacific region driven by the need to counterbalance China's rise. Formed in 2021, AUKUS is the second most important alliance of the US with Australia and the

United Kingdom aimed to deepen trilateral cooperation on defense and security, with a focus on enhancing Australia's maritime capabilities, including acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. Currently AUKUS is being expanded by offering membership to Japan. Geopolitically, AUKUS signifies a strategic move to counterbalance China's influence in the face of evolving security challenges in the region. This forum aimed at empowering Australia to manufacture nuclear submarines which will be deployed in the strait that separates China and Taiwan specifically aimed to deter any Chinese move against Taiwan. The next important alliance is "Five Eyes" which boasts the membership of the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand aimed at intelligence-sharing and cooperation on border security issues, including countering cyber threats and foreign interference. In October last year the Five Eyes countries' intelligence chiefs came together to accuse China of intellectual property theft and using artificial intelligence for hacking and spying against the nations. In addition, the US has forged many bilateral alliances which include U.S.-Japan. Under this alliance, the US is planning to help Japan create a new Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) by March 2025, overseeing all of the country's military operations. The US will match Japan's upgrade with an upgrade of US operational command" to lay the groundwork for a future unified Japanese-US command mainly to push back China. Like Japan, the US has also forged Strategic Partnership with India aimed to deepen defense and security cooperation, promote economic ties, and address regional and global challenges, including those related to China. During her visit to China (4-8 April, 2024), the U.S. Treasury Secretary made some interesting demands. Instead of improving US industrial efficiency and productivity, She asked China to slow down its industrial growth to match the sluggish growth of USA industries. Interestingly, her demands of ensuring balanced economic growth did not make any economic or financial sense. The balance of growth according to the US meant a reduction in production capacity for electric vehicles (EVs), lithium batteries, solar panels and other clean energy technology that threaten competing firms in the U.S. and other countries, and stop flooding US markets with exports that make it difficult for American and other firms to compete. She also warned China to stop providing military aid or civilian technology which can have dual purposes. The threats hurled by Yellen were in line with President Biden's earlier warnings to China to stop

providing help in rebuilding Russia's military industry and Blinken's belligerent posture when he warned in Europe last week that China was providing aid to Russia on a "worrying scale," including products such as rocket propellant. Recently, the US started using credit rating agencies such as Fitch and Moody's to discredit China's credit ratings to negative citing risks to public finances. The ratings based upon self-serving data were rebutted by China arguing that there was no change in financial and economic outlook of China compared to last year, therefore reducing credit ratings had no justification whatsoever. This multifaceted encircling of China is meant to suffocate China militarily by building aggressive alliances in Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific region, using existing agreements to empower US to intervene against military threats especially in South China Sea, Strait of Taiwan, Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific region. On foreign policy front, the USA wants to control China's bilateral relations with other countries of the world, especially with those countries which do not enjoy friendly disposition with the USA. While on the economic front it wants to control China's industrial strategy by forcing it to reduce the speed of industrial growth to match the sluggish US industrial production. On the financial front it is using sovereign credit rating agencies to discredit China's financial outlook. These confrontations are akin to the Cold War era involving intense geopolitical competition between major powers for influence and dominance in strategic regions, and like the cold war era US is building and strengthening alliances and partnerships with like-minded countries to counterbalance the influence and actions of China. But this time around, the US is not confronted with Ideological warfare, less territorial but more of industrial warfare, knowing very well that unlike the USSR, it's fighting a war which it is losing very fast. Soon the US will realize the best option for the US in not to impose tariffs on Chinese products, but to improve the efficiency and productivity of its sluggish industrial sectors, otherwise, it will lose its innovative and creative edge on the world market paving the way for Chinese dominance in these fields which were earlier only US specific.

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

Hamas-Israel negotiations and regional stability

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The historical context of previous conflicts between Hezbollah and Israel underscores the magnitude of the potential consequences, including widespread destruction, loss of life and destabilization of the region. Despite the heightened tensions, there remains recognition albeit uneasy of the imperative to avoid a full-scale war and seek avenues for de-escalation and resolution. The complexity of the geopolitical scene which is intertwined with regional

The escalating intensity of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel is attached with the rising rhetoric from officials on both sides that suggest a troubling path towards a potentially devastating conflict. While the confrontations may indicate a path towards a large-scale war, it is an evident that both parties are acutely aware of the devastating toll such a conflict would exact on civilian populations in both Lebanon and Israel. The historical context of previous conflicts between Hezbollah and Israel underscores the magnitude of the potential consequences, including widespread destruction, loss of life and destabilization of the region. Despite the heightened tensions, there remains recognition albeit uneasy of the imperative to avoid a full-scale war and seek avenues for de-escalation and resolution. The complexity of the geopolitical scene which is intertwined with regional alliances and interests to underscores the importance of diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions and prevent further escalation. Ultimately, the recognition of the immense human cost of conflict underscores the necessity for all stakeholders to prioritize dialogue and diplomacy in pursuit of peace and stability in the region. According to Israeli officials, tensions along the Israel-Lebanon border have escalated significantly, with clashes intensifying and spreading in recent weeks. Israel has reportedly increased its military strikes, targeting not only areas within Lebanese territory but also conducting airstrikes against Iranian-affiliated sites in Syria, including the Iranian consulate in Damascus on April 1st. In response to these developments, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah delivered a speech on April 5th, affirming Hezbollah's commitment to continued border clashes with Israel and declaring that the group will persist in its attacks until the cessation of hostilities in Gaza. Nasrallah also warned Lebanon to brace itself for potential Iranian retaliation against Israel, emphasizing Hezbollah's preparedness for any escalation along the border and asserting that the group has yet to deploy its most potent weaponry. These developments underscore the precarious situation in the region, with the potential for further escalation and broader regional implications. On April 7, the Israeli army made a significant announcement on its website, declaring the completion of yet another phase of the Northern Command's readiness for war along the Lebanon front. This announcement has intensified the concerns of analysts, who increasingly argue that prolonged border clashes heighten the likelihood of a broader conflict, potentially culminating in a ground invasion of southern

Lebanon. Such a military operation would be strategically aimed at establishing a security corridor deep into Lebanese territory, pushing Hezbollah fighters beyond the Litani River. However, historical precedents cast doubt on the effectiveness of such endeavors. Israel's previous attempt to create a security corridor in south Lebanon, spanning from 1985 to 2000, ended without achieving the desired stability. Despite past reservations from Israeli political and military officials regarding ground combat in Lebanon, there has been a perceptible shift in attitude. Amos Harel suggests that given this shift, the scenario of a general war in Lebanon no longer appears implausible. Yet, the complexities of the region and the historical challenges associated with similar endeavors suggest that any such military action is fraught with uncertainties and risks, casting a shadow over Israel's aspirations for stability along its border with Lebanon. Israeli officials find themselves in a precarious position, carefully weighing two critical factors in their decision-making regarding a potential full-blown war with Hezbollah. Firstly, the prospect of such a conflict escalating into a broader regional conflagration cannot be overlooked, as it's highly likely that other members of the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance" would join forces against Israel and the US. This amplifies the risks and complexities involved, given the already strained dynamics in the Middle East. Secondly, the stance of the Biden administration adds another layer of consideration. With clear opposition to a significant escalation in Lebanon, Israeli initiation of such a war, particularly amidst US calls for cease-fires in Gaza and objections to Israeli actions in Rafah, could significantly strain the bilateral relationship with the United States. The intensifying skirmishes between Hezbollah and Israel, coupled with heightened rhetoric from both sides, signal a potential path toward a large-scale conflict, reminiscent of the scale of hostilities seen in Gaza. However, amidst this escalating tension, both Israeli and Hezbollah officials are cognizant of the devastating humanitarian toll such a war would exact on civilians in both Lebanon and Israel. Furthermore, there's a sober recognition within Israeli circles that the outcomes of a new conflict with Hezbollah are uncertain, with lingering doubts about whether it would result in a resolution akin to the 2006 war, which led to the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, ultimately unimplemented by either side. Therefore, Israeli officials face a delicate balance, contemplating the risks of escalation, the implications for regional stability, the diplomatic ramifications vis-à-vis the US, and the potential human cost, as they navigate the complexities of their decision-making calculus concerning Hezbollah.

UNSCR 1701 stands as a pivotal framework aiming to defuse tensions and promote stability in the volatile region surrounding the Israeli-Lebanese border. Central to its provisions is the call for militants not affiliated with the Lebanese army or the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to withdraw approximately 25 miles north of the Israeli border, alongside urging Israel to relinquish its hold on occupied Lebanese territories and to cease violations of Lebanese airspace. Amidst this backdrop, key stakeholders including Lebanese officials, Hezbollah leaders, and Israeli authorities have expressed a collective inclination towards pursuing diplomatic avenues to resolve the persistent conflict along the border. Hezbollah's stance notably hinges on the cessation of hostilities in Gaza as a condition for their approval of any potential agreement. The United States has emerged as a proactive actor, proposing a roadmap aimed at addressing the divergent demands of both sides through a series of security arrangements. Notably, this proposal falls short of a complete implementation of UNSCR 1701. It envisions Hezbollah's withdrawal, particularly its elite Radwan Forces, northwards to the Litani River, while concurrently advocating for heightened presence of the Lebanese army and UNIFIL in the vacated areas. Additionally, the US seeks to facilitate mediation efforts between the conflicting parties to address territorial disputes along the border, mirroring its prior successful intervention in mediating maritime border disputes. This multifaceted approach underscores the intricate dynamics at play and the concerted international efforts aimed at fostering lasting peace and stability in the region. The fate of the ongoing indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israel, facilitated by Qatar, Egypt, and the US, is crucial for the region's stability. These talks aim to broker a ceasefire deal that would lead to the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The outcome of these negotiations carries significant implications, not only for the Israel-Palestine conflict but also for wider regional dynamics. If successful, Hezbollah is likely to adhere to the ceasefire agreement, potentially reducing tensions in the region. However, should these negotiations falter, it could exacerbate hostilities, especially if Israel responds to Iranian retaliation by targeting Iranian assets both inside and outside Iran. Such actions could prompt Hezbollah and other members of the Axis of Resistance to escalate attacks on Israel, raising the specter of a full-blown war between Israel and Lebanon. In this scenario, the United States may face renewed pressure to intervene and mediate between Israel and Lebanon to prevent further escalation and restore stability in the region.

Briefs

Iran, Israel
mull options
as world...

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The Damascus strike levelled the five-storey consular annexe of the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital and killed seven Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals. Bagheri said the retaliatory attack targeted an intelligence centre and the air base from which Tehran says the Israeli F-35 jets took off to strike the Damascus consulate. "Both these centres were significantly destroyed and put out of order," he said, though Israel maintains that the attack only resulted in minor damage. "We see this operation as complete, and this operation has ended in our opinion," Bagheri said. The army chief also warned the United States against aiding any Israeli action against Iran.

Puttin fears
World
War III

FROM PAGE 01

The Russian foreign ministry said Lavrov reiterated "decisive condemnation" of an Israeli strike in Syria this month that killed Iranian generals. Russia has previously condemned Israel's conduct in its six-month war in Gaza. Meanwhile, China is deeply concerned about the current escalation of the Iran-Israel situation and calls on relevant parties to remain calm and exercise restraint to avoid further escalation of tensions, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said on Sunday. China expresses deep concern over the current escalation and calls on relevant parties to exercise calm and restraint to prevent further escalations, the spokesperson said in a statement in response to a question about the Iran-Israel conflict.

UNSC
meets in
emergency...

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UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres slammed Iran's attack, saying he was "deeply alarmed about the very real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation." "I strongly condemn the serious escalation represented by the large-scale attack launched on Israel by the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said in a statement. "I am deeply alarmed about the very real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation. I urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid any action that could lead to major military confrontations on multiple fronts in the Middle East." Iran launched a swarm of explosive drones and fired missiles at Israel late on Saturday in its first-ever direct attack on Israeli territory, risking a major regional escalation as the United States pledged "ironclad" backing for Israel. The Iranian strikes came as Tehran's allies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen have carried out a flurry of attacks on Israeli and Western targets since October 7 when Israel attacked Gaza. —APP

Omar
asserts...

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He said the parties included in their alliance would hold rallies all over the country. On April 12, Ayub had announced that under the umbrella of a "grand opposition alliance", they would launch a protest movement against the alleged rigging in the February 8 general elections and for "restoration of the Constitution and democracy" in the country from Balochistan. The opposition leader also said the resources of Balochistan should be first spent on residents of the province. In fact, resources of any province should be spent on its people, he said. Subsequently, the six-party opposition alliance launched its protest drive against the government a day earlier with a rally in Balochistan's Pishin where PTI Ayub vowed to reclaim their rights through the "Tehreek Tahafuz Ayin". "The people of country came forward to make this movement successful," the politician said during his address in front of a charged crowd.

Naqvi seeks list of PCB
political affiliation hires

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi is determined to make the board politics-free

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE : Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has requested the list of the employees who were recruited on the basis of political affiliation in the board, sources told on Sunday. Naqvi, who was elected unopposed as the chairman of the board recently, has also asked for the current posts and salary details of such individuals working inside the board. The PCB chairman also asked for the education credentials of all those who were recruited without rules and regulations as he is determined to make the board free of all political influence of any kind. The process of making the list has already started and important decisions can be expected by next week as Naqvi intends to follow the right person for the right job formula. Sources further revealed that Naqvi is strictly against the



lobbying and advocacy culture as he is focused on taking immediate steps that would make things easy and smart. Earlier, Mohsin Naqvi made a big decision to upgrade three major stadiums in Pakistan ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 after which the stadium upgradation plan was presented

to him. National Bank Stadium Karachi, Gaddafi Stadium Lahore and Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium will be upgraded massively before the commencement of the ICC tournament in 2025. Remember, the PCB finalised the deal with the International Cricket Council (ICC) in December. The event will

mark the return of the ICC Champions Trophy after an eight-year gap since its last occurrence in 2017, which Pakistan won. Some Test-playing nations such as Sri Lanka and West Indies missed out on this global tournament, with Sri Lanka failing to secure a top-eight position in the ICC World Cup 2023 points table. For the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, a total of eight teams will participate, following the One Day International (ODI) format. The qualification process involved the top seven teams from the ICC ODI World Cup group stage, along with the host nation, Pakistan, securing their positions for this upcoming tournament. The teams confirmed for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy are Pakistan (hosts), India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Afghanistan, England, Bangladesh. Earlier on, PCB provides major update on Ihsanullah's elbow injury Pakistan's fast bowler Ihsanullah has left for

Manchester, England where he will meet with a renowned orthopaedic surgeon to assess the extent of his elbow injury, confirmed the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday. Ihsanullah, 21, has only represented Pakistan in five international matches, with his last appearance in match against New Zealand in April 2023. Ihsanullah's Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchise, Multan Sultans, also collaborated with the PCB to ensure that their star pacer's treatment goes smoothly. "Fast bowler Ihsanullah left for Manchester, England, on Sunday morning for his crucial appointment on Monday with esteemed orthopaedic surgeon, Professor Adam Watts, regarding his elbow injury. Professor Watts specialises in hand and wrist surgery, shoulder and elbow procedures, sports injuries, and trauma surgery," PCB said in a press release.

NZ team reaches Pakistan
ahead of T20I series

The five-match T20I series will begin on April 18 in Rawalpindi

ISLAMABAD: The New Zealand cricket team reached Pakistan on April 14 ahead of the five-match series which is set to begin on April 18 in Rawalpindi. New Zealand's arrival was confirmed by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on their official X, formerly Twitter, handle with the caption: "Welcome to Pakistan, @BLACKCAPS!"

The New Zealand team has arrived in Islamabad ahead of the Bank Alfalah Presents Jazz Pakistan vs New Zealand T20I Series 2024." The five-match series is crucial for both teams as it will

provide a great chance to analyse their squads ahead of the 2024 T20 World Cup, which begins on June 1. Remember, in New Zealand's last training session before leaving for Pakistan, two of their key players, Finn Allen and Adam Milne, sustained injuries and were ruled out of the series. Allen sustained a back injury while Milne felt discomfort in his ankle after which it was decided to exclude them from the squad. Wicketkeeper-batsman Tom Blundell and all-rounder Zak Foulkes were named replacements for two players. The former has previously

visited Pakistan while the latter will be making his debut for the Black Caps. It is worth mentioning that most of the players in the New Zealand squad are not part of their first team as key players like Kane Williamson, Rachin Ravindra, Daryll Mitchell and others are engaged in the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024. Pakistan squad Babar Aza, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Saim Ayub, Usman Khan, Ifthikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan (wk), Imad Wasim, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, Mohammad Amir, Abbas Afridi, Abrar Ahmed, Fakhar Zaman, Irfan Khan Niazi, Usama Mir, Zaman

Khan Reserves: Haseebullah, Mohammad Ali, Agha Salman, Sahibzada Farhan, Mohammad Wasim Jr. New Zealand squad: Michael Bracewell, Finn Allen, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Adam Milne, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert (WK), Ish Sodhi Pakistan vs New Zealand T20I series schedule April 18 – 1st T20I, Rawalpindi April 20 – 2nd T20I, Rawalpindi April 21 – 3rd T20I, Rawalpindi April 25 – 4th T20I, Lahore April 27 – 5th T20I, Lahore.—APP

Fakhar impressed by
Azam during Kakul
fitness camp

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's top-order batter Fakhar Zaman has appreciated young wicketkeeper batter Azam Khan for his courage and hard work during the recently concluded physical fitness camp in Kakul. Twenty-nine cricketers attended the pre-season camp at the historic and iconic Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul from March 26 to April 6, with the training and drills designed by Pakistan Army experts and strategists. During the camp, there was a focus on team building aimed to enhance the physical and mental strength of the players, ensuring they were in the best condition to face the challenges ahead. Under the guidance of experienced trainers and coaches, the players underwent a comprehensive training regime tailored to elevate their fitness levels, agility, leadership, strategic thinking and overall performance on the field. Azam Khan's consistent hard work during the fitness camp brought him to the forefront, despite being criticized for his fitness issues in the past. Fakhar Zaman praised the explosive wicketkeeper highly in an interview on the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) official YouTube channel. "What impressed me the most is what Azam Khan has done. We were not expecting him to undergo such tough training, and naturally, his physique is such that we didn't anticipate him to take up such challenges," Zaman said. "Despite that, the way he has pushed himself, even climbing mountains when we were hiking, I mean, we couldn't believe he would make it to the top. If we all show such courage, it could be very beneficial."—DNA

Fin Minister
leads
delegation
to US

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Finance Minister Aurangzeb and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. Sources have indicated that members of the economic team would also participate in the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank. Earlier on Thursday, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva stated that Pakistan was in discussions with the IMF on a potential follow-up programme to its nine-month \$3 billion stand-by arrangement. During an event at the Atlantic Council think-tank, Georgieva said that Pakistan was successfully completing its existing programme and its economy was performing somewhat better, with reserves now being built up. However, she expressed the need for Pakistan to address important issues. "There is a commitment to continue on this path, and the country is turning to the fund for potentially having a follow-up program," Georgieva said, flagging issues that Pakistan still needed to address.

Iranian
response
due to...

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intercepted and shot down. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels also launched multiple drones at Israel after Iran initiated a retaliatory drone assault against Israel, security firm Ambrey said late Saturday. Iran has also warned Israel of a larger attack on its territory should it retaliate against Tehran's overnight drone and missile attack on Sunday, adding that Washington has been warned not to back Israeli military action. "Our response will be much larger than tonight's military action if Israel retaliates against Iran," Sky News reported quoting Tehran's Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri's statement to state-run media. Gen Bagheri has also warned Washington that any backing of Israeli retaliation would result in US bases being targeted.

Balochistan
govt to
revise...

FROM PAGE 01

In a similar attack possibly by the same gunmen, another two people were killed after they attempted to escape the cordon set up by the assailants on N-40, the Quetta-Noshki Highway. A spokesperson for the banned Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the killings. According to officials, armed men blocked the highway and started intercepting the vehicles. Soon, they intercepted a passenger coach on its way to Taftan from Quetta and looted the belongings of passengers, including cash and mobile phones, away at gunpoint.

President,
PM extend
Baisakhi...

FROM PAGE 01

the contributions made by the minorities in the progress and development of the country. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif felicitated Sikh community living in Pakistan and across the globe on the celebration of Baisakhi. In a message, the prime minister said that the Government of Pakistan and all the provincial governments were ensuring provision of all facilities to the Sikh Yatraes who were visiting their religious places in Pakistan to perform their religious rituals. Baisakhi was an occasion showing the colours of spring and an event to exchange feelings like love, affection and joys, PM Office Media Wing, in a press release, quoted the prime minister as saying. The prime minister said that they felt pride that Pakistan comprised the beauty of combination of different faiths and cultures and the event of Baisakhi further added to that beauty. "On the occasion of Baisakhi, I give you all the message of love, affection and peace. Let's play our role in building a peaceful world," he added.

McGregor to face
Michael Chandler
at UFC 303

Conor McGregor is all set to return to the octagon as the date for his fight against Michael Chandler has been confirmed, announced UFC boss Dana White on Saturday. The two are all set to lock horns at the main event of UFC 303 in Las Vegas on June 29 at T-Mobile Arena. McGregor, who last stepped inside the octagon in July 2021 when he broke his leg in a fight against Dustin Poirier, has 22 wins and six losses while his opponent, Chandler, has a 23-8 record in the UFC. There were rumours that McGregor may face Chandler at UFC 296 as the two spent the better part of last year having off-field bouts with one another but that didn't happen as the Notorious failed to meet UFC's policy of six months of mandatory drug testing after which White announced Leon Edwards vs Colby Covington will headline the final UFC show of the year. The co-main event is yet to be set. Current UFC 303 lineup on McGregor vs Michael Chandler, 170 lbs catchweight Rei Tsuruya vs Carlos Hernandez, flyweight Cub Swanson vs Andre Fili, featherweight Michelle Waterson-Gomez vs Gillian Robertson, women's strawweight It is worth mentioning that McGregor lost three of his last four fights including back-to-back defeats against Poirier at UFC 257 and 264 and a famous submission defeat against the undefeated UFC star Khabib Nurmagomedov at UFC 229 on October 7, 2018. At his peak, the Irishman won two UFC titles and impressively knocked out eight opponents. The quickest knockout win of his career came against Jose Aldo in December 2015 when he knocked Aldo out in just 13 seconds. In his UFC career, the 35-year-old was undefeated in his first seven fights from 2013 to 2015. His first loss came against Nate Diaz at UFC 196 in March 2016.—Agencies

Will Rafael
Nadal play
Barcelona
Open?

PARIS : Rafael Nadal is set to return to ATP competition for the first time since January when he faces Flavio Cobolli in the Barcelona Open next week. The 22-time Grand Slam champion has only played once, in an exhibition match, since experiencing a hip injury flare-up during his quarterfinal loss to Jordan Thompson at the Brisbane Open. The tournament has received a boost with the return of Nadal's fellow Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, the world No 3, who withdrew from this week's Monte Carlo Masters due to a right arm injury. Unlike Nadal, the two-time defending Barcelona champion receives a first-round bye as he is seeded. Nadal, 37, missed most of the 2023 season due to injury and has only competed at the Brisbane International this season. The injury in Brisbane led the 14-time French Open winner to withdraw from the Australian Open, as well as Doha and Indian Wells, where he had initially planned to make his comeback.—APP

Tchouameni helps
Madrid see off Mallorca
to stay on title course

PALMA: Aurelien Tchouameni scored a long-range goal to help Real Madrid secure a 1-0 victory over Mallorca in their La Liga 2023-24 match at Estadi Mallorca Son Moix. The victory helped Real Madrid to stay eight points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga points table ahead of the upcoming El Clasico. The France midfielder, who is suspended for the second leg of Madrid's Champions League quarter-final away to Manchester City next week, scored three minutes into the second half with a deflected 25-metre drive. Jude Bellingham rattled the crossbar in the first half with a rasping effort from just outside the area as coach Carlo Ancelotti reshuffled his attack with Wednesday's trip to England in mind, leaving out Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo. Tchouameni's third goal of the season put Real Madrid ahead, with Ibrahim Diaz denied a second by the legs of Mallorca goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic and Fede Valverde's attempt cleared off the line. Vinicius appeared off the bench for the last 30 minutes but Rodrygo and Toni Kroos were unused substitutes after a thrilling 3-3 draw with Manchester City in Tuesday's first leg. Sergi Darder's spectacular dipping shot forced a flying stop from Andriy Lunin as Madrid extended their unbeaten league run to 25 games, keeping Barcelona a safe distance behind ahead of next week's Clasico in the Spanish capital. "It's a very important victory, which brings us closer to the title. We're on a good run and now we're going to think about Wednesday, that we have time to recover well and try to do our best," said Ancelotti. "Having an advantage before (next) Sunday's game is very important and that was the goal." Copa del Rey runners-up Mallorca stay in 15th, six points above the relegation zone. Meanwhile, Barcelona, who are desperately trying to force their way back into the title race, matched Madrid's result with a 1-0 win of their own at third-bottom Cadiz. Joao Felix's clever overhead late in the first half secured the points as coach Xavi Hernandez made sweeping changes to the team that beat Paris Saint-Germain 3-2 in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final. The Portugal international led the attack in the absence of the suspended Robert Lewandowski, acrobatically hooking in the only goal after a Cadiz defender's looping header from a corner fell directly to him. Fermin Lopez had an effort scrambled off the line and Marc-Andre ter Stegen's sprawling save to claw away a Diadie Samassekou piledriver preserved a sixth successive clean sheet in the league for the visitors.—Agencies

Al-Sagheer Hockey Club won the first position

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: Member National Assembly Khawaja Izzat ul Hasan has said that North Karachi Hockey Academy is working at the grass root level in the true sense, the talent that will emerge from here will be entitled to wear the green shirt of Pakistan. He expressed these views while watching the final of the Ramadan Hockey League held at the North Karachi Hockey Academy And after making a detailed visit to the academy, he did in the discussion. On this occasion, it was also announced that Khawaja Izzat ul Hasan has been made the head of the North Karachi Hockey Academy and member Sindh Assembly Rehan Akram has been made the patron. A game in which we ruled the world, today is so decaying that we are continuously losing in Asia as well. He thanked for working at the grass root level and assured his full cooperation and said that many members of our Sindh Assembly are also present here at this time to play their role for the North Karachi Hockey Academy. Member of Sindh Assembly Rehan Akram said that he was very impressed by the performance of the young children of North Karachi Hockey Academy.

The coaches and officials of the academy deserve congratulations for promoting hockey without any

Chairman of Al-Sagheer Hockey Club and Vice President of Sindh Olympic Association Imtiaz Ahmed

Students Olympic Association, Director of Higher Education Commission, HEC, Javed Ali Memon,

man Faisal Aziz, former Deputy Director Sports KMC and Sindh Catchball Association Treasurer Nadeem Khan, Ismail Shah District Sports Officer Karachi East, Ms. Hajra Nawab District Sports Officer Central District, National Hockey Player Shaheen Sultana, Director of Physical Education Ms. Zarqa International Arif Bhopali Dr. Samar ul Islam, International Empire Younis Siddiqui Junaid Jahangir, Mahmood, Azam Khan, Haji Ghulam Muhammad Khan, son of late Jahangir Muhammad Khan, founder of Nishtar Hockey Club, performed the duties of comparing Muhammad Umar, International Muhammad Ali Khan, Naveed Ahsan, International Sarfaraz, Taslim Usmani aka Raju, Shoaib, Kashif Farooqi, Salimuddin Babar, Latafat Shah, Engineer Athar Hussain, Zulqarnain, Irshad Haider, District Sports Officer Central District, Senior players and veterans of Al-Sagheer Hockey Club, in addition to the members of the Mahalla Committee of the area, Javed Bhai, Adnan, Zahid, Tariq Khan, Faisal Javed, Raheel Khan, Abid Khalil, Fahad, Adnan Naqvi, parents of children and other elders of the city were present.



greed, playing their role, he said that we will fully support the North Karachi Hockey Academy in every way. International hockey player Mubbashir Mukhtar Assuring his full cooperation while commending the services The ceremony was presided over by Olympian Ishaq uddin Siddiqui, Olympian Ayaz Mehmood, Olympian Kamran Ashraf, International Muhammad Ali Khan,

Sheikh, President of Al-Sagheer Hockey Club Syed Sagheer. Husain and Secretary General Azmat Pasha, Amir Siddiqui, senior player of Al-Sagheer Hockey Club and Director of Sports of Habib University, Naeem Haider, senior hockey player, Mubbashir Mukhtar, the spirited international of North Karachi Hockey Academy, Maqbool Arain, President of Pakistan

International Goalkeeper Ghaffoor Ahmed, International Goalkeeper Abuzar Amrao, International Goalkeeper Ijaz Khokhar, Taslim Usmani, International cup player and head coach North Karachi Hockey Academy Masroor Javed, Al-Sagheer Hockey Club coach Junaid Aslam Kamran Naseem, KMC Director Sports and Karachi Student Olympic Association Chair-

Briefs

Landslides
kill 14 on
Indonesia's
Sulawesi
island

JAKARTA : At least 15 people have been found dead and two others missing after landslides hit central Indonesia, say the local authorities. At least 17 victims were evacuated from the landslides that hit Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi province on Saturday evening, local disaster agency head Sulaiman Maila said on Sunday. "Two of them survived while 15 others sadly passed away," Maila told the AFP news agency. "According to reports from residents, there are still two individuals reported missing, presumably buried under the landslide debris," he said, adding that rescue efforts were ongoing. Tana Toraja and its surrounding areas have been experiencing heavy rainfall for the past week, he added. The landslides, triggered by heavy rains, affected two villages in the region and destroyed four homes, Abdul Muhari, the spokesperson for the country's disaster mitigation agency, said in a statement. The affected areas are hilly and difficult for rescuers to reach. Photos provided by officials showed rescuers trawling through the rubble for survivors, with homes reduced to planks of wood and concrete.—Agencies

US to
announce
\$100 million
aid for Sudan
conflict

WASHINGTON : The United States on Sunday will announce an additional \$100 million in aid to respond to the conflict in Sudan, according to a statement, as Washington seeks to spur international response ahead of Monday's anniversary of the war. U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power in the statement said the additional funding, first reported by Reuters, would go toward emergency food assistance, nutrition support and other life-saving aid. Power is also set to call on the warring parties to stop hindering humanitarian access and participate in "good faith negotiations to reach a ceasefire" in order to prevent famine and further suffering, according to the statement.

"A year ago tomorrow, the people of Sudan awoke to a nightmare," Power said. "The warring sides turned bustling neighborhoods into battle zones, killing thousands, leaving bodies in the streets, and trapping civilians in their homes without adequate food, water, and medicines." War erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), devastating the country's infrastructure.—APP

Hashmi
stresses upon
commitments
to reduce
carbon
emission

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Pakistan to Nepal Abrar Hashmi said that developing nations like Pakistan and Nepal bore the brunt of carbon emissions largely produced elsewhere in the world and urged the developed countries to fulfil emission reduction commitments. "Pakistan has been active in international negotiations, advocating for measures like the Loss and Damage Fund. Collaboration with Nepal is crucial in leveraging scientific knowledge to mitigate these impacts," the ambassador said during an interview with Radio Nepal on Saturday. The ambassador said that melting of glaciers in the Himalayan and Karakoram ranges presented serious risks like floods, droughts, and water shortages for both the nations and beyond. Pakistan, with its diverse zones and seasonal changes, faced these challenges and had experienced devastating floods due to rapid glacier melt in recent years, he added.



BAKU: Ambassador of Pakistan to Azerbaijan Bilal Hayee arranged a get-together at the Pakistan embassy on the occasion of Eid. Pakistanis living in Azerbaijan along with their families attended the event. —DNA

Petro slams OAS pro-Israel
position amid Iran's airstrike

'Genocide is and precedes all barbarism, so the Organization of American States (OAS) must express itself in the utmost objective of peace,' says Colombian president Gustavo Petro

NEWS DESK

BOGOTA : Colombia's President Gustavo Petro voiced Sunday disapproval towards the Organization of American States (OAS) for its support to Israel in the aftermath of Iran's attack on Israel. "Genocide is and precedes all barbarism, so the OAS must express itself in the utmost objective of peace; everything else is nothing more than geopolitical propaganda that only leads to human destruction," said Gustavo Petro on X, quoting the OAS statement. Petro stressed that the OAS' objective must be "global peace, not Iran or Israel," and that as "inde-

pendent republics," they must bet on this "without masters." The OAS statement "unequivocally" condemned Iran's attack and expressed "total solidarity" with the government and citizens of Israel. "The Iranian regime, breaking the most basic norms of international law, continues to be a source of instability in the region and in the world in general," the statement said on Saturday. The statement added that Iran poses a "global threat" due to its history of attacks on Israel, including those in the Americas. Iran's "fundamentalism and hatred" fuel war, according to the OAS. "Peace requires that nations, peoples and individuals exercise their right to



self-defense to combat terrorism, armed aggression and exercise the protection of their people, as an ethical and legal imperative," it concluded. On April 1, Israel conducted an airstrike on Iran's

consulate building in Damascus, resulting in the deaths of seven individuals, including two Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps generals. Iran declared Israel's attack as an assault on its territory and vowed retaliation, while Israel promised a response to Iran's actions. On Saturday, Iran launched extensive attacks on Israel, utilizing kamikaze drones, ballistic, and cruise missiles. While Iran claimed hits on certain military targets, Israel asserted that most of the attacks were thwarted by air defense systems, although a missile did strike a military base in the southern region. Meanwhile, Since Israel has waged a deadly military offensive

against the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by the Hamas group on Oct. 7, at least 33,686 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children. The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85% of the territory's population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the U.N. Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Deaf Americans'
votes often ignored,
up for grabs

WASHINGTON : When deaf Americans discuss the 2024 White House candidates, some of them use a sign representing the president's classic aviator sunglasses to refer to Joe Biden, or make a gesture mimicking Donald Trump's signature comb-over hairstyle. But experts say many of the approximately one million deaf and hard-of-hearing American Sign Language (ASL) users in the United States may not be participating in politics at all, due to the inaccessibility of campaigns. In a country where the last two presidential races were decided by only tens of thousands of votes, the group represents a potentially significant but untapped voting bloc. "The most important thing is for deaf people to feel like members, not visitors, in (this) country," said Brendan Stern, a political science professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, the world's only liberal arts university for deaf students. Deaf people need to "feel like citizens," he told AFP through an interpreter. "And for that to happen, (we) need not only access, but meaningful engagement across differences." Presidential campaigns that receive federal funding are legally required to caption their ads, but captions can be glitchy or inaccurate, and most candidates don't hire interpreters for live events. And captions do not always provide sufficient access. ASL is its own language separate from English, with its own grammar, word order and idioms. When deciding who to support, deaf voters may be interested in candidates' stances on issues related to their disability, such as funding for specialist schools, but they are focused on the same issues other Americans care about too. "I'd rather understand it myself," Danielle Previ, a 35-year-old clinical psychologist who is deaf, said she is most concerned with politicians' views on women's rights, but that events such as candidate debates can be hard to follow. With captions "I feel like I'm missing information, because it's going so fast, the back-and-forth," Previ told AFP. "I just don't like the idea of... asking my (hearing) partner, 'What's up? Fill me in,'" she added. "I'm very independent. I'd rather understand it myself."—DNA

Erdogan tells Pope the reaction
needed to stop violations in Gaza

WEB DESK

ANKARA : Ali Erbaş, head of Türkiye's Presidency of Religious Affairs delivered a letter from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Pope Francis during his visit to the Vatican on Saturday. In the letter, Erdogan said: "Humanity must prevent further violations of international law in Gaza." Erdogan also stated that humanity should speak out against the bombing of hospitals, schools, mosques and churches, emphasizing that these should never be targeted, even in times of war. "Without a fair resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, establishing lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is not possible," he added. "It is impossible to establish lasting peace and stability in the Middle East without a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. An independent, sovereign and geographically integrated Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, must emerge and

take its place in the global system as an equal member of the international community," Erdo also underlined. Erdogan further emphasized in the letter that Türkiye has become the second-largest country providing aid to Gaza, with nearly 45,000 tons of humanitarian supplies since Oct. 7, 2023. "The treatment of 429 sick and wounded Gazans, including Christians, with 450 persons accompanying them, continues in Türkiye," he also said. The Turkish president stated that killing is forbidden in all Abrahamic faiths, adding that humanity "must no longer allow international law and international humanitarian law to be trampled on in Gaza." "It must raise its voice against the deliberate bombing of hospitals, schools, mosques and churches that should not be violated, even in wartime," he said. The president also touched upon international cooperation in humanitarian efforts for Gaza. "The challenges that we face, particularly the indiscriminate Israeli attacks in Gaza, where deaths by starvation occur due to the

failure to deliver humanitarian aid even during the holy month of Ramadan, and the global impact of the Ukraine War, which is now in its third year, require the international community to act in cooperation and coordination," he said. Erdo reiterated Türkiye's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity in the letter. "Türkiye, while supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, with its motto of humanitarian diplomacy, has also been, and continues to be, at the forefront in the defense of the right to life of the innocent Palestinian civilians and their just cause," he said. Mentioning that hateful ideologies such as Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia "are spreading worldwide," Erdo called for "inclusive and rational policies." "With this mindset, we are determined to further develop our dialogue and cooperation with the Holy City to promote a culture of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding, on the basis of our common human values and our aim to serve world

peace," he said. Speaking to reporters in the Vatican, Ali Erbaş said the Pope told him that he was grateful for what Erdo has done. "Pope Francis emphasized that our president is one of the few leaders who works hard for world peace, and who has the power to achieve this," Erbaş said. "For this reason, he asked us to personally convey his greetings to him and said: 'I thank you very much for what he has done,'" he said. Erbaş also said that the focus of their meeting was "the murders, massacres and crimes against humanity committed by Israel in Palestine." "Jerusalem, the symbol of peace and coexistence, is under Israeli oppression, everywhere, regardless of Muslims or Christians, babies or innocent children, mosques or churches. We are faced with a situation where everyone, including children, the elderly, sick and women, are being massacred," Erbaş also added. "We expressed the need to work together to put an end to this situation and to draw more attention to Palestine and Gaza and to stop the Israeli oppression."

Egypt to
boosts health
sector by 25%

RIYADH: Egypt will increase health sector allocations in the next general budget to 495.6 billion pounds (\$10.4 billion), according to the country's finance minister. The North African country's upcoming fiscal year is set to begin in July. Mohamed Maait said in a statement that this reflects an annual growth rate of 24.9 percent compared to the funds allocated for the sector in the current fiscal. This is in line with the nation's goal to improve medical services for citizens, which is also an objective of Egypt's Vision 2030. Moreover, the minister added that allocations for the education sector will also be raised to 858.3 billion pounds, with an annual growth rate of 45 percent. Scientific research reserves are also on track to increase to more than 139.5 billion pounds in the next budget, reflecting an annual growth rate of 40.1 percent. Mait noted that the country will continue to provide the necessary funds to expand healthcare initiatives, supply medicines and medical aids to hospitals, and increase support for health insurance programs. He emphasized how Egypt was also working on targeting the speed of gradual expansion in extending the umbrella of comprehensive health insurance. Furthermore, the minister said the last social package implemented in March included allocating 15 billion pounds in additional increases for doctors, nurses, teachers, and university faculty members.—APP

Turkish
military
eliminates
PKK terrorists
in northern
Syria

ANKARA : Turkish Defense Ministry announced on Sunday that three PKK/YPG terrorists were eliminated by Armed Forces in Syria's north. The ministry said the operation took place in the Euphrates Shield area of operation in Syria. Terrorists were making preparations for an attack in the area, the ministry said. In its nearly 40-year terror campaign against Türkiye, the PKK — listed as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the U.S., and the EU — has been responsible for the deaths of over 40,000 people, including women, children and infants. The YPG is the PKK's Syrian offshoot. Since 2016, Ankara has launched a trio of successful anti-terror operations across its border in northern Syria to prevent the formation of a terror corridor and enable the peaceful settlement of residents: Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018) and Peace Spring (2019). President Recep Tayyip Erdo announced a large-scale cross-border operation last month to eliminate PKK. "We will protect our country from the ring of fire (in the region) through a security corridor across our borders," Erdo said in a speech in Şırnak, a southeastern province near the border with Iraq.—Agencies

Dying mother
handed over
baby in Sydney
mall stabbing
rampage

SYDNEY: In the midst of a Sydney mall stabbing rampage, witnesses say a fatally wounded mother handed over her injured nine-month-old baby to a stranger to save the infant's life. Stories of courage are still emerging from Saturday's attack, in which a 40-year-old knife man with mental illness roamed the packed shopping centre, killing six people and seriously wounding a dozen others. Lone senior police officer Amy Scott is being hailed for tracking down, and then shooting dead the assailant during his killing spree. One young man was filmed fending off the attacker on an escalator, armed only with a shopping centre bollard. Storekeepers opened their doors to shelter frightened shoppers. But the harrowing story of 38-year-old mother Ashlee Good's desperate final act to save her baby daughter Harriet has struck a chord with many shocked Australians.—APP

Scholz walks tightrope on trade and politics in China

Germany remains committed to doing business with the world's second-largest economy and rejects US-led calls for "decoupling"

FOREIGN DESK

BEIJING : German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in China on Sunday, kicking off a trip in which he faces a tough balancing act as he aims to shore up economic ties with Berlin's biggest trading partner. Scholz touched down in the southwestern megacity of Chongqing on Sunday morning, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said, accompanied by a large delegation of ministers and business executives. As Western allies are cranking up pressure on Beijing, Scholz is expected to underline that Germany remains committed to doing business with the world's second-largest economy and rejects US-led calls for "decoupling." His friendly overtures towards China risk sparking ire

among Washington and EU partners, which have been pushing back against Beijing's heavy subsidies for industries. "China remains a really important economic partner," Scholz told journalists on Friday, adding that he would try to level the playing field for German companies in China. On the geopolitical front, Scholz will also use his visit to persuade Chinese President Xi Jinping to exert his influence to rein in his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and help bring an end to the war in Ukraine. "Given the close relations between China and Russia, Beijing has the possibility to exert its influence on Russia," said a German government source in Berlin. The three-day tour through Chongqing, Shanghai and Beijing is Scholz's second trip to China since he took of-

ice. His first in November 2022 took place under intense scrutiny, as it came swiftly after Xi strengthened his grip on power, and marked the first post-pandemic visit by a G7 leader to China. Stung then by painful supply chain disruptions during the health crisis as well as by China's refusal to distance itself from Russia despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Western allies had been scrambling to reduce their reliance on Beijing. Scholz's visit comes as many of Germany's Western allies confront China on a range of trade issues. A slew of probes into state aid for Chinese solar panels, electric cars and wind turbines are ongoing in Brussels. The United States is meanwhile investigating national security risks posed by Chinese technology in cars. With tensions rum-

bling over Taiwan, US President Joe Biden this week made defence pledges to Japan and the Philippines, while describing behaviour by Beijing in the South China Sea as "dangerous and aggressive". Two days before his visit, Scholz held talks with France's President Emmanuel Macron, whose office said the leaders "coordinated to defend a rebalancing of European-Chinese trade relations". But China is a vital market for Germany, where many jobs depend directly on demand from the Asian giant. Both economies also badly need a boost. The German economy shrank by 0.3 percent last year, battered by inflation, high interest rates and cooling exports, and for this year, the economy ministry expects just an anaemic growth of 0.2 percent. Beijing has set an annual GDP growth target of

around five percent for this year, but exports plunged more than expected last month. German MPs and analysts urged Scholz to take a firm line. The Green party's Deborah Duering warned Scholz against viewing China just as an economic opportunity. "Those who ignore long-term risks for short-term profits risk repeating the mistakes of the past, misguided Russia policy," said Duering, in reference to past dependency on Moscow for cheap energy supplies. Max Zenglein of the Mercator Institute for China Studies said Germany should not hesitate to be more assertive. "As countries such as the USA and Japan are positioning themselves much more sharply against China, Germany has an important role to play," he said, adding that Germany was "in a position of strength"

Briefs

Canada sacks Indian staffers in India

LONDON: Ties between Canada and India have deteriorated further as the former has dismissed dozens of Indian staffers from service who were working at its diplomatic missions in India over the Indian regime's plan to assassinate pro-Khalistani Sikhs on Canadian soil.

Relations between Canada and India started deteriorating last year when tens of thousands of Canadian Sikhs voted for Khalistan Referendum in several Canadian cities on the call of Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), led by Gurbhag Singh Panun who is a dual Canadian and US national.

The relations hit rock bottom when Indian assassinated SFJ and Khalistan Referendum's Canada coordinator Hardeep Singh Nijjar at the Canada's biggest Gurdwara in June 2023 and also tried to kill Panun in New York.

A spokesperson for the Canadian High Commission stated that the reduction in the number of Indian employees was required in light of the country's shrinking Canadian workforce. "I can confirm that the Government of Canada has implemented some staff reductions across our network of missions in India," the official said. The spokesperson, however, said that the high commission expressed its sincere gratitude for the resilience, dedication, and service of its local staff in India. - Agencies

World cannot afford another war: UN Chief

NEW YORK: The international community cannot afford another war, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, commenting on Iran's latest drone and missile attack on Israel. "I am deeply alarmed about the very real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation. I urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid any action that could lead to major military confrontations on multiple fronts in the Middle East," he said. "I have repeatedly stressed that neither the region nor the world can afford another war."

Israeli Permanent Representative to the UN Gilad Erdan believes that Iran's attack violates the UN Charter. At the same time, Iran's mission to the UN said the attack came as a response to Israel's attack on its diplomatic facilities in Syria and was carried out in line with the Charter's clause on legitimate self-defense.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported late on Saturday that Iran had launched drones from its territory towards Israel. The Israeli military remained vigilant and tracked all targets approaching the country, the press service said. Later, missiles were also fired by Iran. - Agencies

Bilawal Highlights 'climate crisis'

Also voiced his concern regarding the incidents of lightning strikes

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Chairman of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has conveyed heartfelt condolences for the tragic loss of lives resulting from multiple accidents amidst heavy rains across various regions of the country, notably Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. He also voiced his concern regarding the incidents of lightning strikes exacerbated by the changing climate conditions during the inclement weather.

Bilawal lamented the loss of life caused by lightning strikes as well as other rain-related incidents in South Punjab, including its districts Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur, and Lodhran. He urged the provincial government to deploy all available resources in aiding the rain-affected victims throughout Punjab.

Hamas, Israel exchange recriminations over talks

Without explicitly rejecting the draft deal, Hamas reiterated its long-standing demands for a permanent ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, which Israeli officials have repeatedly opposed

NEWS DESK

JERUSALEM: Israel and Hamas have accused each other of undermining negotiations for a truce in Gaza and a hostage release deal, although the talks have not collapsed. On Saturday, while Hamas-backed Iran was preparing to launch hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel in retaliation for a deadly Damascus strike, the Palestinian militant group announced that it had delivered its response to the latest ceasefire proposal. Without explicitly rejecting the draft deal, Hamas reiterated its long-standing demands for a permanent ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, which Israeli officials have repeatedly opposed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has instead reiterated his determination to launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the last city in Gaza yet to face such a fate and which Israel insists is Hamas's last major holdout. On Saturday, Netanyahu accused Hamas of being the "only obstacle" to a deal that would free the hostages still held by Gaza militants. "The cabinet and the security forces are united in their opposition to these unfounded demands," he said, adding that Hamas "has refused any deal and any compromise proposal."

On Sunday, Israel's Mossad spy agency said in a statement released by Netanyahu's office that Hamas had rejected the proposal, and said it "proves" that Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar "does not want a humanitarian deal and the return of the hostages." Sinwar was "continuing to exploit the tension with Iran," Mossad said, and was aiming for "a general escalation in the region."

Israeli war crimes continue in Gaza

FOREIGN DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 191 on Saturday, aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and target different areas, and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. A reporter for the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, killing and injuring scores of citizens. According to media sources, five martyrs and several wounded citizens were transported to the Awda Hospital in an-Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza when the Israeli army attacked them as they tried to return to their homes in northern Gaza. A woman was also killed and others were injured in another Israeli attack on displaced citizens in the same area in central Gaza. The Israeli army

launched more than 300 drones and missiles at Israel, the vast majority of which intercepted according to Israel. Mossad said Israel would "continue to work to achieve the objectives of the war against Hamas with all its might, and will turn every stone to bring back the hostages from Gaza." Despite the apparent gulf between the two

sides, the talks, mediated by Egypt, the United States and Qatar, are ongoing in the Egyptian capital. "The negotiations are not at a standstill" but the mediators will have to go back to the drawing board, said Hasni Abidi of CERAMAM, a Geneva-based think tank specializing in the Mediterranean and the Arab world. A framework being circulated in Cairo would halt fighting for

six weeks and see the exchange of about 40 hostages for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, as well as more aid deliveries into the besieged Gaza Strip.

A Hamas source told AFP that, ultimately, later stages of the ceasefire would see all hostages released, Israel withdrawing all its forces from Gaza, the lifting of the siege and the reconstruction of the territory. However, so far every attempt to negotiate a durable ceasefire in the six-month-long war has failed. In November, a seven-day truce enabled the exchange of 80 hostages for 240 Palestinian prisoners, as well as 25 captives freed outside of the truce mechanism. The war broke out with Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli figures.

Israel's retaliatory attack, aimed at destroying Hamas, has killed at least 33,729 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Palestinian militants also took about 250 hostages, 129 of whom remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli army says are dead. Israel withdrew most of its troops from the Gaza Strip on the six-month anniversary of the war, leaving only a single brigade in central Gaza, while continuing to launch air strikes and bombardments. Netanyahu has repeated his determination to launch a ground invasion of Rafah, where around 1.5 million Gazans are sheltering from the war, despite opposition from Israel's top ally the United States. He also faces increasing pressure from the Israeli public and the families of the hostages, with mass weekly demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem demanding an end to his government and the return of the captives.

Pope warns against 'spiral of violence'

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday made a "pressing appeal" against a "spiral of violence" after Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack on Israel, warning of a potential regional conflagration.

"I make a pressing appeal for an end to any action which could fuel a spiral of violence that risks dragging the Middle East into an even greater conflict," the Argentinian pontiff declared following his traditional Sunday prayer in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican. "I am praying and following with concern, but also pain, the news that has come in recent hours about the worsening situation in Israel due to Iran's intervention," the pope told worshippers.

"No one should threaten the existence of others. All countries must, however, side with peace and help Israelis and Palestinians to live in two states, side by side and in security," he said. "That is their right," Francis insisted as he once again repeated earlier calls for a ceasefire in Gaza and "negotiation." The pontiff furthermore demanded the world "help the population facing a humanitarian crisis" in Gaza and urged the "immediate release of the hostages kidnapped months ago" by Hamas, setting in train the latest chapter of violence in the region. - Agencies

NA session today, joint session rescheduled

The NA session has been convened on the opposition's requisition

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: A National Assembly session has been called for Monday, while the joint session of Parliament has been rescheduled.

Speaker National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq will preside over the NA session on Monday at 5 p.m. sharp. The NA session has been convened on the opposition's requisition, with discussions revolving around the opposition's agenda. During the session, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Asifa Bhutto will take the oath as a member of the National Assembly (MNA). Meanwhile, the joint session of Parliament has been rescheduled.

CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif Pays Tribute to the Leadership of PM Shehbaz



DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif while paying tribute to the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Pakistan's economic indicators getting improved stated that under the vibrant leadership of

Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's economy has once again started treading on the path of progress. The fruits of economic progress during the tenure of PML-N government are prominently coming to surface. The Chief Minister highlighted, "The common man would be provided relief with the reduction in electricity rates and price-hike. Big international financial institutions including IMF, ADBP highly acknowledge Pakistan's economic policies." She stated, "Owing to PM Shehbaz Sharif's economic policies, the investors confidence is enhancing. For the first time in the history, 100 index Stock Exchange has crossed its 70 thousand psychological barrier." Madam Chief Minister said, "Good news are awaiting Pakistanis and their is a strong likelihood of reduction in the inflation rate up to 12.2 percent next year. For the first time, rupees 500 reduction occurred in the price of 20 kg flour bag and their is a further possibility of rupees 300 reduction in the flour price according to market indicators. The Economic & Social Survey Of Asia & Pacific Region have termed Pakistan's economic indicators as excellent. In the UN Report, Pakistan's economic progress moving forward briskly in the next fiscal year has been predicted. The growth rate would increase from 2% to 2.3% during the current and next financial year in Pakistan."

Madam Chief Minister acknowledged that Pakistan has successfully completed its current economic program with the IMF and its economy is showing satisfactory performance along with increase in its foreign reserves. She stated that Pakistan's economy would further improve with the launching of new economic program with the IMF. The Pakistani nation reposes its complete trust in the leadership of PM Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, she concluded.

239 candidates vie for 23 vacant seats of NA, PAs: ECP

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: A total of 239 candidates were vying for 23 vacant seats in both national and provincial assemblies during the upcoming by-elections slated for April 21, an official of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said.

A total of 239 candidates will contest in the by elections, with 50 of them competing for vacant National Assembly seats. Notably, the first lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has already been elected unopposed for NA 207, he said. He said that a total of 23 candidates were vying for the vacant seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, while

154 candidates were seeking their fortunes in Punjab. In Sindh, Zubair Ahmed Junejo secured his seat unopposed on PS-80. Twelve contenders are in the running for the empty seats in the Balochistan Assembly. The Commission has schedule to commence printing the ballot papers for the by-elections upon the finalization of candidate lists by the relevant returning officers on March 30, he added. He stated that necessary election materials had been provided to provincial election commissioners. Additionally, district Returning Officers and Returning Officers are fulfilling their duties according to the established election schedule. He said close coordination has been maintained by the commission with the Ministries of Interior and Defense as well as provincial law enforcement agencies. On March 13, the Commission announced the schedule for by-elections across 23 National and Provincial Assembly seats. These elections encompass six National Assembly seats, twelve Punjab Assembly seats, two seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, one seat in the Sindh Assembly and two seats in the Balochistan Assembly, all slated for April 21, he told.

Maryam's Message on 'Besakhi'

LAHORE: "Besakhi" is the hallmark of Punjab's unique culture," said Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif in her message on Besakhi. She added, "Besakhi is a festival full of happiness, I congratulate all brothers and sisters on this blissful occasion." Madam Chief Minister also offered greetings to the Sikh brothers and sisters who have come here to celebrate this festival. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said, "I am a proud Punjabi after my identity as a Pakistani first. Punjab lives in my heart." She added, "Every person of my Punjab equally shares the joy and happiness of Besakhi." "May Allah Almighty protect the happiness of Besakhi forever," she prayed. Besakhi starts with the harvest of golden crop of wheat with sickle on the drum beat, spreading joy and happiness around. Madam Chief Minister said, "We are starting to officially celebrate this Punjabi festival 'Besakhi.'" She added, "Special ceremonies of Besakhi have been organized in Hasan Abdal, Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur and Lahore for the Sikh community coming from all over the world to celebrate this festival." Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said, "We are focused on providing best environment and facilities to Sikh pilgrims in Punjab for their religious and cultural tourism." - DNA

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