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Azerbaijan president dissolves parliament calls snap parliamentary polls

Detailed News On Page-07

Gaza, EU warns of catastrophic situation

Detailed News On Page-07



Buttler opens up on his future after T20 WC

Detailed News On Page-06



In a tit-for-tat move Pakistan passes resolution against US call for poll probe

“Pakistan not to tolerate any kind of interference in internal affairs as a sovereign state,” states resolution

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In response to the United States House of Representatives vote to demand a probe into alleged irregularities in Pakistan's general elections, the National Assembly on Friday passed a resolution to condemn the US Congress resolution and termed it “contrary to facts” and “interference” in its internal affairs. The resolution was tabled by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) lawmaker Shaista Pervaiz Malik, and passed by a majority in the National Assembly amid a noisy protest of the opposition benches. Through the resolution, the NA expressed sorrow over the US House Resolution 901 which demanded a “full and independent investigation of claims of interference or irregularities” after expressing concerns over the February 8 polls. The US resolution was completely against fact, it stated, adding that Pakistan would not tolerate any kind of interference in its internal affairs as an independent and sovereign state. The lower house of parliament also demanded the US to maintain bilateral ties with Pakistan on mutual respect. MNA Shaista further said that the resolution passed by the US House of Representatives was a clear “interference in internal affairs” despite being non-binding. She also slammed the opposition lawmakers for “encouraging an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty” after a country dared to “intervene in our internal matters”. The US House was apparently taking notice of the “expression of supporting democracy in Pakistan”, she read, adding that the US resolution was the result of “incomplete information and misunderstanding” regarding Pakistan's political and electoral process. It was a sorrowful development that the US resolution rejected the independent exercise of voting rights of millions of Pakistanis in the February 8 nationwide polls, the resolution read. MNA Shaista, via her resolution, urged the US Congress to play a constructive role in cementing Pakistan-US

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United States resolution unsolicited interference: FO spokesperson

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday said that Resolution 901 adopted by the US House of Representatives was an “unsolicited interference” in Pakistan's domestic affairs which was “neither welcome nor acceptable.” The Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, at her weekly press briefing, told the media that the resolution clearly stemmed from an inadequate and erroneous understanding of political and electoral process of Pakistan. “It is also an unsolicited interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs. We believe that bilateral relations between countries should be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality. The unsolicited interference from the US Congress is therefore neither welcome nor acceptable,” she remarked. Besides, the spokesperson said the timing and context of the said resolution were also not conducive to the current positive trajectory of bilateral ties between Pakistan and the United States. She said Pakistan would like to develop its relations with the US on the basis of mutual trust and confidence and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs. Expressing concerns about the continued suppression of the democratic rights of

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif interacts with parliamentarians in the National Assembly. – DNA

Iran holds vote to pick new president

Initial estimates of the election outcome are anticipated by Saturday morning, with the conclusive tally expected by Sunday

FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Voting commenced at 8 a.m. local time (0430 GMT) on Friday, with the polls scheduled to close at 6:00 p.m. (1430 GMT) but the voting time in election has received two extensions amid the high turnout of Iranians across the country. Given the requests for another extension of the voting time and upon the approval of Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, the time has been extended for two more hours, until 10:00 p.m. (1830 GMT), across the country, Eslami said.

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Pakistan decides to change envoy to US

Govt has decided to appoint Asim Iftikhar as Pakistan's additional permanent representative to UN

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to replace Masood Khan and appoint additional Foreign Secretary (Middle East and SIFC) Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh as envoy to the United States, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said on Friday. Masood Khan has been

Continued on Page 06

Despite Rs 590b funds PM Shehbaz Sharif questions K-P gov't's failure to establish CTD

Premier offers to revise panel, dismissed allegations of discrimination against province

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday criticised the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) government for its failure to establish a Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) despite receiving Rs590 billion over the past 14 years. Responding to a point of order raised by Sunni Ittehad Council member and former NA Speaker Asad Qaiser, the premier highlighted that an additional one per cent share was allocated to K-P under the NFC Award to bolster its anti-terrorism efforts. This allocation was agreed upon in 2010 by then-Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, during a peak in terrorism, with K-P being the most affected province. Shehbaz acknowledged the

Continued on Page 06

Cross-border strikes PTI blasts Kh Asif for provocative statement

Mandate thieves won't be allowed to open door of armed conflict

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) spokesperson strongly criticised the mandate thief Defense Minister Khawaja Asif for his irresponsible

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Javed Latif condemns US resolution

Bloodshed is being played in occupied Kashmir: PML-N leader

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Javed Latif said the American resolution regarding Pakistan's elections was condemnable. Talking to media in Lahore, Latif said that former PM Nawaz Sharif was repeatedly jailed. Those who want instability in Pakistan support such activities, he asserted. Talking about the occupied Kashmir, he said bloodshed was being played there. There was a plan to block China's investment in 2014 as well. He said that America does not consider the violation of human rights in Gaza, Syria, Iraq and other countries.

Petrol price expected to increase from July 1

Federal government likely to hike price of diesel by Rs9.84 per litre, say energy ministry officials

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is expected to increase the petrol prices by Rs7.54 per litre and HSD by Rs9.84 per litre from July 1 for the next fortnight, The News reported Friday. Also, if the petroleum levy of Rs5 per litre is added from July 1, then the price of motor spirit is expected to be hiked to Rs12.58 per litre and diesel Rs14.84 per litre, energy ministry officials told the publication.

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. – Editor

PTI conflicts deepen

Sher Afzal demands Shibli Faraz's resignation

Marwat says party will only be freed by “qabza mafia” after Faraz tenders his resignation



KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Strife within the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) continues to escalate as Sher Afzal Marwat demanded resignation from Shibli Faraz, saying that the party will only then be freed from the “qabza mafia”. His demand came after Leader of the Opposition in National Assembly Omar Ayub stepped down as the PTI Secretary General on Thursday, saying there would be more changes in the party's organisational structure. “I demand resignation of Shibli Faraz from party positions and as leader of the

Continued on Page 06

SC accepts Vawda, Kamal's apologies

Both lawmakers tendered unconditional apologies to apex court in contempt case

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday accepted the apology tendered by Senator Faisal Vawda and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) lawmaker Mustafa Kamal and withdrew the contempt of court notice issued to them. According to the court's order, read by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, both the parliamentarians – Senator Faisal Vawda and Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Mustafa Kamal – have realised that the words they used were inappropriate.

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Tax-heavy budget sails through NA ahead of IMF talks

FM Aurangzeb says economy has achieved stability; PPP supports govt in passing budget

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Unleashing a tsunami of taxes, the Finance Bill 2024 cruised through the National Assembly on Thursday ahead of talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a fresh, longer, and larger bailout to save the economy—which is growing at the slowest pace in South Asia—from a sure debt default. The federal government presented the tax-loaded Rs18.877 trillion budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 (FY25) two weeks ago, drawing sharp criticism from opposition parties, which termed it “economic terrorism” against the people. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb moved the finance bill to the lower house of the parliament, which was endorsed by the ruling alliance, including the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). The motion was passed with majority vote which led to the passage of Finance Bill-2024 after clause-by-clause reading and adopting amendments after due process of voting. All the amendments, presented by the opposition members, were rejected. NA Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq announced the passage of the bill in a live TV telecast.

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New budget is an economic terrorism, claims opp leader

Demands NAB investigation on the wheat import matter

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Opposition leader in the National Assembly Omar Ayub has termed the new federal budget as economic terrorism against the public. Speaking at the National Assembly, he reiterated that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif himself claimed that the budget was IMF-directed. He asserted that this budget was devised by “hit-man” and an economic terrorism against the public. He hit out at the federal cabinet on

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CAN STOP OVER FOR FREE
IN A 5 STAR HOTEL.

BISP, KfW partner to promote mother children health

Senator Rubina Khalid highlighted BISP's commitment to designing and implementing health initiatives aimed at combating malnutrition and stunting among women beneficiaries and their children under Benazir Nashonuma

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and KfW Development Bank will join hands to disseminate awareness about mother and child health in line with Benazir Nashonuma initiative. This was discussed during a meeting of Chairperson BISP, Senator Rubina Khalid with the KfW Development Bank mission at BISP headquarters on Friday. Chairperson BISP, Senator Rubina Khalid, emphasized the critical link between the health of mothers and the health of their children. She highlighted BISP's commitment to designing and

implementing health initiatives aimed at combating malnutrition and stunting among women beneficiaries and their children under Benazir Nashonuma. The meeting was attended by Dr Patrick Rudolf, Head of Division in Health, KfW Frankfurt, Anna Berzovskaja, Portfolio Manager in Health and Social Protection, Dr. Matthias Nachtnebel, Technical Advisor, Dr. Masuma Zaidi, Senior Sector Specialist, KfW Pakistan, Additional Secretary Dr. Muhammad Tahir Noor, and DG NSER/CCT Naveed Akbar. Chairperson Rubina Khalid proposed collaborative initiatives with KfW to raise awareness about nutritious food and the benefits of breastfeeding for newborns.

She suggested utilizing the services of the network of lady health workers and discussed the importance of reproductive health for women. Additionally, Chairperson Rubina Khalid underscored the necessity of skill training for members of Benazir Income Support Programme beneficiary families, deeming it essential for poverty graduation. The KfW mission also assured full support for BISP's future health initiatives for women and children and praised the role of the National Socio-Economic Registry NSER database in responding to crises such as floods and the COVID-19 pandemic.



ISLAMABAD: IG Islamabad presenting a souvenir to Ambassador of Jordan Dr. Maen Khreasat during his visit to IG office in Islamabad. —DNA

Rs 54m fine imposed on smog contributing vehicles

DNA

MULTAN : Around 31000 transport vehicles were issued penalty tickets worth Rs 54 million across Punjab in a month long drive that was still ongoing against vehicles that emit smoke and contribute to smog.

The province-wide crackdown was launched early June on the orders of Faisal Sultan, secretary regional transport Punjab, also resulted in the arrest of 40 drivers of smoke-emitting vehicles while 7,413 such vehicles were impounded by police.

Moreover, another 31,453 vehicles that were polluting the cities and 4470 vehicles operating without fitness certificates were issued Challans. Speaking on the matter, Faisal Sultan emphasized that the "Environment-Friendly Punjab," vision championed by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif was the ultimate goal of the ongoing crackdown.

He also highlighted that Dr. Ahmad Javed Qazi, the provincial secretary of the transport and Mass Transit department, had issued strict orders to comply with the High Court's directives for smog elimination. Sultan appealed the citizens to cooperate in reducing environmental pollution, stressing that the survival of future generations depend on eliminating smog, says an official release.

3m children out of school in Balochistan

Education minister says girls to be provided transport facility to increase enrollment

DNA

QUETTA: Over three million children are not enrolled at schools in Balochistan, and the government will address the concerns of the parents to bring out-of-school children to the educational institutes. It was stated by Balochistan Education Minister Raheela Hameed Khan Durani during the National Achievement Test (NAT) launched by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) on Thursday. She highlighted the severity of the crisis, calling for urgent corrective measures. This revelation comes in a backdrop of a worrisome national scenario as Pakistan is one of the countries with the highest number of out-of-school children globally, exceeding 26 million. Balochistan, where

an education emergency has been declared, mirrors this broader national crisis. Despite attempts to enforce Article 25-A of the Constitution, which guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 5 to 16, the situation remains critical. The minister identified the high number of out-of-school children as the foremost challenge for the current government in Balochistan. She asserted, "We are committed to ensuring maximum enrollment," expressing frustration over the lack of action on proposed solutions, such as solarizing government-run schools to protect children from extreme weather conditions. The recommendations aimed at creating a more favorable learning environment have yet to gain cabinet approval. The minister voiced particular concern

about the rising number of out-of-school girls in the province, describing the trend as 'alarming'. In response, the government has decided to provide transportation facilities to girls, aiming to lower dropout rates and enhance access to education. The NAT, conducted biennially, assesses students in Grades 4 and 8 across various subjects. The 2023 survey results for Balochistan showed that 4th graders scored an average of 40 percent in math, while 8th graders averaged 31 percent. Scores in English and Urdu were slightly better, with averages above 50 percent, consistent with national averages. Director General of PIE, Dr Shahid Soroya, emphasized the importance of collaboration with the Balochistan Assessment and Examination Commission (BAEC).



Govt taking revolutionary initiatives to empower youth

ISLAMABAD : Chairman of the Prime Minister Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan has said that the government was committed to empowering youth through several revolutionary initiatives and was taking crucial steps for the betterment of the youth. Addressing the 16th National Youth Forum organized by the Pakistan Girls Guide Association here Friday, he said that a National Youth Council was being formed to include the youth in the policy-making, development and governance engagements. He said Pakistan has a talented youth and has a pivotal role in advancing the country towards fast-paced development. "We are dedicated to preparing our youth to excel in diverse fields, from technology-driven industries to traditional crafts. This holistic approach will enable them to contribute meaningfully to Pakistan's socio-economic development," he added. The Chairman PMYP further elaborated that the PML N Punjab government had devised a policy to provide 5,000 E-bikes to females while the government was making efforts to provide free-of-interest laptops to students from banks on soft instalments. Rana Mashood said that a comprehensive approach such as skills development, education, entrepreneurship, and environmental sustainability was being formulated for the empowerment of youth. He said that today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow and the government was making all-out efforts to make them skilled in every sphere of life.—APP

Meeting held to review measures for dengue control

DNA

DIR LOWER: A high-level meeting was convened at District Jail Timergara to review the current dengue situation and preparedness for prevention of the fever. Additional Deputy Commissioner Relief Tariq Hussain chaired the meeting which was attended by representatives from all relevant departments. A detailed report was presented on

the current dengue situation, highlighting the risks, symptoms, and prevention strategies. The ADC issued directions to all departments for dengue control, emphasizing the need for collective responsibility and swift action. The Deputy DHO provided an update on the current dengue cases and the efforts being made to contain the outbreak. The report recommended the intensifying vector

control measures, including fogging and spraying, in the jail and hospital premises. It also stressed conducting regular surveillance and monitoring for dengue cases and vector breeding sites besides ensuring proper waste management and disposal in the jail and hospital. The meeting also stressed the need for holding awareness campaigns for inmates, staff, and the general public on dengue prevention and control.

HEC conducts first-ever 'learning skills assessment test'

ISLAMABAD :The Higher Education Commission (HEC) via its Higher Education Development Programme in Pakistan (HEDP) conducted the first-ever Learning Skills Assessment Test (LSAT) in affiliated colleges/universities across Pakistan. More than 5,000 students, showing a uniform regional, urban and rural, and gender representation, participated in this baseline study, said a press release on Friday. Featuring contemporary cognitive skills, LSAT is a general ability test formulated in collaboration with Dr. Salvador Malo, the World Bank International Consultant. It focuses on testing the students' "General Ability" in three areas: Information Management, Communication, and Problem Solving. Since the formal rollout of the revised Undergraduate Education Policy (UEP) in September 2023 across the country, it is important to gauge its impact on learning outcomes via an assessment study, especially in the public sector. Focusing on Pakistan's comparatively neglected and resource-scarce tertiary education system—composed of affiliating universities and affiliated colleges—HEC conducted this assessment at 16 affiliated colleges and allied affiliated colleges. There are 77 affiliating universities in Pakistan. Each of the selected 16 affiliating universities has around 10 affiliated colleges and represents major institutes having adequate infrastructure and human resources to execute the assessment of affiliated colleges students and a proven record of conducting tests/examinations for thousands of students. Unlike most of the assessments conducted in Pakistan's higher education sector, which focus on evaluating students' competence in a specific subject, LSAT assesses the general abilities of students. This is for the very first time in Pakistan's higher education public sector history. Globally such tests are commonly used in educational settings to evaluate an individual's overall cognitive aptitude and problem-solving skills. This general ability test is a standardised assessment that measures various cognitive abilities, including verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, and abstract reasoning. It also randomly includes assessing spatial reasoning and mechanical reasoning. Last year, HEC along with Dr. Salvador finalized the assessment tool and conducted a consultative workshop with select 15 faculty members from different HEIs from diverse educational and disciplinary backgrounds such as Science, Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Mathematics, and Psychology to fine-tune the methodology of the study. The baseline LSAT data will establish a national baseline of students' skills in Information Management, Communication, and Problem-Solving Skills. The next assessments will be conducted in December 2024 and May 2025 to assess the improvement in the acquisition of the general abilities among students enrolled in affiliated colleges of Pakistan. HEDP is a flagship project of HEC, which supports HEC in its strategic areas of research, governance, capacity-building policymaking, and a wide variety of IT initiatives for the higher education sector.—DNA

PTCL Group integrates AI for customer service excellence

The strategic initiative underscores PTCL Group's commitment to excellence in customer experience

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan's largest telecommunication and ICT services provider, PTCL Group (PTCL & Ufone 4G) has collaborated with STech.ai to integrate an innovative AI-based platform that leverages advanced technologies, including Urdu-based Large Language Models (LLMs), Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Machine Learning (ML) to enhance its customer services system. The platform aims to enhance quality management systems by providing enriched customer sentiment analysis and valuable insights, driving PTCL's overall customer experience strategy, said a news release. The strategic initiative underscores PTCL Group's commitment to excellence in customer

experience. Customer centricity is paramount at PTCL Group, which inspires the Group's commitment to excellence in both customer experience and services delivery. The company continuously invests, innovates, and refines its business processes. It leverages innovative technologies and customer feedback to enhance every interaction and ensures that each service touch point is seamless, responsive, and efficient to foster a reliable and enriching experience for its valued customers. Looking ahead, the integration of innovative AI will elevate customer experiences to unprecedented heights, setting a new benchmark for the entire industry. Hatem Bamatraf, President & Group CEO, PTCL & Ufone 4G expressed his enthusiasm for

the initiative, saying, "Leveraging contemporary technologies like AI shall be the enabler to improve our customer experience significantly. AI is set to revolutionize the industry, and it is a proud moment for PTCL Group to be at the forefront of this journey." Ahmad Kamal, Group Chief Customer Care Officer, remarked, "We are thrilled to announce the launch of the industry's first Urdu Language AI-enabled Customer Services platform. This initiative aligns with our vision and underscores our commitment to being the best in customer experience. The use of this program will significantly enhance our customer experience in the days to come." Adeel Saeed Chaudry, CEO of STech.ai, (originating from the MENA region)

stated, "Partnering with PTCL Group is a proud milestone for us. As a pioneering AI company specializing in Conversational AI under the brand BOTWA, our latest AI-driven customer experience solutions demonstrate our commitment to digital transformation and excellence in customer service. PTCL Group is the backbone of Pakistan's telecommunications and digital services landscape. It is distinguished by its extensive telecom and digital infrastructure serving a nationwide user base. Its state-of-the-art fiber network, comprehensive cellular and digital services, along with financial offerings, play pivotal roles in enhancing both personal and professional aspects of the lives of millions of customers each day.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JUNE

June 02/Italy National/Independence Day

June 04/Finland Armed Forces Day

June 06/Sweden National Day

June 10/Portugal Portugal Day (National Day)

June 10/Jordan Arab Revolution & Army Day

June 11/United Kingdom Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth

June 12/Philippines Independence Day

June 12/Russian Federation Day of Sovereignty of the Russian Federation (National Day)

June 13/Zambia Armed Forces Day

June 17/Iceland National Day

June 18/Seychells National Day

June 25/Croatia National Day

June 25/Mozambique National Day

June 26/Azerbaijan Army Day

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Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
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Hospitals

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Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
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Govt to review agreement with IPPs: Presidents moot

President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ahsan Bakhtawari, hailed the conference declaration as a landmark document that embodies the collective thinking of the nationwide business community and charts a new course for the country's economic trajectory

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Chambers Presidents' Conference has issued a landmark declaration outlining a comprehensive roadmap for the country's economic growth and development. The declaration, endorsed by business leaders from across Pakistan, calls on the government to Review agreements with Independent Power Producers (IPPs). Prioritize industrial development and regional trade promotion. It is further stated in the declaration that Gov should Provide a better business environment and simplify tax collection procedures. Establish industrial parks and provide electricity to industries at a reasonable tariff. Promote digital transformation and provide duty-free status for IT equipment. Offer easy loans for industries and incentivize exporters. The conference emphasized the need for strategic planning and collective efforts to achieve a tax revenue target



of Rs 10,950 billion and a GDP growth rate of 3.6%. President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ahsan Bakhtawari, hailed the conference declaration

as a landmark document that embodies the collective thinking of the nationwide business community and charts a new course for the country's economic trajectory. He vowed

to tirelessly advocate for the conference's recommendations, ensuring they reach every pivotal decision-making platform, including the government. He urged the government to

acknowledge and integrate the business community's proposals into policymaking, fostering a collaborative approach to drive economic growth and prosperity.

CPDI holds five-day training for journalists on safely reporting, HR issues

ISLAMABAD: The Center for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) has conducted a five-day Capacity-Building Training Program for a cohort of journalists from Punjab to report on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic processes safely, accurately, independently and inclusively. The initiative was aimed at empowering journalists to build robust, ethical careers while steering the intricacies of modern-day journalism. The training sessions took place in Islamabad and were attended by journalists from various areas of Punjab, including Faisalabad, Khanewal, Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur, a news release said. The training sessions featured a diverse, educated, and skilled panel of eminent trainers including Myra Imran, Aftab Alam, Zahid Abdullah, Nizam Khan Salarzai, Tanzila Mazhar, Waqas Naem, Bilal Dar, Hasnain Ghayoor, Adnan Rehmat, Zafarullah Khan, Saifullah Khoso, Tanzeela Mazhar, and Gulam Murtaza. These experts provided detailed insights into the various facets of journalism in the country through interactive sessions and activities specifically designed to engage participants in constructive discussions. Key features of the training included bridging the gap between conventional and modern journalism, ensuring a free, expressive media landscape in Pakistan and using AI and Machine Learning for sound reporting. The training sessions served as a reminder to the journalists about their responsibilities of unbiased reporting, modernizing journalism by using digital means, and the negative impacts of disinformation and misinformation. It was emphasized that collection of data, and authenticating helps to enhance the credibility of journalistic reporting. The training emphasized the responsibilities of journalists in unbiased reporting, integrating digital tools for modern journalism, and fostering an inclusive work environment in the male-dominated field.—DNA

RCB Offers 10% tax rebate till 29th June for closing year 2024

RAWALPINDI :Rawalindi Cantonment Board (RCB) has announced rebate of 10% on all taxes payable till 29th June for the closing year 2024. The decision was taken to facilitate the tax payers for clearance of their dues within the closing date of the current fiscal year. According to the details, the National Bank Booth, set up in RCB premises will remain open on Saturday June 28, till 1230 hours. The taxes include property, water, commercial etc.—APP

Rana Tanveer launches 10 year development plan

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), while celebrating the international Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) day, has introduced a Ten-Years Cluster-Based Development Plan. Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain launched the plan as Chief Guest of the ceremony Mr. Socrat Aman Rana, Chief Executive Officer of SMEDA and Dr. Muhammad Jehanzeb Khan Deputy Chairman Planning Commission also addressed the ceremony that was widely attended by a large number of SMEs, leaders of the business community and senior government officers. Federal Minister Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, addressing the ceremony as chief guest said, our nation's economic landscape thrives on the dynamism of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which play a pivotal role in driving growth, innovation, and job creation, making them the cornerstone of our economy. He told that the ten-year Cluster Based Plan for SMEs, include five sectors including Fruits & Vegetable Processing, E-bike, Pharmaceutical, Sea Foods, and Marble & Granite. These studies, on these sectors, are a result of the collaboration between the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and the Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, guided by the consultation with private sector. The plan has been meticulously charted based on the selected sector's potential for exports, that also aligns with our Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) for 2020-25, he said adding that The given facilitative cluster-based development plan is the key to unlocking the tremendous potential within our SMEs, propelling us towards a path of lasting prosperity. He hoped that the recommendations put forth in the reports are all pertinent and their implementation will definitely shape a better future of our SME sector. To achieve all of this, he called for collaboration between the government, businesses, and citizens through regular consultations, feedback mechanisms, and transparency. He hoped that the visionary roadmap crafted by SMEDA in the form of a 10 years Cluster based development plan would enhance exports, employments and GDP to an optimal level in the next ten years. The launch of these Cluster Studies, he said, is not merely an academic exercise; it is transformative initiative that will shape the trajectory of these industries and our nation's economic landscape. He appreciated all stakeholders, including industry leaders, investors, academia, and civil society, to actively engage with the findings and recommendations of these studies. He assured to derive conducive policies for the five selected sectors as per recommendations of SMEDA to achieve the exports, employments and growth targets. Earlier, Mr. Socrat Aman Rana, Chief Executive Officer of SMEDA welcomed the guests and highlighted SMEDA's role in economic development of the country. He said that evidence based planning is need of the hour, therefore, SMEDA had got actively engaged in research and planning. He acknowledged Ministry of Industries and Productions' support and encouragement to SMEDA's initiatives.

Moot discusses geostrategic contestations in Asia Pacific region

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) on Friday organised the roundtable on "Asia Pacific: Geo-Strategic, Geo-Environmental and Technological Contestations" to discuss opportunities and challenges for the country amid growing regional tensions.

It was participated by Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (QAU), Ambassador Naghmana Hashmi, and Dr Ashfaq Hasan Khan (NUST). The session was moderated by Director Research IPRI Dr Raashid Wali Janjua. President IPRI Ambassador Dr Raza Muhammad gave the welcome remarks. The discussion focused on the importance of the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific regions in geo-politics and geo-strategic alliances, a news release said. Dr Janjua discussed the post 9/11 importance on the region and transition from bi-polarity to multi-polarity. Dr Jaspal discussed the implications of regional security architecture. He also discussed the importance of South Asia and the Indian Ocean in the regional security architecture, and India-USA security relations. He elaborated how India's position as a net security provider with the US has impacted China's relation with Pakistan, with the two countries becoming strategic partners on security. He discussed how this is also impacted by Pakistan's history with India and due to existing territorial disputes with India. Ambassador Hashmi discussed China's perspective on the Asia-Pacific region. She highlighted how China prioritizes development and progress on a local and international level. She addressed Pakistan's strategic and regional importance to China in geo-politics with India's strategic alliance with the United States as a net-security provider. She discussed China's perspective to be more defensive than offensive which is also very relevant to Pakistan. She emphasized the importance of clarity on Pakistan's standing in Asia-Pacific relations, and to have one strategic compass towards Pakistan's goals as Pakistan and China have significant strategic partnerships on navy and nuclear policies.—APP

Bike lifter arrested with four stolen motorcycles

RAWALPINDI: The police arrested a bike lifter and street criminal and recovered four stolen motorcycles and other items from his possession, said a Police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Sadiqabad Police Station managed to net a bike lifter namely Kashif and recovered four stolen motorcycles and other items from his possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Faisal Saleem said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar received the US Ambassador Donald Blome in his office. The two sides reviewed the latest developments in bilateral relations and discussed ways to move the relationship forward.

Weekly inflation falls by 0.73 pc

ISLAMABAD: The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.73 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on June 27, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 314.57 points as compared to 316.88 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 22.88 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732, decreased by 0.80 per cent and went down to 306.62 points from last week's 309.10 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732-22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, decreased by 0.85 percent, 0.77 percent, 0.79 and 0.67 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 18 (35.29%) items increased, 8 (15.69%) items decreased and 25 (49.02%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included tomatoes (25.25%), chicken (14.20%), onions (3.90%), garlic (2.80%), bread (0.81%), rice basmati broken (0.15%), eggs (0.09%) and rice Irri (0.04%). The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on week-on-week basis included LPG (5.38%), pulse gram (4.72%), pulse moong (3.20%), cooked daal (1.87%), pulse masoor (1.79%), potatoes (0.99%), gur (0.87%), bananas and wheat flour (0.61%) each, pulse mash (0.32%) and firewood (0.20%). On-year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included wheat flour (32.49%), chicken (31.87%), cooking oil 5 litre (15.98%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (13.29%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (12.31%), bananas (11.15%), mustard oil (8.07%), tea packet (2.52%) and petrol (1.38%).—DNA

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Briefs

Chinese company seeking food processing business in Punjab

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A Chinese company plans to invest \$8 million in Punjab to establish a food processing business with potential for future expansion, according to the Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT). An online meeting between PBIT officials and representatives from Hi-Road Technology Co., Ltd. was held to discuss various aspects of the food processing industry in Punjab. PBIT, in collaboration with the Consulate of Pakistan in Shanghai, pledged full support to help navigate procedures and identify potential joint venture partners in Punjab. The initial setup will cover 6,000 square meters (approximately 1.5 acres) in Phase I, with plans to increase investment following successful implementation. Shanghai Hi-Road Food Technology Co., Ltd. manufactures dairy products, including plant fat creams, creamy creams, coffee plant fat creams, and chocolate plant fat creams. The company also produces jams, fragrances, etc. according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro on Friday.

Uzma Bukhari warns anti-state elements

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Information Minister Uzma Bukhari Friday warned the anti-state elements who were involved in lawlessness to destabilize the country and said that government would adopt zero-tolerance policy in that regard. Talking to a private news channel, she clarified the issue of restoring a hundred-year-old Gurdwara, adding no discussion was held so far in that regard but some anti-state groups were misleading the people. The minister said law would come into action if there was a threat of damaging public property or harming the people, adding, anti-state elements were playing every tactic to tarnish the image of the country but would not succeed. The provincial government would not allow anyone to spread violence and fan anarchy, she added.—APP

CDA chairman chairs high level meeting

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman, Capital Development Authority, Muhammad Ali Randhawa chaired a meeting at CDA Headquarters. Senior Management of the Bank of Punjab attended the meeting. During the meeting, both organizations affirmed commitment on working towards a long term partnership in financial transactions. The Bank of Punjab also confirmed that their delegation will actively participate in upcoming Margalla Tree Plantation Open House being held on July 04, 2024 at Jinnah Convention Centre. The management of the Bank of Punjab assured commitment for being a major partner in the Margalla Tree Plantation Driver and will also assist CDA in its efforts to restore the Margalla Hills and other such initiatives.

PTCL advances Telenor Pakistan acquisition

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) has signed formal loan agreements with an International Finance Corporation (IFC)-led consortium to secure up to \$400 million in financing for the acquisition of Telenor Pakistan and Orion Towers (Pvt.) Limited. This is a significant milestone in the acquisition process following the IFC Board of Directors' approval of the financing deal in April 2024.

UNIDO hosts workshop to strengthen food regulatory practices in Pak

Participants reviewed core food regulatory functions, focusing on best practices in managing food business operations to protect consumers and promote optimal food handling among local producers. The workshop highlighted the collaborative nature of food safety regulations and emphasized the importance of fostering compliance among food producers in Pakistan. Through a SWOT analysis, participants assessed their performance

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) brought together senior officials from Provincial Food Authorities across Pakistan in Islamabad for a high-level workshop to enhance food regulatory practices in Pakistan. The workshop, entitled "Designing and Operating Food Regulatory Functions," gathered Director Generals, Directors, and Technical Officials from all Provincial Authorities of Pakistan, including Azad Jammu Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan, and the Islamabad Food Authority. Professor Samuel Godefroy, an expert in Food Risk Analysis and Regulatory Policies at Laval University and former Director General of the Food Directorate under the Federal Department of Health in Canada, delivered the sessions in this three-day workshop from 25 to 27 June 2024. Participants reviewed core food regulatory functions, focusing on best practices in managing food business operations to protect consumers and



promote optimal food handling among local producers. The workshop highlighted the collaborative nature of food safety regulations and emphasized the importance of fostering compliance among food producers in Pakistan. Through a SWOT analysis, participants assessed their performance. They drafted recommendations to enhance food safety, including increased collaboration at federal, provincial, and territorial levels, enhanced food regulatory science capacity, and improved governance of food safety decision-making. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining a predictable, transparent, collaborative, and evidence-based food regulatory environment. They also emphasized the need for stronger collaboration with the food production sector and other stakeholders to ensure the improved standards of food safety across Pakistan. This workshop represents a significant step forward in strengthening Pakistan's food regulatory framework, contributing to the protection of consumers and the advancement of best practices in food handling and safety.

PM efforts to bring Chinese industry to Pakistan laudable

ISLAMABAD: Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt, on Friday lauded Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif for his efforts to attract Chinese investment and relocate Chinese industries to Pakistan. The cost of doing business has increased in China, while tensions with the West are also hampering its exports and resolution to these problems lies in relocation of industries, he said. Shahid Rasheed Butt said in a statement issued here today that Chinese investors are trying to improve their businesses by relocating to other countries where labor is cheap and overall business costs are lower as compared to China. The business leader said that Chinese investors have moved industries and businesses to their enemy countries, like India, but they are not willing to relocate their businesses to the closest and friendliest country, Pakistan. All policymakers here understand the reluctance of Chinese investors, but they do nothing to address their concerns, he said. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that PM Sharif recently visited China and signed MOUs with many companies. Now he wants to transform these MOUs into reality. Presently, PM is exerting a tremendous deal of effort to make the effort a success. The PM recently said that it was of it is of utmost importance to encourage both domestic and international investment in Pakistan. However, his assertion will be tested soon, that we are cultivating a business-friendly environment to facilitate the relocation of Chinese industries to Pakistan through joint ventures. This is due to the fact that Pakistan's bureaucracy is notorious for stalling investment and foreign companies view it as a major barrier to direct investment. The government is pushing two policy actions to allay the fears of Chinese investors: legislation to establish a one-stop shop for luring investments in the Special Economic Zones and the development of a business facilitation facility in Islamabad, he informed. The goal of both of these steps is to allay any investor concerns, which will be a very beneficial development. He said that the issues that Pakistan faces in terms of its internal security will continue to take precedence over the investment decisions that Chinese corporations make, regardless of whether or not there are improvements in business policies. Chinese investors have brought up the safety of their employees in Pakistan, which was likely the most important concern they raised. He recalled that a senior minister of China's Communist Party had raised these issues more forcefully recently. He was speaking to representatives of Pakistan's political parties in Islamabad, and he cited deficiencies in Pakistan's internal security as a major cause for the decline in investor trust. Despite the fact that Beijing has always been concerned about the safety of its employees, the targeted attacks, particularly the one that took place in Bisham, which is located close to the construction site of the Dasu dam, have significantly undermined China's confidence in our capacity to protect its interests from militant groups, he observed.—DNA

PDMA takes measures to deal with monsoon related eventualities

ISLAMABAD: Punjab, Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Director General Irfan Ali Kathia Friday said that following the strict direction of Chief Minister Punjab Maryum Nawaz, the authorities concerned had been cleaning and de-silting all the nullahs immediately to deal with any pre-monsoon related eventualities. Talking to PTV news channel, he said that normal to above normal rains, nearly normal temperatures were expected in the country during this monsoon season whereas urban flooding warnings were being issued to all the districts. The authority asked all deputy commissioners and concerned officers to take all precautionary measures to avoid human loss as

rain-wind-thundershowers with isolated heavy falls predicted, the DG said. The rains might generate flash floods in different parts of the province, he added. The district administrations had also been asked to ensure availability of all emergency services staff, machinery and other resources to deal with any eventuality, he mentioned. The DG further said that the district administrations had made all arrangements to tackle any untoward situation. An effective response mechanism was being prepared in case of natural calamity while trained human resources would also play an effective role in disaster management, he added.

"We are also ensuring safe evacuation of communities residing along

natural drains and rivers to minimize the impact of any untoward situation," he highlighted. Replying a question, he said that the PDMA warned of potential urban flooding in Lahore, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Narowal and Rawalpindi, alerting the local administrations accordingly. The authorities in flood-prone districts were advised to clear the rivers and canals and people had been advised not to cross them during rainy and flood conditions, he said, adding, strict enforcement of laws prohibiting bathing in rivers and canals was also recommended. "In case of rains, immediate drainage of water should be ensured in every city. Wherever there is a risk of flood, early measures should be taken," he added.—APP

PML-N leader terms political stability vital

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Leader, Syeda Nosheen Iftikha Friday stressed the need of political stability to achieve economic strength and urged the opposition to work collectively with the government for strengthening the country by setting aside personal agendas. Talking to PTV news channel, she said that political stability and social harmony were two essential elements which would only ensure progress of the country, adding, if there was a conflict in society then no policy could yield positive results. The PML-N leader said the credit of bringing the economy of the country on the right track went to PML-N leadership, adding, It was hoped that situation would further improve in the coming months and inflation would be reduced.—APP

Chinese tech giants drive innovation in Pakistan: Report

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's digital transformation journey has been significantly influenced by China's active role in driving digital investments and successful partnerships. The participation of youth to transform Pakistan's digital future has been seen as one of the top targets of the Chinese giants. They have made transformative contributions to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects along with driving innovation in Pakistan's ICT sector, says a report carried by Gwadar Pro on Friday. As per Investopedia, a global financial media website, China's five big-

gest software companies based on annual revenue are Huawei, JD.com, China Mobile, Alibaba, and Tencent. Three of these IT giants, Huawei, Alibaba and China Mobile Pakistan (CMPak) are playing a leading role in bringing huge investments and projects in partnership with the local communities. Huawei, China's leading global provider of ICT, leads a growing pack of Chinese companies operating in Pakistan. It has made significant contributions and investments in Pakistan's IT sector. The company has been actively involved in developing Pakistan's ICT talent ecosystem since it began operating in the region in 1998 and played a

crucial role in enhancing Pakistan's IT infrastructure and high-tech talent pool. It also partnered with Pakistan's Higher Education Commission in a nationwide smart school initiative. During Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's recent visit to China, a framework agreement was signed between Pakistan's Ministry of Information Technology and Huawei, under which the company aimed to provide free IT training, including AI, to 200,000 Pakistani youth. In addition, it will support safe-cities, e-governance, and digitization of the economy in Pakistan. The company has been active in the Pakistani market for more

than 25 years, driving digital innovations and investments while engaging with the country's youth. China Mobile Pakistan, branded as Zong 4G, a pioneer of mobile internet connectivity in Pakistan, has been a driving force in Pakistan's digitalization journey, contributing significantly to the nation's economic and digital future. It was the first network to launch 4G services in Pakistan back in 2013. They also successfully conducted 5G tests in 2020, making them a trailblazer in South Asia. The company has invested over \$3 billion in digital infrastructure. While their extensive network of 14,000+ LTE-enabled sites ensures accessibility to digital services across the nation.

EPI Director Punjab appeals media

ISLAMABAD: Director of Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) of Punjab Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Friday appealed to media and Ulema for playing a responsible role for mobilizing people about eradication of polio from society as present government was committed to actively implementing a special emergency response plan to reach every child living in remote areas. Talking to PTV news channel, he said, "All the provinces should pay special attention and ensure that every child is reached by the polio programme." "Ministry of Health with the help of district administrations was actively involved in the polio programs and we will ensure that the focus on polio remains unwavering," he added. He also requested the media to generate a demand from within communities for anti-polio and other vaccinations to safeguard their children against all crippling and deadly diseases like measles and Polio. "All the stakeholders would have to come together and devise an effective strategy to tackle the crippling disease of Polio," he added. While urging for widespread polio vaccination, he emphasized the importance of education and awareness to combat the spread of the virus. "The pivotal role of scholars in raising awareness within society and the real challenge is to convey the message to pulpits in the remote areas where mostly parents are misguiding and confused about the safe vaccination," he underscored. Replying a question about the decline cases of Measles, he lauded the efforts of health department and said, "Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has focused all her attention for the improvement of health system." "This decrease in cases is a positive development in the ongoing efforts to control and prevent measles in the region," he mentioned. "Vaccination of child is only way to tackle viruses and diseases," he added

BEOE advises emigrants to reach out only valid OEPs

ISLAMABAD: The officials of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) have advised the foreign job-seekers to only reach out to the valid Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP) to avert any loss of time, money and their energies. An official source told APP here on Friday, there were only 2,577 Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP) licenses were valid as more than 5048 licenses had been pronounced invalid. Out of the invalid OEPs, licenses of some 670 were cancelled on various grounds while 805 were expired and rest of them had surrendered. They said all the foreign job-seekers must visit to the official web-page of the bureau regularly to get fresh and valid information and protect themselves from unauthorised OEPs. The officials said that the BEOE was mandated to regulate emigration under the Emigration Ordinance, 1979, promote Emigration of Pakistani citizens.—APP



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Tit for tat

IN matters of foreign relations, proportionality is key. Responding to provocation properly is an art, and given the subtle nature of the provocation from the United States House of Representatives, Pakistan's answer was equally measured. In response to the United States House of Representatives vote demanding a probe into alleged irregularities in Pakistan's general elections, the National Assembly passed a resolution condemning the US Congress resolution and termed it "contrary to facts" and "interference" in its internal affairs. The resolution, tabled by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) lawmaker Shaista Pervaiz Malik, was passed by a majority in the National Assembly amid a noisy protest from the opposition. The NA expressed sorrow over the US House Resolution 901, which demanded a "full and independent investigation of claims of interference or irregularities" after expressing concerns over the February 8 polls. The US resolution was entirely against fact, it stated, adding that Pakistan would not tolerate any interference in its internal affairs as an independent and sovereign state. The lower house of parliament also demanded the US maintain bilateral ties with Pakistan based on mutual respect. MNA Shaista further stated that the resolution passed by the US House of Representatives was clear "interference in internal affairs" despite being non-binding. She also slammed the opposition lawmakers for "encouraging an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty" after a country dared to "intervene in our internal matters." According to her, the US House was apparently taking notice of the "expression of supporting democracy in Pakistan."

She added that the US resolution resulted from "incomplete information and misunderstanding" regarding Pakistan's political and electoral process. It was a sorrowful development that the US resolution rejected the independent exercise of voting rights of millions of Pakistanis in the February 8 nationwide polls, the resolution read. MNA Shaista, via her resolution, urged the US Congress to play a constructive role in cementing Pakistan-US bilateral ties and focusing on the two-sided interests of both countries. She further urged the US Congress to pay attention to severe human rights violations in Gaza and Kashmir. The PTI backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) lawmakers opposed the resolution, chanting slogans of "Cipher-Cipher" and "Shame-Shame" in the House, as well as tearing copies of the resolution. The PML-N lawmaker also criticized the opposition lawmakers for "encouraging an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty" after a country dared to "intervene in our internal matters." The US House of Representatives, earlier this week, voted overwhelmingly to demand a "full and independent investigation of claims of interference or irregularities" in the polls. Resolution HR 901 passed with a massive 368 votes against seven, which makes up 85% of the total American lawmakers in the legislature. The US lawmakers emphasized the need for the Pakistani public's participation in the country's democratic process months after its general polls were contested as "rigged" and its outcome termed "delayed" by political parties now seated on the opposition benches in the legislature. The PTI is among those opposing the results of the polls after its candidates faced immense hurdles in their run-up to their participation in the vote, leading them to participate as independent candidates and being deprived of their iconic bat symbol following a legal battle with the ECP.



The Israeli regime, where every accusation is a confession

Robert Inlakesh

Quite predictably, the Israeli regime and its propagandists began accusing Hamas of attempting to commit genocide. They also attempted to portray the popular chant "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" as a call for the genocide of Jewish people. To any intelligent person, such narratives are no more than a childish claim...

THE Zionist entity initiated its aggression on the Gaza Strip by fabricating a narrative based on actions it either commits now or has committed in the past to justify its own sadistic genocidal assault. However, by accusing the Palestinian Resistance of crimes they themselves are demonstrably guilty of, they are inadvertently admitting their own culpability. As this is how the Israeli regime was born, it is only natural that we address its response to the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people of Palestine between 1947 and 1949. Today, it is an established fact, confirmed by documents and oral history, that some 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homeland by Zionist militias to pave the way for the establishment of the Zionist entity. For decades after 1948, the Zionists attempted to sell the lie that Jews from Europe arrived in the supposedly empty land of British Mandate Palestine and were suddenly attacked by anti-Semitic Arab armies simply because they were Jewish. However, as Palestinian voices began to emerge and publish works on the issue, coupled with a generation of what is known as the "new Israeli historians," this narrative quickly collapsed, exposed as the pack of lies it always was. This exposure posed a significant challenge to the "legitimacy" of the entity that had not only established itself beyond the lines of the 1947 UN partition resolution but also occupied the remaining Palestinian territories in 1967, along with territories in other Arab nations. When the true history of the struggle began to enter the mainstream and challenge the settler colonial regime, they then pivoted and began to construct a new victim narrative centered around Jews from Arab countries. The Israeli regime now claims that an early equal number of Middle Eastern Jews were expelled from their lands and sought refuge in the newly established Zionist entity. They attempt to frame this as an antisemitic injustice and a "population exchange". While some Zionist actions contributed to the migration of Jewish populations from Arab nations like Iraq, the majority of Jews were not forcibly expelled but left voluntarily for occupied Palestine, according to available documentation.

Even if all Jews from various West Asian countries had been driven out, this would not equate to the displacement experienced by the Palestinian people, nor was it the doing of the Palestinians. The Zionists recognized that the world was becoming aware of the great injustice committed during the Nakba and appropriated the narrative in order to claim victimhood, suggesting they were the true victims of ethnic cleansing, or at least on par with the Palestinians. This revisionist narrative aims to garner sympathy by alleging their victimhood in a campaign of ethnic cleansing. However, they are aware that their actions against the Palestinians were a morally irreconcilable crime against humanity, and this invented narrative of shared suffering is easily debunked.

Next, we have the crime of Apartheid, which Palestinian human rights groups have been highlighting for decades and has now been confirmed by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Israeli rights group B'Tselem. The evidence for the Israeli regime operating a system of Apartheid is indisputable. After successfully suppressing the proof for so long, the facts finally caught up with them a few years ago. To divert attention from the reality, Zionists have argued that because Israelis aren't allowed to enter Gaza or the West Bank, it is actually the Palestinians who are imposing an Apartheid system against them. However, anyone with even a basic understanding of the situation knows that there are around 750,000 illegal Israeli settlers living in the occupied West Bank and the eastern part of occupied al-Quds. Additionally, it is the Israeli regime that imposes a ban on its settlers entering either Gaza or Areas A and B of the West Bank, which are de-facto control of the Palestinian Authority. More recently, allegations have been made to justify their genocide against the people of Gaza. These claims are particularly the most important to address at this time. Ironically, many of these accusations are things that the Zionist entity itself is responsible for. Each of these points deserves to be addressed separately (in no particular order): 1- Human shields: The Israeli regime constantly accuses Hamas and other Palestinian Resistance groups of using civilians as human shields. This allegation, often repeated during various military assaults on Gaza's civilian population, is used to justify the mass murder of innocent people to the international community. However, this claim has been debunked multiple times by Amnesty International in its human rights reports, notably following the 2008/9 and 2014 Israeli assaults on Gaza. For example, during the 2008/9 war, there was not a single documented case of Hamas using Palestinian civilians as human shields. In contrast, there were documented cases of Israeli soldiers using Palestinians as human shields even acknowledged by the Zionist regime. The last time the Israeli soldiers were held accountable for using human shields was in 2010 when two soldiers were given minimal punishment for using a Palestinian child as a human shield during the 2008/9 war. Ironically, the most severe punishment given to an Israeli soldier during that period was for stealing a credit card from Gaza, resulting in a seven-and-a-half-month prison sentence. This human shield allegation, like the previous crimes mentioned above, is actually an inversion of what the Israeli military had been systematically committing for decades. Until the Israeli Supreme Court banned it in 2005, the Israeli army had the use of human shields built into its military doctrine under the "neighbor procedure". Despite the ban, there have been numerous cases where Israeli soldiers, in defiance of their own Supreme Court, have taken Palestinian civilians, including children, as human shields. The most recent case occurred

late last week in the Jabriyat neighborhood of Jenin, which was caught on video and condemned by the U.S.

2- A mass rape campaign: The Israeli propaganda machine has also promoted the idea that Hamas inflicted a pre-meditated mass rape campaign against Israeli women on October 7. To begin with, there is not a victim or accuser that exists to prove even one rape occurred, with the only evidence for such allegations about individual rape cases being limited to interpretations of what may have happened to certain Israelis whose bodies were found lying in a certain way. Yet, even in these cases noted in UN reports, there is no actual proof for any of the claims, and they can only be considered as a possibility.

Without delving too deeply into the various demonstrable lies perpetuated by Zionist propagandists and the distortion of crime scenes as noted in UN reports by rescue service groups like the infamous ZAKA group, it suffices to say that there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest a mass premeditated rape or sexual violence campaign ordered by the Palestinian Resistance. On the other hand, we have testimonies of released Palestinian female prisoners who say that women were being raped in Israeli detention. Additionally, in February the UN produced a report on 2 cases of rape committed against Palestinian women, in addition to various cases of sexual assault and threats of rape, triggering a United Nations panel of experts to call for an inquiry. In the UN's most recent rights report, which dedicated its first half to October 7 allegations, it concluded that mass sexual violence was carried out by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians, both online and in person. The UN report also pointed fingers at the Israeli chain of command and labeled the cases of sexualized torture and assault against men and women as "systematic".

There is also the gruesome evidence that continues to emerge from the SdeTeiman detention center, where Palestinian civilians from Gaza are held without a charge. Women testified to being sexually assaulted and having pepper smeared on their genitals. Multiple men testified to being raped with electrified and burning metal rods, and in one case, a Palestinian man even died after being raped in this manner. Additionally, Israeli soldiers have openly filmed themselves wearing Palestinian women's lingerie and rummaging through their underwear draws. They have also filmed civilians they had kidnapped and forced to strip fully or partially naked to humiliate them. Various reports have also emerged of the soldiers using attack dogs to rape kidnapped civilians. The verdict here is clear: Not a single proven case of any Palestinian raping an Israeli, yet there are countless cases with mountains of evidence of Israeli soldiers raping Palestinians. 3- Captives: This topic may be contentious to some, but it must be noted. Israel complains about Hamas having captured Israeli soldiers and settlers from the areas surrounding the Gaza Strip. Under international law, taking non-combatants as captives is a crime and is not justified except if it can be demonstrated that it was done for the specific purpose of protecting the non-combatant. There simply is not enough evidence to get into claims of this nature, however.

While Palestinian Resistance groups captured around 200 Israelis, the Israeli regime has been taking Palestinians as captives without any charge since 1967. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been detained and locked up as political prisoners in Israeli military detention. The Israelis were holding around 5,000 Palestinian hostages on October 6, which has now more than doubled, many of whom were in administrative detention (held without any charge).

The reality here is that for a regime that specializes in kidnapping children and innocent civilians, holding some of them for years without even issuing a single charge against them, it is simply laughable for them to complain about captive-taking. This is the case because the entire reason the Resistance took Israelis as captives is to conclude a prisoner exchange to release thousands of their own detainees who basically nobody cared about, nor do we even hear a peep about today. The Zionist entity currently holds more than 100 times the number of detainees than the Palestinian Resistance does. Moreover, the soldiers that are being held are legitimate prisoners of war, so to describe the Israeli soldiers as innocent captives is just ridiculous.

4- Genocidal intent: Until January, the Israeli regime simply denied the accusation of committing genocide in Gaza, brushing such allegations off as "anti-Semitic". Yet, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favor of South Africa's case accusing the Zionist entity of committing genocide in Gaza, holding them plausibly accused of committing genocide, the Israeli narrative had to shift.

Quite predictably, the Israeli regime and its propagandists began accusing Hamas of attempting to commit genocide. They also attempted to portray the popular chant "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" as a call for the genocide of Jewish people. To any intelligent person, such narratives are no more than a childish claim "I know you are but what am I." 5- They are like al-Qaeda and ISIS: The Israeli regime's propaganda at the start of the genocide in Gaza was fixated on attempting to compare Hamas to terrorist groups like Daesh and al-Qaeda. Putting aside the fact that the Israeli military not only helped al-Qaeda fighters and gave them medical treatment in southern Syria, we can just look at some simple facts and figures to see who is closer to such terrorist groups. According to the Gaza Health Ministry, the Israeli military has murdered around 50,000 Palestinian civilians in Gaza, including those missing under the rubble and presumed dead. Roughly 70% of those killed are reportedly women and children. This toll has been inflicted over the course of 9 months on a population of 2.3 million people. In contrast, the worst-ever death toll inflicted by Daesh occurred during the first two years of its insurgency in Iraq, with the UN reporting 18,800 deaths. It took only 9 months for the Israelis to inflict a civilian death toll so high in Gaza against a smaller population size, killing as many children alone as the total civilian death toll inflicted by Daesh over two years. Moreover, comparing the statements of Daesh's sectarian killers to those of Israeli officials reveals similarly murderous and supremacist language, depicting groups committed to killing those who disagree with their sectarian exclusivist rule.

At best here, you could argue that Daesh didn't possess the weapons that the Zionists do, which is why their killing was on a much smaller scale. However, if any group in the Palestine-Israeli struggle is to be compared to Daesh, it would be more accurate to compare the Zionist military. Although there have been countless other accusations leveled at the Palestinians, these are perhaps the most prominent of late. All of them are simply attempts to blame the people of Palestine for crimes that the Zionist entity specializes in. Each time such claims are made, they end up serving as admissions that the accusers understand full well that the actions they are committing make them look guilty. It is a kind of collective narcissism that governs the way Zionists think, when their crimes are pointed out, they invent reality to make themselves both the hero and victim.

Religious freedom report exposes hegemonic logic of US HRs

Meng Qingtao

In fact, the long-standing support of its allies by the US government is the fundamental reason why the Palestinian issue has remained unresolved for decades. The human rights harms, such as deprivation of life, health damage, rape, forced disappearances, and displacement, are incalculable. The US' double-standard human rights policy has also had a significant impact on American society, with the human rights...

THE US Department of State released the 2023 International Religious Freedom Report on Wednesday. This is the 25th International Religious Freedom Report issued by the US since 1999. As always, the US has singled out some countries for special attention and observation, with the actual intention of naming and shaming or even slandering them in the international community, once again exposing the hegemonic logic of US-style human rights. The US "concern" for Muslim human rights is actually based on ideology and national interests. On the one hand, the US government has loudly proclaimed its "humanitarian aid" to Palestinian civilians, such as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently stating during a visit to the Middle East that the US will provide \$404 million in humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and surrounding regions, in order to shape its own "glorious" and "noble" international human rights image. On the other hand, since the outbreak of new conflicts between Israel and Palestine last October, the US government has increased military forces in the Middle East and provided large amounts of military aid. On top of this, it has also repeatedly obstructed UN Security Council resolutions on the situation in Israel and Palestine, undermining international efforts to promote peace between two sides. In fact, the long-standing support of its allies by the US government is the fundamental reason why the Palestinian issue has remained unresolved for decades. The human rights harms, such as deprivation of life, health damage, rape, forced disappearances, and displacement, are incalculable. The US' double-standard human rights policy has also had a significant impact on American society, with the

human rights situation of US Muslims substantially deteriorating in recent times. The effects of the Muslim ban issued by former president Donald Trump are still felt today, with "Islamophobia" continuously leading to violent activities and hate crimes against American Muslims. A 2024 survey by the Pew Research Center shows that 70 percent of American Muslims believe that discrimination against Muslims has increased since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, and 53 percent say that news about the war makes them feel afraid. The US selectively ignores the actions of its allies in Gaza, yet criticizes China for "genocide" and "crimes against humanity" in this year's Report on International Religious Freedom, following the same hegemonic logic. These accusations go beyond taking the moral high ground of international legal norms. They reflect the US' narrow-minded perspective - such phenomena are part of the historical memory of many Americans within the US' short 200-year history. These labels also demonstrate the US' selective use of human rights as a tool based on national power and interests. In essence, hegemonism is ultimately reduced by the US to an "ally-enemy" political framework: there exists a substantive relationship of subjugation between the hegemonic state the US, as the dominant force, and its "follower states" as the subjugated entities. The so-called ally status is largely obtained through this subjugation. Outside the hegemonic state's sphere of influence, all "others" constitute real or potential enemies. For these "others," the logic of hegemonism is to eliminate them or convert them into "allies" within its capacity, more accurately, convert them into appendages, thus becoming part of its own national system. Consequently, the theoretical logic of American-style

human rights, when applied to international practices, results in interventionist homogenization based on its own logic toward other countries. Under the logic of hegemonism, American-style human rights are inherently instrumental, ultimately serving to maintain and strengthen the US' global hegemonic position.

The essence of US-style human rights lies in "hegemonism." "Human rights are above sovereignty" uses the universality of morality to suppress the particularity of politics and laws, thus providing moral justification for "humanitarian" intervention. Behind this theory, not only are "human rights" standards set by hegemonic countries, but their moral basis is also assumed to be legitimate and universal. "Humanitarian" intervention based on the economic, military and political advantages of a hegemonic country naturally takes the moral high ground, so that hegemonic powers can intervene in other countries under the cover of "humanitarianism." The widespread discrimination against ethnic minorities in the US and the crimes committed by the US in the Middle East and other regions that seriously violated the sovereignty and human rights of other countries not only expose the hypocrisy of US discourses, but also constitute an irony on the role of the US as the world's sole "human rights policeman." Ultimately, the US-style human rights exist in a paradoxical way: there is a deviation between the US' human rights discourse and human rights practice. The international community is well aware of the hegemonic logic behind the US' human rights narrative. Although the US has repeatedly played the cards of religion and human rights, as the logic of the US' human rights hegemony further unfolds, it will only pull itself down step by step from the altar of "human rights."

Briefs

Italy criticizes deal on filling top EU posts

ROME : Italy on Friday criticized the deal on filling the EU's top posts, including the European Council and Commission presidents and its foreign policy chief. Saying on X that the deal proposed by European Parliament's conservative, socialist, and liberal groups is wrong in both method and substance, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni added: "I decided not to support it out of respect for the citizens and the indications that came from those citizens during the elections." She stressed, "We continue to work to finally give Italy the weight it deserves in Europe." Late Thursday night, outgoing EU Council President Charles Michel announced that former Portuguese Premier Antonio Costa has been elected to replace him. He also announced Ursula von der Leyen's candidacy for a second five-year term as European Commission president and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas' candidacy to replace Josep Borrell as the bloc's foreign policy chief. —APP

MSF suspends medical activities in Rakhine

NAYPYIDAW : The charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has halted medical activities in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state due to an "extreme escalation of conflict" between an ethnic armed group and the military, it said. MSF was suspending "medical humanitarian activities" in northern Rakhine due to the "extreme escalation of conflict, indiscriminate violence, and severe restrictions on humanitarian access," it said on Thursday. Clashes have rocked Rakhine state since the Arakan Army attacked security forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a military coup in 2021. Arakan Army fighters have seized swathes of territory, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere in the country. The suspension would affect 14 mobile clinics in the townships of Rathedaung, Butthidaung and Maungdaw, it said. Fighting had impacted "regular healthcare services" by MSF teams in central and northern Rakhine since November, the charity said, adding that it faced difficulties moving medical and other supplies. Many roads and waterways in riverine Rakhine state have been blocked by the military or the Arakan Army, closing options for villagers to flee to safety. —APP

Milei's 'austerity package' approved by senate

BUENOS AIRES : Argentina's parliament has handed populist President Javier Milei his first legislative triumph, approving his economic reform package after months of debate. "We are going to give President Milei's government the tools to reform the state once and for all," ruling bloc head Gabriel Borroni said in his closing speech on Friday. Milei began congratulating himself even before the package was adopted, hailing it as "the greatest fiscal adjustment not only in Argentine history but in the history of humanity". His government has applied a drastic, all-out fiscal austerity program, intending to achieve "zero budget deficit" by the end of 2024 to tame chronic inflation. But budget cuts, including the paralysis of public works, coupled with a brutal devaluation of the peso by more than half in December, have strangled purchasing power. Politically, Friday's green light means "a total success for the government", political scientist and economist Pablo Tigani said. But in the economic sphere, "it will be a return to the policies of the 1990s, with deregulation, privatisation." —APP



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting on the matters related to Federal Board of Revenue.—DNA

EU 'deeply concerned' over Rafah amid Israeli attacks

Council calls for 'full implementation of terms of ceasefire proposal without delay, without conditions, which would lead to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza'

NEWS DESK

BRUSSELS : The European Council has expressed deep concern over the humanitarian situation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, reiterating its calls for the implementation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) orders. "Recalling the need to implement the ICJ order of 24 May 2024, the European Council expresses deep concern about the consequences on the civilian population of the ongoing ground operations in Rafah," the council said in its concluding statement following Thursday's meeting. It came after the EU leaders agreed on appointments and nominations for the EU's top jobs and adopted the strategic agenda for 2024-2029, a policy plan that steers the EU's future direction and goals. They also adopted conclusions on various issues, including the war in Ukraine, and the latest situation in the Middle East. "The European Council stresses the importance of respecting and implementing the orders of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which are legally binding," said the statement, also welcom-

ing Resolution 2735 adopted by the UN Security Council aiming to achieve a cease-fire in Gaza. It added: "The European Council calls for the full implementation of the terms of the ceasefire proposal without delay and without conditions, which would lead to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, a significant and sustained increase in the flow of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza, and an enduring ceasefire and end to the crisis, with Israel's security interests and safety for Palestinian civilians assured." Deploing all loss of civilian life, the council said it noted with "utmost concern" the unacceptable number of civilian casualties, especially children, as well as the catastrophic levels of hunger and imminent risk of famine caused by the insufficient entry of aid into Gaza. Stressing that the services the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) provides in Gaza and across the region are "essential," the council condemned any attempts to label a UN agency as a terrorist organization. - Calls for safe access to holy sites, for status quo to be upheld. It also strongly condemned the ongoing extremist settler vio-

lence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, inviting the council to take work forward on further restrictive measures against extremist settlers. The European Council also called for safe access to the holy sites and for the status quo to be upheld, stressing that the special status and character of Jerusalem and its Old City, the inviolability of its sacred spaces and the viability of all its communities "must be preserved and respected by all." "The European Council condemns the Israeli government's decisions to further expand illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank and urges Israel to reverse these decisions," said the statement. The council also expressed its concern about the increasing tensions in the region, notably along the Blue Line, and the growing destruction and the forced displacement of civilians on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border. "In line with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, the European Council urges all actors to exercise restraint, prevent further escalation and engage in international diplomatic efforts," it added. Tensions have risen

along Lebanon's border with Israel amid cross-border attacks between Hezbollah and Israeli forces as Tel Aviv pressed ahead with its deadly offensive against the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 37,700 victims since October following an attack by the Palestinian resistance group, Hamas. It also stressed that the European Council "condemns in the strongest possible terms" any threats directed against EU member states, that also contribute to escalation, reaffirming "unwavering solidarity" with members. Early June, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah warned the Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus against allowing its airports to be used by Israel during the conflict, asserting that it would make Southern Cyprus a party to the war and "Hezbollah would treat it accordingly." - 'Russia's assets should remain immobilised' On Ukraine, the council recalled its previous conclusions on continued support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. It also reconfirmed the

bloc's unwavering commitment to providing continued political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people "for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed." "Russia must not prevail. The European Council strongly condemns the recent escalation of hostilities by Russia, in particular the further intensified attacks against civilians and civilian and critical infrastructure, especially in the energy sector," said the council. It also welcomed progress on the initiatives launched by several EU members regarding ammunition and missiles, fighter jets, air defense, and training, calling for their "further reinforcement and acceleration." "Subject to EU law, Russia's assets should remain immobilised until Russia ceases its war of aggression against Ukraine and compensates it for the damage caused by this war," it noted. The council reiterated that the EU remains deeply concerned about the fate of all Ukrainian children and other civilians, accusing Moscow of "unlawful deportation" to Russia and Belarus. Russia has denied the claims.

IMF chief advises Fed to hold interest rates

LONDON: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Thursday that the US Federal Reserve should hold interest rates unchanged until late this year. Given important upside risks, she said the Fed should keep its policy rates at current levels "until at least late 2024." Georgieva said the American economy was supported by "labor supply and productivity gains" during the Fed's unprecedented and aggressive monetary tightening cycle in recent years. "I want to recognize that a lesson we learned from the last years is we are at a time of more uncertainty," she said in a press briefing. "This uncertainty also lies ahead." "We are confident, however, that the Fed will move through that, and certainly with the same prudence it has demonstrated over the last year," she added. The IMF also on Thursday released its US Staff Concluding Statement of the 2024 Article IV Mission. The American economy has proven to be robust, dynamic and adaptable to changing global conditions, while activity and employment continue to exceed expectations and the disinflation process has been considerably less costly than many had feared, according to the statement. —APP

Japan firm investigates 76 deaths in supplement scare

TOKYO : Japanese health supplement maker Kobayashi Pharmaceutical said Friday it was probing 76 more deaths possibly linked to its tablets containing red yeast rice, or "beni koji", meant to lower cholesterol. It erupted a scandal that erupted earlier this year when the company said it was probing five deaths potentially linked to the over-the-counter products after dozens of customers reported kidney problems. "Even if the direct cause of hospitalisation or death was not kidney-related disease, it has become clear that there are a variety of cases, including cases in which beni koji-related products may have caused harm somehow and had some indirect impact," Kobayashi said in a statement. Of the five initial deaths under investigation, the company said it now knows one did not consume red yeast rice. Fermented with a mould culture, the ingredient has been used in food, alcoholic drinks and folk medicines for centuries around East Asia. "We have received 1,656 inquiries from individuals who have sought medical attention, and have 76 cases under investigation over (a causal) connection to the deaths," in addition to the original four, it said. Kobayashi Pharmaceutical had announced on March 22 that it was recalling three kinds of over-the-counter tablets containing beni koji. —APP

Tokyo stocks close higher on weaker yen

TOKYO : Tokyo stocks closed higher on Friday after the yen slid to its weakest value against the dollar since 1986. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index climbed 0.61 percent, or 241.54 points, to 39,583.08, while the broader Topix index rose 0.57 percent, or 15.93 points, to 2,809.63. "As the yen weakened further against the dollar, Japanese equities extended their gains," Iwai Cosmo Securities said. A weaker Japanese currency helps exporters as it inflates their repatriated profits. One dollar bought 161.12 yen at around 0100 GMT, before it was down to 160.93 yen in the afternoon in Tokyo. The greenback traded at 160.79 yen in New York on Thursday. Japan's finance ministry spent 9.79 trillion yen (\$61 billion) to prop up the yen between April 26 and May 29. But analysts now say it is possible traders will keep pushing the envelope to see at what point the government will act, with some saying the currency could hit 170. The Japanese currency has cratered from around 115 per dollar before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. —APP

Azerbaijani president dissolves parliament

Ilham Aliyev appoints Sept. 1 as date for early parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan

BAKU : Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev dissolved on Friday the country's parliament, and appointed Sept. 1 as the date for the early parliamentary elections. The relevant decree was published on the Azerbaijani presidential website. The Azerbaijani Constitutional Court on Thursday ruled the dissolution of the parliament and the holding of snap elections "legitimate," following a request submitted to the court by the ruling political party Yeni Azerbaijan. Opposition deputies in parliament are loyal to Aliyev, but some opponents outside parliament say they have faced persecution after a string of independent journalists and political activists were arrested ahead of this year's presidential election, which Aliyev won with more by 92% of the vote. The deputy chairman of the Yeni Azerbaijan, Tair Budagov, explained that the next parliamentary elections should be held in early November 2024. Meanwhile, a global event is scheduled to be held in Baku in November – the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Azerbaijan's authorities decided to reschedule the date of the parliamentary elections to avoid the scheduling conflict.

Amb. Masood urges stronger US-Pakistan ties

Masood Khan said that they were developing a practical roadmap that would enable them to deepen their understanding and deliver security and prosperity for all

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON : Pakistan need sophisticated small arms and communication equipment to combat the growing terrorism, Ambassador Masood Khan has said, while calling for stronger US-Pakistan security and economic partnerships. "This is crucial for regional security and opposing the rising tide of terrorism that also threatens the interests of the US and its allies," Khan, the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., told the Annual Pakistan conference titled, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Assessing the US-Pakistan Relationship" on Thursday. The well-attended conference was organized by the Wilson

Center's South Asia Institute in partnership with the International Academy of Letters USA. Among those present were policy makers, scholars, intelligentsia, corporate leaders, members of think-tank community and Pak-American community leaders. Pakistan and United States should continue to invest in the reset of their relationship, maintain strong security links, enhance intelligence cooperation, resume sales of advanced military platforms and sustainment of Pakistan's US-origin defence equipment," he said. The ambassador said that prospects of Pakistan-United States ties were bright, adding "We share values, our security and economic interests are interwoven, and it is the aspiration of our two peoples that strengthen our ties."

Masood Khan said that they were developing a practical roadmap that would enable them to deepen their understanding and deliver security and prosperity for all. "In this era of renewed strategic competition, the US and Pakistan will build on existing partnerships and explore new horizons for establishing the parameters of mutuality of interests," he added. We should not base our engagement on incongruity of expectations. Our ties should be anchored in ground realities, even as we aim for stronger security and economic partnerships. Secondly, one or two issues should not hold the entire relationship hostage," the ambassador said. In this context, Ambassador Khan invited US investors and businesses to tap the country's poten-

tial. The ambassador pointed out that high-level defence talks, frequent meetings, military exercises, including 'Inspired Union-2024', 'Falcon Talon' and 'Red Flag' that promoted defence cooperation between the two countries. On fighting the scourge of terrorism, he apprised the audience that Pakistan had launched Azm-i-Hستهkam to oppose and dismantle terrorist networks. Outlining numerous areas of successful collaboration between Pakistan and the US, including energy, agriculture, climate change, healthcare, education, science, and technology, Ambassador Masood Khan expressed gratitude for the US assistance and ongoing partnerships while welcoming the launch of new initiatives in these fields.

Erdogan reaffirms commitment to EU membership

Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that full membership in the European Union is our strategic goal

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA : The Turkish president on Thursday reaffirmed Türkiye's commitment to become a member of the European Union, describing it as the country's "strategic goal." "Full membership in the European Union is our strategic goal. It is in our common interest for the EU to approach Türkiye from a similar perspective," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at joint news conference with his Estonian counterpart Alar Karis in Ankara. Türkiye applied for the EU membership in 1987 and has

been a candidate country since 1999. Membership negotiations started in 2005, but entered into a stalemate after 2007 due to the Cyprus problem and opposition by several member states. Touching on global and regional issues, Erdogan said the massacres in Gaza, where Israel has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians since Oct. 7, 2023, threaten not only regional stability but also global security. The Turkish leader said permanent peace can only be achieved through a two-state solution, and the international community must now weigh in. Speaking of the Ukraine war, which began in

February 2022, Erdogan said a fair solution to the conflict is possible through diplomacy, but initiatives excluding Russia will not yield results. TÜRKIYE-ESTONIA TIES Erdogan said he and Karis affirmed commitment to enhance Türkiye-Estonia relations during their talks, discussing joint steps to be taken in this direction. He highlighted the potential for the two countries to further their collaboration in all fields, saying: "We can increase our trade volume, which has reached \$429 million in 2023, and mutual investments even further." He said the first meeting of the Joint

Economic and Trade Committee established last year will be held in Türkiye soon, setting a new roadmap for economic and commercial relations. As NATO allies, Erdo said, the two countries should also increase existing cooperation in the defense industry. "We consider the diversification of our relations, from science and technology to education, culture, and tourism as significant investments," he said. Erdo also highlighted Estonia's global importance in digital transformation, digital applications, and cyber defense, emphasizing discussions on sharing experience in these areas. "I sincerely believe that our close bilateral rela-

tions and our solidarity within NATO will continue to strengthen on solid foundations," the Turkish president said. Responding to a question about relations with Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo stressed in his comments to journalists following the Friday prayers that there is no reason not to establish ties. Erdo added that Türkiye has no intention or goal to interfere in Syria's internal affairs. "Just as we kept our ties very lively in the past - we even held talks between our families with Mr Assad - it is certainly not possible (to say) this will not happen again in the future, it can happen," he said after Friday prayers.

Briefs

Von der Leyen nominated to stay on in top EU job

BRUSSELS: EU leaders have nominated current European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen for a second five-year term in the bloc's top job at a summit in Brussels. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas was picked as the EU's next foreign affairs chief and former Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa was chosen as the next chairman of EU summits. All three candidates are from centrist, pro-EU factions. The European Parliament is due to vote on the nominations for Ms von der Leyen and Ms Kallas. Ms von der Leyen is from Germany's centre-right, Mr Costa is a socialist and Ms Kallas a liberal. The leadership package represents continuity for the EU at a time of geopolitical uncertainty. It comes despite a surge in support for hard-right parties in the European Parliament elections earlier this month. But there has been resistance from Italy's Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni. Before the summit she said the plans ignored the successes of hard-right parties like her own in the recent elections for the European Parliament. Ms Meloni has worked on cultivating a constructive relationship with the EU political mainstream, but she abstained from the vote for Ms von der Leyen and voted against Mr Costa and Ms Kallas. - Agencies

Kenyan court allows military deployment

NAIROBI: Kenya's High Court has approved the use of military force to restore order, following days of anti-tax protests that at some point overwhelmed police. More than 20 people have reportedly been killed in the nationwide protests that are largely led by young people opposed to government plans to increase taxes. Armoured military vehicles patrolled streets in the capital, Nairobi, on Thursday as police fired tear gas to disperse protesters, who had threatened to storm the presidential palace. A judge said that the military deployment was critical to protect government installations but gave the authorities two days to clarify how long the deployment would last, along with its rules of engagement. "To deploy the military in a blanket manner without defining their scope of operation and the duration of their operation is a dangerous trend that can bring about militarisation of the country," ruled Justice Lawrence Mugambi. The Law Society of Kenya, which had petitioned the court to order the army back to the barracks, said it "respects but disagrees" with the ruling. President William Ruto on Wednesday bowed to pressure and said he would withdraw the finance bill containing the unpopular tax proposals, a day after parliament was briefly stormed and set ablaze by angry protesters. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the ASEAN countries posing for a picture on the occasion of movie screening at the residence of the Brunei High Commissioner Kamal Ahmad. The film was screened as part of the ASEAN movie festival. - DNA

Joe Biden falls flat against Trump in presidential debate

The current president was perceived as stumbling over his words while the Republican Trump repeated numerous falsehoods

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden and Donald Trump have squared off in the first debate of the 2024 United States presidential race, seeking to pull ahead in a match-up that has, so far, been in a dead heat. But despite delivering the opening salvo in Thursday's event, Biden struggled to articulate his points at several moments, appearing to fumble for his words. Meanwhile, Trump took the opportunity to redirect the conversation at several points to Biden's perceived weaknesses, drumming up fears about immigration and the state of the economy. He also attempted to dodge questions about whether he would honour the results of November 5's presidential election, saying he would only do so if it was "fair" and "free" - and then reiterating false claims that the 2020 election was rigged. "The fraud and everything else was ridiculous," he said at one point, casting doubt on President Biden's win in 2020. Trump currently faces two criminal indictments - one in Georgia and another in Washington, DC - over his alleged attempts to subvert those election results. Thursday

evening's performance took place at the CNN news network's studios in Atlanta, Georgia, and it marked the first time since October 2020 that the two candidates met on the debate stage. Many political observers wondered if they would be rusty, neither having participated in a public debate of any kind in the years since. Biden had spent the week leading up to the debate at Camp David in Maryland, a presidential retreat where aides helped him prepare with mock set-ups. Trump, meanwhile, largely continued his schedule of rallies. But from the moment Biden stepped on stage, the Democratic president seemed to wobble, muttering as he approached the podium. Still, as he faced the first question of the night, Biden came out swinging, seeking to dent Trump's popularity by attacking the Republican's leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We had an economy that was in free fall," Biden told the room, which was largely empty except for two CNN moderators, Dana Bash and Jake Tapper. "By the time he left, things were in chaos. Things were in chaos. So we put things back together." He also mocked Trump's resistance to COVID-19 safeguards, saying his philosophy echoed the misinformation circulat-

ing online about cures: "Just inject a little bleach into your arm, and you'll be alright." But when Trump was given a chance to respond, his opening remarks reflected a characteristic hyperbole the Republican candidate has become known for. "We had the greatest economy in the history of our country. We have never done so well. Everybody was amazed by it. Other countries were copying us," Trump said in his opening remarks, quipping later: "Everything was rocking good." The night was a crucial event for both Trump and Biden, as they sought to advance different visions of the US. Trump implied that the country declined under Biden's leadership. Biden, meanwhile, sought to defend the US's standing in the world. "I've never heard a president talk like this before. We're the envy of the world. Name me a single major country that wouldn't trade places with the United States of America," said Biden at one point. "No one thinks we're weak. No one wants to screw around with us. Nobody." Trump, however, fired back at one point: "Joe, our country is being destroyed as you and I sit up here and waste a lot of time on this debate." In the lead-up to Thursday's debate, polls showed Trump

and Biden in a tight race, though the Republican appeared to be edging ahead. A survey from The New York Times and Siena College, released on the eve of the event, showed Trump with nearly 48 percent support, close to four points ahead of Biden, who was around 44 percent. Political observers noted that Thursday's performance could deepen that divide. "I've been speaking to Republicans and Democrats since the debate ended," said Al Jazeera correspondent Alan Fisher. "And the overwhelming view is that this was a very good night for Donald Trump." Much of it had to do with stage presence, Fisher continued. He noted that Trump reiterated many talking points from his campaign rallies. "Yep, Joe Biden called out Donald Trump on his lies, on his falsehoods, on his exaggerations, on things that simply are not true. But Donald Trump looked as if he was in command," Fisher explained. "Biden didn't finish thoughts. He looked confused on certain points. And this was a bad night for him." Fisher added that the debate will underscore questions about Biden's age: The Democratic president is 81, while his Republican rival is 78. "This performance is not going to do anything to assuage those concerns."

Punjab govt never abused power against opposition

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said on Friday that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government neither abused its authority against the opposition nor did it ever try to restrict facilities for its [jailed] political rivals. CM Maryam was addressing the Punjab Assembly's (PA) session discussing Budget FY25 under the chair of Speaker Malik Ahmed Khan. The opposition lawmakers resorted to ruckus during her address and chanted anti PML-N slogans, but she continued to speak amid the noisy protest. However, the daughter of PML-N supremo blasted the former provincial government of the PTI, saying: "They were busy setting new records of incompetence and removing air conditioners from other people [when they were in prison cells]." CM Maryam stated that the ruling PML-N President Nawaz Sharif had instructed the authorities that instead of one install two air conditioners in the prison cell of PTI founder Imran Khan - the former premier who is held at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail. She said that PTI's trolls used to ridicule her for her public-friendly actions. "They take checking the price of roti at a tandoor as an insult and used to mock me."

Opp conduct during CM's speech regrettable

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari says the opposition's conduct during the speech of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz was regrettable. Speaking at a press conference on Friday, she said they (opposition) thought they would suppress the government by abuse, hooliganism and misbehaviour. "We will wait for what the speaker will decide," she said, adding that they had resorted to use of abusive language and "we have been bearing the insult with our heads down for the last four months." "They even do not care about mothers and sisters' respect. Foul language has been used in the assembly against the CM," she highlighted.



ISLAMABAD: Chinese ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong calls on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar. - DNA

Israel authorizes 5 settlement outposts in occupied West Bank

The extremist minister said that sanctions against the Palestinian authority came after "weeks of discussion" and were an "appropriate response" to the Palestinian Authority's activity against the regime at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the United Nations

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM: The Israeli cabinet has approved the "legalization" of five settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank, and further sanctions on the Palestinian Authority for supporting cases against the regime in international courts. "The Security Cabinet authorized one outpost for every country that unilaterally recognized Palestine as a state in the last month," Israel's extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich said late Thursday night. Last month, Spain, Ireland and Norway formally recognized the Palestinian state, joining over 140 UN member states that have recognized its statehood over the past four decades. Slovenia and Malta have also indicated they plan to formally recognize the state of Palestine. The five settlement outposts are Evyatar, Givat Asaf, Sde Efraim, Heletz, and Adorayim. The

extremist minister said that sanctions against the Palestinian authority came after "weeks of discussion" and were an "appropriate response" to the Palestinian Authority's activity against the regime at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the United Nations. The sanctions include the cancellation of exit visas for PA officials. Further restrictions were also declared regarding Palestinian construction in Area B of the West Bank, which is under the Palestinian Authority's administration, in violation of signed agreements. According to the Smotrich-proposed measures, the so-called Higher Planning Council for the West Bank is also expected to meet to advance the approval of thousands of additional settler units in the occupied territory. More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 set-

tlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds. The international community views the settlements - hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since Israel's occupation of the territory in 1967 - as illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions due to their construction on the occupied territories. Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent state with East al-Quds as its capital. As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 266 on Friday, aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and target different areas and massacre more civilians. Reporters for the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to bomb homes and attack citizens in different areas of Gaza during the past 24 hours. - Agencies



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