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UK PM Starmer says, Britain must rediscover its identity

Detailed News On Page-08

Saudi FM calls for sanctions on Israeli officials

Detailed News On Page-08



Paolini makes Wimbledon 2nd week debut

Detailed News On Page-06



Imran may to go on hunger strike 'PTI decides to take part in APC despite concerns'

PTI founder says party wants to hear govt's version, warns of further instability

KHAYYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan said Friday that his party would participate in the all-parties conference (APC) in which the government is expected to take political parties into confidence over Operation Azm-e-Istehkam. "My party will participate in the all-parties conference and hear what the government has to say," the PTI founder told reporters as he appeared in a case at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, where he is imprisoned. The PTI founder, while noting that his party has reservations over the new anti-terrorism action, said it would "only lead to further instability" in the country. With terrorism on the rise, the government has launched a reinvigorated and re-energised national counter-terrorism drive, which would be intelligence-based operations' focused. Khan's comments came after Geo News reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has decided to organise an APC "to gain political parties' confidence" in newly announced Operation Azm-e-Istehkam. PM Shehbaz will hold consultations to decide on the date of the APC, the sources said, adding that the date would be announced later. The federal cabinet last week approved the launching of the counter-terrorism operation following the National Action Plan's Central Apex Committee's recommendations to turn up the heat on militants targeting Pakistan. However, opposition parties including the PTI, Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam Fazl (JUI-F), Awami National Party (ANP), and others have voiced concerns over the military operation, demanding that parliament must be taken into confidence before taking any such decision. Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Muhammad Khan says that the PTI founder may go on hunger strike after consulting his colleagues. Talking to the media, Ali Muhammad Khan

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Govt hopes Imran Khan to walk the talk on APC

Information minister says govt held first round of consultation with allies regarding operation Azm-e-Istehkam

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar has confirmed media reports that the federal government is planning to hold an all-parties conference (APC) to evolve a broader consensus on the newly launched Operation Azm-e-Istehkam and also 'welcomed' the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder's statement signalling to attend the key huddle. The minister's confirmation comes a day after Geo News citing sources reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had decided to convene an APC "to gain political parties' confidence as the opposition parties have voiced concerns over the new operation and demanded the government to take parliament into confidence before launching any counterterrorism drive. "Certainly, consultation is underway with the allies [...] to summon the APC regarding [Operation] Azm-e-Istehkam,"

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of Cabinet Committee on Energy in Islamabad. – DNA

Pak seeks stronger UK ties

PM Shehbaz looks forward to working closely with new UK govt under "Starmer's wise leadership"

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Friday congratulated UK Prime Minister-elect Keir Starmer after his party won a landslide victory in the British general elections, seeking to further boost the ties between the two nations. Starmer's centre-left Labour won a massive majority in the 650-seat parliament. Rishi Sunak's Conservatives suffered the worst performance in the party's long history as voters punished them for a cost of living crisis, failing public services, and a series of scandals.

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PPP to participate in APC: Bilawal

We want complete eradication of terrorism from this country, says PPP chairman

DNA

QUETTA: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Friday said that a delegation of PPP will participate in the All Parties' Conference (APC) convened by the prime minister. He made this announcement while addressing a press conference in Quetta along with Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti. "We want complete eradication of terrorism from this country and we'll put our viewpoint in the APC," said the PPP chairman. The prime minister has convened the APC over 'Operation Azm-e-Istehkam' to bring consensus among all the stakeholders.

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No leniency for tax evaders Digitization of tax system Govt's top priority: Shehbaz

During the briefing on FBR's digitisation, the meeting was told that during the FBR digitisation, 4.5 million taxable individuals have been identified who were not part of the tax net

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday calling the digitisation of taxation system government's priority to prevent tax evasion worth billions of rupees, directed the authorities concerned to immediately create a dashboard to monitor the ongoing digitisation and implementation of the reforms. The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the reforms process of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), instructed to bring the taxable non-filers into the tax net and revoke the discretionary powers of the customs appraisers, and sought an implementation report from FBR chairman within 24 hours. During the briefing on FBR's digitisation, the meeting was told that during the FBR digitisation, 4.5 million taxable individuals have been identified who were not part of the tax net. It was told that consequent to the government's measures, over 300,000

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Swedish envoy praises business climate in Pak

Henrik Parson Leaving Pakistan soon after completing his term

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan, Henrik Parson admired the flourishing business environment for Swedish companies in Pakistan. In a significant diplomatic meeting, the Swedish envoy commended the robust cooperation and support extended to Swedish companies operating in Pakistan, said a press release issued here Friday.

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Dar urges int'l action on Gaza crisis

He says, Pakistan forcefully raises plight of Palestinians at Int'l fora

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar says Pakistan has forcefully raised the plight of Palestinian people at all international fora. Speaking in the Senate today, he reiterated Pakistan's demand for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, emphasizing that proceedings of war crimes should be initiated against Israel at the International Court of Justice. He said the genocide of Palestinians must come to an end and free flow of humanitarian aid should be allowed inside Gaza. The Deputy Prime Minister said Pakistan has sent nine consignments of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

PTI seeks CJP's recusal from PTI's cases

Raoof urges Qazi not to sit in benches after Imran's distrust

DNA

ISLAMABAD: PTI leadership expressed distrust in the Chief Justice of Pakistan and demanded his recusal from the benches hearing related to PTI and its Founding Chairman Imran Khan and vowed that they would continue their fight for the restoration of constitutional supremacy and rule of law despite all odds. Addressing a press conference along with PTI senior leadership including Shanmim Naqvi, Shandana Gulzar, Shoaib Shaheen and Shaukat Basra, PTI Central Information Secretary Raoof Hasan said that the CJP should recuse himself from all PTI related cases because justice could not be done in his presence in the benches.

During Muharram

Govt disallows suspension of social media applications

Punjab govt sought suspension of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram for 6 days

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The federal government rejected several provincial governments' requests to suspend access to social media applications during a few days of Muharram ul Haram. The provincial governments had sought suspension of six social media applications for around a week during Muharram due to security concerns. Faithful hold processions across the country in Muharram, while religious scholars address huge gatherings amid tight security, with thousands of law enforcers deployed to ensure the security during the month. According to sources within the Ministry of Interior, the social media websites will not be closed, assuring that the security will be foolproof during the holy month. "Security should be made more active and effective," said the ministry, adding that mobile signals will be blocked in areas where processions and majlis will be held. The Punjab government had cited spread of hate material and misinformation as reasons behind the move. According to a Punjab Home Department letter, a meeting of the Standing

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Punjab requests deployment of Army, Rangers

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Friday requested the deployment of the Pakistan Army and Rangers to assist the provincial police in establishing "peace and order" during the month of Muharram. A statement issued by the Punjab Home Department's spokesperson said the provincial government had sought the services of 150 contingents of the military and Rangers following the requirements of different districts. It added that a letter was written in line with the police's request for cooperation in maintaining security and the services of 60 army contingents and 81 Rangers contingents were sought.

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Army top brass concerned over 'criticism' over Azm-e-Istehkam

The forum vows to combat 'digital terrorism', uphold national security



STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) presided over 265th Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) held at GHQ. Forum paid rich tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhadas of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement

Agencies and the citizens who have laid their lives for peace and stability in the country. The forum undertook a comprehensive review of internal and external security situation of the country and had detailed discussion on various aspects of "Azm-e-Istehkam", which is aimed at harnessing the national counter terrorism efforts in a synchronised manner to dismantle the nex-

us of terrorism and illegal spectrum in the country for enduring stability and economic prosperity. Forum noted with concern the unwarranted criticism by some quarters and deliberate misrepresentation of the vision, only for furthering their vested interests. The forum also deliberated upon regional security situation, especially Afghanistan and reaffirmed its commitment to regional peace and security. The forum expressed solidarity with the people of Kashmir and Palestine. Forum condemned serious human rights violations, war crimes and genocide being perpetrated in Kashmir and Gaza. The forum affirmed that military leadership is cognizant of the full spectrum of the challenges and resolved to shoulder its constitutionally mandated responsibilities with support of the resilient people of Pakistan. The forum underscored that onslaught of politically motivated

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Pak-US history of collaboration runs deep: ICCI President

ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that the United States is one of Pakistan's largest trading partners

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan and the United States have long history of partnership and cooperation and both have always worked to strengthen it with each passing day. This has been stated by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry while addressing a cake

said that the educational programs and scholarships, such as the Fulbright Program, have enabled thousands of Pakistani students to study in the USA, fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange, adding that the US has been a significant provider of humanitarian aid to Pakistan, especially during natural disasters like earthquakes and floods. The ICCI President made the mention of

Committee, Dr. Ijaz Ahmed also participated in the celebration and emphasized the need to increase the bilateral relations between Pakistan and United States in different spheres including education, health and people to people contacts for promoting socio-cultural integration. They also urged for enhancing media cooperation on both the sides. Deputy Assistant Secretary Phil Remus shared suggestions how to improve the existing bilateral ties and also proposed to declare the New York as a twin province with Punjab and as well as Sindh. Phil Ramos praised Pakistani community's contributions in the US by emphasizing the need for strong educational foundations and people-to-people contacts to overcome barriers and foster closer ties between the two nations.

Ijaz Ahmed, Chairman American Pakistani Public Affairs Committee (APPAC), stated that the Pakistani community is keen to invest in their homeland and called for maximum facilitation and cooperation for the initiative.

Alec Brook Cressey, Member of New York Assembly said that Pakistan has a better education system for nurses and Pakistani professional nurses can work in USA on good salaries, adding that "We have identified schools in New York and Pakistan for cultural exchange and Pakistani students can learn history from an American teacher and American children as well can learn from a Pakistani teacher."

President Pakistan Union of Journalists Afzal But said that People to people contacts and cooperation between the journalist communities of both sides must for enhancing this relationship.



cutting ceremony held here at the National Press Club in connection with the 248th Independence Day of the United States.

He said that the United States is one of Pakistan's largest trading partners. Numerous bilateral trade agreements and investments have been made in multiple sectors including infrastructure, agriculture, technology, and manufacturing and both the nations have cooperated closely on security and counter-terrorism efforts, with Pakistan playing a crucial role in regional stability and counter-terrorism operations. He further

USAID and other American organizations contributions in development projects in Pakistan, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure development, contributing to the nation's progress. He expressed the hope that in the days to come Pak-US relationship will continue to grow in all the fields especially people to people and business to business which will go a long way in further strengthening this collaboration engagement. It is noteworthy, that a delegation led by New York State Assembly Deputy Speaker Phil Ramos and Chairman American Pakistani Public Affairs



ISLAMABAD : Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Romina Khurshid Alam called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar at Ministry of Foreign Affairs.— DNA

Flour price may go up by Rs5-7 per kg

KARACHI :While Pakistanis are reeling from backbreaking inflation, another shock is in store for them. The government has levied the withholding tax on wheat products in the federal budget for fiscal 2024-25, which is likely to raise the flour price by Rs5 to Rs7 per kg. The Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) has called an emergency meeting in Lahore on Saturday to deliberate the situation. Flour millers have warned the government to reconsider the imposition of withholding tax; otherwise they would take drastic measures, including strikes and shutdown of flour mills across the country. While speaking to The Express Tribune, PFMA Chairman Chaudhry Amir Abdullah said that both regular and fine flour could see a price increase of Rs7 per kg due to the withholding tax. He further stated that the cost of a 10kg flour bag is expected to rise by Rs106, while the price hike for a sack of flour could reach Rs460. Abdullah criticised the taxation policy, saying that only 2% of Pakistan's population pays direct taxes, while indirect taxes such as sales tax heavily burden the remaining 98%, who are often economically disadvantaged. "These tax measures on essential commodities will adversely affect the public, particularly low-income households.—APP

Romina meets DPM Dar; discusses upcoming COP29 summit

Deputy PM and Foreign Minister expressed full support to Ministry of Climate Change during the COP29 process

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Romina Khurshid Alam on Friday called on Deputy

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar here. In the meeting, she briefed him about the efforts made to mitigate the threat of climate change in Pakistan, and sought support from the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the upcoming COP29 to be held in Baku this year. The deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister expressed full support to Ministry of Climate Change during the COP29 process.

Kundi call for empowerment of women and youth

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR : Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi has said that steps would be taken for empowerment of women and youth and to train them according to demands of contemporary market. He said this during his visit to National Vocational Technical Training Commission (NVTTC) on Friday. On the occasion, KP Governor was also briefed by Chairperson of NVTTC, Gulmina Bilal and Executive Director, Muhammad Amir about working of the commission. KP Governor termed Pakistani workers serving outside the country as ambassadors and said that they played a significant role in sending foreign exchange. He said that majority of laborers working in gulf countries belong to Pakistan and added that they can earn a better

livelihood in native areas if provided training modern technologies.

Faisal Karim said that youth and women would also be provided trainings in field of mining, tourism and gemstone sector enabling them to explore opportunities in Central Asian States. Governor also urged authorities in NVTTC to develop a liaison with universities and educational institutions to train youth in modern and diversified fields. He also assured his cooperation to commission in training youth and women. He was also informed that training of about 1000 children are underway in the commission under BISP while more than 600,000 youth were provided training in various fields. Chairperson of NVTTC said that actions would be taken on proposals of KP Governor and steps would be taken to train youth and women.

Faisalabad receives 47mm rain

FAISALABAD: Faisalabad received 47 millimeter (mm) rain here on Friday morning, which turned the harsh and sizzling weather into pleasant. The dark clouds started prevailing in the sky from the night. However, the rain coupled with thunderstorm and windstorm started early in the morning and continued for half an hour, which inundated the low-lying areas. Managing Director (MD) Water & Sanitation Agency (WASA) Amir Aziz immediately made the field staff fully activated with a clear-cut direction to drain out the stagnant rainwater from low-lying areas and important roads of the city. The WASA staff used heavy machinery for pumping out rainwater accumulated in various intersections of the city while the MD WASA supervised the entire operation, a spokesman for the agency said on Friday. People, especially children, enjoyed the rain and thronged to open spaces like parks, ground, bazaars, etc.—APP

Matric exams result on July 9 in Punjab

LAHORE : All nine education boards of Punjab will announce the result of matriculation examination 2024 on Tuesday, July 9 at 10 am. According to official sources of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) here, students can check their results online on the website of the respective board or through their mobile phones. Each board will have a specific result page where students can enter their roll number and other required credentials to access their score card.—APP

Minister calls for unity during Muharram

LAHORE : Punjab Minister for Health and Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order Khawaja Salman Rafique emphasised the role of scholars in fostering unity among Muslims during Muharram-ul-Haram. He conveyed the message during a meeting with a delegation from the Shia Ulema Council on Friday. The discussions centered on security measures for the upcoming Muharram. Saad Rafique assured that the government planned comprehensive security arrangements for Majalis, processions, sa-beel, niaz, and azadari. He highlighted a special security plan.—APP

Electricity system in Pakistan is rusty: Laghari

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Energy Awaiz Ahmad Khan Laghari on Friday told the Upper House that entire electricity system in Pakistan was rusty which needs complete overhauling. Responding to calling attention notice of Senator Falak Naz about excessive and un-announced load shedding of electricity in Upper and Lower Chitral causing problems for the residents of these areas, the minister said that the complete system would restore in two weeks time.

He said Golan Gol Hydro power project produces 108 megawatt electricity but due to some technical issue it stopped power generation. The other option to restore electricity was to provide electricity from national grid through PESCO but the line constructed and managed by WAPDA was also faulted which caused problem however the teams are working on war footings for complete restoration of electricity in Chitral, he said. He also apologized over the in-efficiency of

employees and said that unless the entire system would not be overhauled, there would be no change in the system. Our actions are yielding good results and we are working on war footings to provide electricity to the people of Chitral, the minister said. Chairman Senate Seyd Yousaf Raza Gillani also assured the Senator that the issue would be taken up when the Ministry will come to brief the Committee of the whole of Senate on power crises.—APP

Govt. allocates over Rs. 18 bln for two IT parks

Technology Park in Islamabad is expected to serve as a state-of-the-art facility that fosters collaboration, innovation, and product development

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The government has allocated over Rs. 18.718 billion for the establishment of the Technology Park Development Project (TDP) in Islamabad and an IT Park in Karachi in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the financial year 2024-25. The Technology Park in Islamabad is expected to serve as a state-of-the-art facility that fosters collaboration, innovation, and product development.

It will act as an interface to bring cohesion among aca-

demia, research, industry, and planners from both within Pakistan and abroad. The park will play a significant role in knowledge and resource management, focusing mainly on the commercialization of knowledge through managing innovations, providing business support services, promoting entrepreneurship, and offering consultancy services. Additionally, it will provide much-needed IT-enabled office space and facilities to IT companies registered with the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB). The IT Park in Karachi is set to act as a catalyst for creating job and

business opportunities, especially for the youth. According to the PSDP, the government has also allocated a total of Rs. 28,929 million for the financial year for ongoing and new schemes of the Information Technology and Telecom Division. Out of this total allocation, Rs. 23,535 million has been earmarked for 16 ongoing schemes, while Rs. 5,394 million has been allocated for five new schemes. Among the ongoing schemes, notable allocations included Rs. 300 million for Smart Office Federal Ministries Department (NTTB), Rs 1000 million for Cyber Security for Digital

Pakistan (NTISB) and Rs. 2000 million for Prime Minister's Initiatives-Support for the IT Startups, Specialized IT Training and Venture Capital (IGNITE & PSEB). For new schemes, Rs. 3500 million allocated for Digital Economy Enhancement Project (WB. Funded) (MoITT/Bol/NTTB/NADRA), Rs. 800 million National Semiconductor HR Development Program (NSHRDP) Phase-I (IT Wing), Rs 194 million Expansion of Cellular Services in AJK and GB Phase-IV (SCO) and Rs. 800 Revamping IT Industry Landscape (PSEB).

Punjab Police, Child Bureau to cooperate protecting children

IGP said that full security is being provided to the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau's teams during their child rescue operations in all districts

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Chairperson of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau and Member of the Provincial Assembly Sarah Ahmed visited the Central Police Office here on Friday and met Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar. She was accompanied by Director General of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau Aftab Ahmed and Director of the Bureau Shafiq, among other officers. During the meeting, it was agreed to further promote mutual cooperation for protection and rescue of victims of child abuse, forced labour, and violence.

The IGP said that full security is being provided to the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau's teams during their child rescue operations in all districts. He mentioned that child protection and rescue monitoring system feature will be included on the police's central

dashboard. Nomination of police focal persons in all districts to rescue children who are victims of begging, forced labour, and violence was also discussed. The IGP said that Tahaffuz centres, Tahaffuz Manzil foster home, and the Child Protection Bureau would be interlinked in all districts, including Lahore. He said that coordination between the Punjab Police and the Child Protection Bureau is being further improved for the protection of street children. Chairperson of the CP&WB Sarah Ahmed said that the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau is facing significant challenges with limited resources. She appreciated the cooperation and efforts of the Punjab Police for the protection of children and victims of exploitation. She said that public awareness campaigns and intelligence-based operations for the elimination of child labour will continue with the cooperation of the Punjab Police.


AIG Admin and Security Rizwan Ahmed Khan was also present. Meanwhile, Inspector General Punjab Police, Dr. Usman Anwar, chaired a Follow-Up RPOs Conference at the Central Police Office. All RPOs, CPOs, DPOs, & senior officers of the province attended the conference. Police officers expressed gratitude for the confidence shown by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif of Punjab Police and declaring the Punjab Police as her frontline force. Senior police officers affirmed their commitment to make the province a stronghold of security under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's teamwork. Police officer reiterated their determination to further improve police working in view of Key Performance Indicators system. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has directed to adopt zero tolerance towards corruption, intensified efforts in crime prevention, and enhanced service delivery


with renewed vigour. During the conference, a review of security arrangements for Muharram was conducted, with briefings given by RPOs and DPOs. Dr. Usman Anwar said that Punjab Police's strong commitment to ensuring a peaceful and secure Muharram. IG Punjab emphasized collaboration with local religious scholars, community leaders, and institutions to thwart conspiracies by anti-state and anti-peace elements. Infrastructure development, service delivery projects, and facility upgrades were also discussed during the meeting. Dr. Usman Anwar highlighted the timely completion of Smart Police Stations and Safe Cities projects. Measures to enhance the welfare of police personnel and their families are being expanded too. Additional IGS, including Special Branch, Welfare & Finance, MD Safe City Authority, Commandant PTI Chung, DIGs, CTO Lahore, and senior officers, attended the conference.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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July 01/Singapore
Armed Forces Day

July 01 / Canada
National Day

July 01/Somalia
Independence Day

July 04/USA
Independence Day

July 05/Algeria
Independence Day

July 09/Argentina
Independence Day

July 09/Mongolia
Revolution Day

July 14/France
National Day

July 15/Brunei
Sultan's Birthday

July 21/Belgium
National Day

July 20/TRNC
Independence Day

July 23/Egypt
National Day

July 26/Cuba
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July 26/Liberia
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National Day

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Islamabad to be made a world-class city: Naqvi

The Interior Minister said that work on the Serena Chowk Underpass and F-9 Park Chowk Flyover projects will begin soon to alleviate traffic congestion issues in Islamabad. He added that the long-delayed Expressway project will be completed on a priority basis. He stated that development work in the non-developed sectors of Islamabad will also be completed, and possession will be handed over to the allottees

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi has made key decisions to transform Islamabad into a world-class city while chairing an important meeting at the Capital Development Authority (CDA) headquarters on Friday. On the Minister's directives, CDA will now only purchase electric motorbikes in future to reduce environmental pollution. Additionally, eco-friendly electric buses will be introduced for the citizens of Islamabad. The Interior

Minister has also imposed a ban on the purchase of conventional motorcycles. International standard emergency services will be provided to the citizens of Islamabad and the administration of emergency services will be transferred from MCI to CDA. Moreover, the establishment of Capital Waste Management Company will also be expedited. Furthermore, the matters related to the establishment of Capital Waste Management Company will also be finalized soon. The Interior Minister said that work on the Serena Chowk Underpass and F-9 Park Chowk Flyover projects will begin soon to alleviate traffic congestion issues in Islamabad. He added that the long-delayed Expressway project will be completed on a priority basis. He stated that development work in the non-developed sectors of Islamabad will also be completed, and possession will be handed over to the allottees. He highlighted that work on the Islamabad Model Jail, which has been stalled for 17 years, is progressing rapidly, and the first phase will be completed within the stipulated

time. The Interior Minister said that Business Facilitation Centers are being established in Islamabad, where investors will be provided with all facilities under one roof. Land has also been allocated for the Health Tower in Sector H-16. The Interior Minister congratulated CDA team, including Chairman CDA, on achieving record tax collection but warned that no organization can run solely on plot and land sales; therefore it is essential to develop the assets of the organization. In this regard, the Interior Minister directed that an investment plan be prepared and presented within seven days. The meeting also reviewed the progress on various ongoing development projects, including the Kuri Enclave, renovation of Federal Secretariat building, Diplomatic Enclave, and Smart Parking projects. Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, briefed the Federal Minister for Interior on various projects. The meeting was attended by Chairman CDA, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Memon, and all members of CDA.

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Overseas Pakistanis are an asset: Minister

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis Chaudhry Salik Hussain has said that Overseas Pakistanis are ambassadors of the country of Pakistan. Two thousand IT skilled people will be sent to Japan. Overseas Pakistanis will benefit from online facility for property transfer. Initially to America, Pakistanis from UK, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Italy and Spain will be able to get the facility. Property transfer complaints will be resolved within 20 days. Asylum seekers bring the country into disrepute. Efforts are being made to put the country's institutions on their own feet. He expressed these views yesterday during a press conference at the OPF headquarters. Overseas Pakistanis will be able to transfer property sitting abroad. Most of the complaints of overseas Pakistanis are related to property transfer. Overseas Pakistanis will now be able to benefit from the online facility. The problems with the power of attorney will be over. He said that Pakistanis should not go out illegally. Whatever investment is worth 30-40 million dollars, we approach SIFC. If factories are set up in our country. Pakistanis would not have gone out.

Canadian envoy meets Chairman Senate

ISLAMABAD: Canadian High Commissioner H. E. MS. Leslie Scanlon hosted a reception in honour of the Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani at her residence Islamabad. Discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations, with a particular emphasis on enhancing cooperation in trade, investment, security, and cultural exchanges. The Chairman Senate underscored the significance of continued dialogue and collaboration to further deepen the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and Canada. Chairman Senate also highlighted importance of parliamentary and other high level exchnages. He called for enhanced exchanges and people to people contacts to promote understanding. -APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Poland Maciej Pisarski hosted a dinner reception for the journalists covering the diplomatic event. The ambassador talked about bilateral relations as well. -DNA

Jam Kamal Khan Praises NUTECH Initiatives

ISLAMABAD: The National University of Technology (NUTECH) held an inspiring Open House event, highlighted by the presence of Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan. Jam Kamal Khan commended the innovative efforts and new initiatives showcased by the students, reflecting on the significant challenges Pakistan faces, such as inflation, quality of life, and unemployment. He emphasized the need to overcome these challenges by leveraging indigenous resources and expanding the export market. The event, also graced by Minister for Science and Technology, Mr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, featured a variety of projects by final-year students. Both ministers were warmly welcomed by Rector NUTECH, Lt Gen Moazzam Ejaz, HI(M), (Retd). They toured the displays, appreciating the students' dedication and innovative spirit. -APP

Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan increase by 6.12% in 11 months

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's export of goods and services to Afghanistan witnessed an increase of 6.12 percent during the first eleven months of the fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported. The overall exports to Afghanistan were recorded at US \$507.935 million during July-May (2023-24) against

exports of US \$478.614 million during July-May (2022-23), SBP data revealed. On a year-to-year basis, the exports to Afghanistan also surged by 74.32 percent from \$42.660 million in May 2023, against the exports of \$74.369 million in May 2024. Meanwhile, on a month-on-month basis, the exports to Afghanistan surged by 27.67 percent during May 2024 as compared to the exports of \$58.248 million in April 2024, the SBP data revealed. Overall Pakistan's exports to other

countries witnessed an increase of 11.31 percent in the first eleven months, from US \$25.764 billion to US \$28.678 billion, the SBP data revealed. On the other hand, the imports from Afghanistan into the country during the months under review were recorded at US \$10.150 million against US \$15.277 million last year, showing a decrease of 33.56 percent in July-May (2023-24). On a year-on-year basis, the imports from Afghanistan witnessed an increase of 112.44 percent

from US \$1.318 million in May 2023, against the imports of US \$2.800 million in May 2024. On a month-on-month basis, the imports from Afghanistan into the country also witnessed an increase of 194.73 percent during May 2024, as compared to the imports of US \$0.950 million during April 2024, according to the data. The overall imports into the country witnessed a decrease of 2.25 per cent, from \$49.518 billion to US \$48.401 billion, according to the data.

ANF seizes over 149 kg drugs in 5 operations

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in a crackdown against drug dealers conducted 5 operations and managed to recover 149 kg drugs besides netting 5 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 100.8 kg hashish and 26.4 kg opium were recovered from a vehicle near Misri Banda Road, Nowshera. 20 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested on North Bypass Karachi. 1 kg hashish was recovered from the possession. -APP

Digital trucks' campaign advocate for Kashmiris' rights

ISLAMABAD: The World Kashmir Awareness Forum (WKAF), a Washington-based advocacy group, deployed digital advertising trucks across the US capital displaying bold messages advocating for the right to self-determination for the people of Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, this initiative coincided with the festive atmosphere of American Independence Day celebrations, making a significant impact. The digital trucks, equipped with electronic screens, traversed prominent locations such as the National Mall, Capitol Hill, the Washington Monument, the White House, museums, and various embassies. The messages displayed included: "Americans Celebrate Independence Day: Kashmiris Treat Indian Occupation with Dismay;" "No Election, No Selection: UN Resolution the Only Solution;" "Freedom of Kashmir Only Solution: Enslavement Not an Option;" "Indian Forces on Kill-

ing Spree: Kashmir Needs to Be Set Free;" "Kashmir Facing Existential Threat: United States Needs to Act;" and "India Involved in Genocide: Kashmiris Demand Plebiscite;" Dr. Ghulam N. Mir, President of WKAF, highlighted the significance of July 4th, noting it as a day of independence celebrated by proud Americans of diverse backgrounds. He expressed gratitude to the United States for its ongoing moral and diplomatic support in the Kashmiri struggle against Indian occupation since 1947. Dr. Mir underscored the contrast between the freedoms enjoyed in the US and the repression endured by Kashmiris under Indian rule. Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai, Secretary General of WKAF, emphasized American core values of freedom, equality, and justice, pointing out the need for these values to extend globally. He said, "The whole world knows that Indian army is committing crimes against

humanity in Kashmir. And today Kashmir is at the brink of genocide". He cited international leaders' statements supporting self-determination and called upon the US to uphold these principles by advocating for Kashmiri rights. Dr. Imtiaz Khan, a Kashmiri American scholar, spoke passionately about the plight of Kashmiris facing atrocities under Indian occupation. He condemned the ongoing human rights abuses, including killings, rapes, and enforced disappearances by Indian troops in the occupied territory, and urged the international community, especially the United States, to intervene to end these atrocities. Sardar Zulfiqar Roshan Khan and Sardar Shoaib Irshad, from various Kashmiri associations, echoed these sentiments, urging the Biden administration and world powers to prioritize resolving the Kashmir dispute and stopping human rights violations. -APP

30 E-Buses safely docked at Convention Center

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Law and Justice, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar on Friday informed the Upper House of the Parliament that 30 Electric-Buses of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) were safely docked at the Convention Center declared as its initial terminal and depot with proper charging and maintenance infrastructure in place. Responding to the question of Senator Fawzia Arshad on the reasons behind the CDA's failure to establish depots for public transport buses to be received from China in upcoming months and any precautionary measures taken to ensure protection of the vehicles, the Minister informed that it was the first batch of the buses received from China and two more batches were in the offing. Senator Tarar informed that the Chinese company had installed charging stations with a capacity of charging 12 buses at a time within 3 hours which was sufficient to manage the entire fleet. -DNA



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Briefs

Newspapers received advertisements of Rs 9 bln: Tarar

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Ataulah Tarar on Friday said the newspapers of the country had received the maximum advertisements of Rs 9 billion whereas the new channels were given Rs 6 billion advertisements. Responding to the question of Senator Sarhad Ali Khan pertaining to criteria for news channels and newspapers during the question hour session of the second meeting of the 340th session of the Senate of Pakistan, the Minister informed that the newspapers were facing financial crisis due to which the current government paid special attention to it. Ataulah Tarar said at present as per the 1997 Services Manual, advertisements were given to the news and media outlets. He added that a policy for advertisement was introduced in 2021 which was amended in 2022. "There is no criteria to gauge electronic media's eligibility for getting advertisements. However, our rates' committee based on rating of news channels allows a limit or number of advertisements to be given to a particular channel," he said. The Minister underlined that at present no advertisements for any news channel were halted by the current government.—APP

School Meal Programme for lagging districts of Balochistan on cards

ISLAMABAD: The Benazir Income Support Programme, Ministry of Education and Professional Training and World Food Programme are continuing collaborative efforts on the development of School Meal Programme to provide nutritious meals in 500 public sector schools in Balochistan's lagging districts. The programme has been conceived in line with the directives of Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif to provide nutritious meals to the schools in the province for which the government of Balochistan, WFP and BISP have listed 500 schools. To discuss the progress on this initiative, a meeting was held here, co-chaired by Secretary BISP, Amer Ali Ahmad along with Secretary Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Mohyuddin Wani, as a follow-up for the implementation of PM directive on School Meals Programme. Country Director WFP, Ms. Coco Ushiyama was also present along with her team including the representative of WFP from Balochistan Dr. Faaria Ahsan, who participated virtually.—APP

Senate passes State-Owned Enterprises Bill

ISLAMABAD: Senate on Friday passed unanimously the State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) (Amendment) Bill, 2024, aimed at strengthening the provisions for the removal of directors under the Act. Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on behalf of the Minister for Finance and Revenue moved the bill in the House to amend the State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) Act, 2023 [The State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) (Amendment) Bill, 2024]. The minister said that the amendment was brought to enhance the efficiency of Board of Directors (BoDs) of all State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) besides ensuring good governance. In the proposed changes, future board directors, including government and independent members, would undergo performance evaluations by the board's nomination committee. Recommendations for removal would be sent to the federal government for approval. The act would empower the government to nominate independent directors through an institutionalised mechanism and provide for the majority of independent directors, security of tenure.—APP

RCCI warns of nationwide Protest, shutter down strike

Consultative meeting on budget 2024, impact on businesses

DNA

RAWALPINDI: An emergent consultative meeting was held at the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the impact of the recently passed fiscal Budget 2024. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq along with Group Leader Sohail Altaf, chaired the meeting. In the course of the meeting, representatives from the ICMA and tax bar associations provided a comprehensive overview of the measures outlined in the budget, including tax rates, FBR additional powers, penalties for filers, non-filers, and late filers, double taxation, and advance tax. Participants expressed strong opposition to the anti-business measures introduced in the 2024 budget, particularly the imposition of additional taxes on existing taxpayers. Concerns were raised regarding the potential negative impact of these measures on businesses, with participants emphasizing that the budget measures could lead to business closures. Additionally, concerns were voiced regarding the substantial powers granted to the FBR in terms of the Tax Fraud Investigation Unit and the rising electricity bills faced by traders. The participants highlighted that the creation of the Fraud unit will lead to further harassment of the existing taxpayer. President Chamber Saqib Rafiq informed that a charter of demands will be presented to the government prior to any calls for organized nationwide protests and strikes. A decision was made to seek the support and collaboration of all small and large factions of trade organizations and cham-



bers across the country in preparation for a potential nationwide strike. It was emphasized that the budget was formulated without considering the prevailing ground realities and without consulting relevant stakeholders. It is important to note that the business community has expressed concerns regarding the potential closure of businesses and industries as a result of the proposed budget measures. Specifically, the budget includes a significant increase in the revenue target of 40%, which places

an additional burden on existing taxpayers. Group leader Sohail Altaf expressed concerns regarding the impact of the budget on various stakeholders, including shopkeepers and industries. Mr. Altaf cautioned that instead of implementing reforms and providing a roadmap for industrialization and increasing exports, the government has disincentivized the industry and especially exports by bringing exporters into the Normal Tax Regime as opposed to the Final Tax Regime previously. He termed the

budget regressive and inflationary along with reducing disposable income of businesses as well as salaried class. Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad, former presidents, Executive Committee Members, Women Members and a large number of RCCI members were also present on the occasion. Representatives from the Anjuman e Tajran, Sheikh Siddique, Shahid Ghafoor Piracha, Sheikh Hafeez, Arshad Awan, Raja Jawad from

Gujar Khan, Asif Idrees - Former President RCSTSI, leaders of different markets, representatives from the Tax Bar Associations and ICMA, including Taseer Bukhari, Chairman of the RCCI Standing Committee on Tax Affairs, Faraz Fazal, President of RITBA, Shehzad Malik, President of ICMA, and Mian Ramzan, were present at the meeting. Key individuals from various sectors and industries, including poultry, pharmaceuticals, mobile, furniture, travel and tourism, stationery, marble, construction, property, gems, and jewelry, were also in attendance.

PM pays tribute to Capt. Karnal Sher Khan

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed on his 25th martyrdom anniversary, lauding his unprecedented valor and patriotism. The prime minister, in a statement, said that Capt. Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed showed exemplary gallantry and courage on the Kargil front which was even acknowledged by the enemy. He said Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed set an example of patriotism, dutifulness and fighting for the country sacrificing his own life that would be kept alive forever. "Capt. Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed (Nishan-e-Haider) and his family are pride of the whole nation.—APP

IRSA releases 341,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 341,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 500,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1497.68 feet and was 99.68 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 277,400 cusecs and 144,200 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1188.25 feet, which was 140.25 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 45,200 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 187,200, 173,900, 108,100 and 38,900 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 90,500 cusecs of water released at Nowshera.—APP

A digital corridor is helping Pakistani young entrepreneurs

ISLAMABAD: The Sino-Pak digital corridor is helping Pakistani young entrepreneurs, said Fahad Raja, co-founder of Pakistani e-commerce platform Deal Kart at the EuroAsia Pakistan Digital Economy Forum held here. "Our platform could be said to be the Pakistani version of Pinduoduo. As an e-commerce platform targeting price-sensitive users, groceries and daily necessities are within our scope." "As a global giant, Pinduoduo has not yet started operations in Pakistan. But that's not a problem, we are building a Pinduoduo for ourselves." Raja told China Economic Net (CEN). Chinese companies, especially e-commerce companies, are closely related to his career. "In terms of payment, logistics, technology and the like, Chinese companies have attracted global attention, making great achievements. For us from emerging markets, there are too many experiences and even too little time to learn, thus more connections are in urgent need." Another young entrepreneur, Shahada Salam, mentioned that CPEC ensures the transportation efficiency of Pakistan's supply chain. "In my country, most of the hardware comes from China, such as biometric equipment needed to solve security issues, thus this corridor is very helpful for the timely supply of hardware and technology products. Nowadays, more and more Chinese companies have set up offices in the special economic zone located in my hometown, Islamabad, including manufacturing and supply chain departments. We are also inviting a large number of Chinese technology companies to set up offices there, so that we could better assist them expand their business throughout the country, and then from Pakistan to the Middle East, Europe, Africa... In the future, this will become an amazing "digital corridor". A total of more than 200 representatives from all walks of life in China and Pakistan attended the forum, all of whom looking forward to a more shining digital future that both two countries can benefit from. Addressing on the Global Digital Economy Conference 2024, Shaza Fatima Khwaja, Minister of State for Information Technology and Telecommunication of Pakistan, said that the global landscape has witnessed a digital revolution in recent years, positioning the IT sector as a cornerstone of economic development, innovation, and social transformation. Recognizing the immense potential of this sector, "both Pakistan and China have made substantial strides in harnessing its capabilities."—DNA

Economy will collapse if tax targets failed

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of FPCCI Advisory Board and National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Friday that the increase in basic electricity tariff and fixed charges is unbearable for public and businesses. Due to the continuous increase in the price of electricity, the livelihood of the people and the rights of traders and industrialists to do business are being taken away, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain asked how the government would collect taxes when the economy doesn't work. Talking to the business communi-

ty, the veteran business leader said that business expansion, investment, reduction in unemployment, inflation, and tax targets will fail miserably due to the government's policies. He said that the government did not consult the businessmen and industrialists before the budget, which is a recipe for an economic disaster. The business leader noted that petroleum dealers are on strike. In contrast, oil marketing companies, alternative medicine, exporters, gems and jewelry, salaried employees, the lubricant industry, construction, real estate, and other business sectors are protesting. Mian Zahid Hussain said that people are fed up with inflation

and don't have money to pay utility bills. The pressure is increasing on the people, while those from whom taxes should be collected are not even being looked at, which is the worst exploitation. He added that since the tax defaulters, tax evaders, electricity thieves, and failed government institutions have been given an open exemption, all the burden of their luxury is falling on the taxpayers and the people. Mian Zahid Hussain said the government has increased the basic electricity tariff by Rs 5.72 per unit. The basic tariff per unit of electricity for domestic consumers has been set at Rs 48.84 paise, which will increase from Rs 65 per unit due

to adjustments and other taxes, which will put an additional burden of about Rs 600 billion on consumers. He further said that the increased fixed electricity charges for various categories have also been approved. A 150% increase in monthly fixed charges for commercial customers has been approved, after which the fixed charges will increase from Rs 500 to Rs 1250. On the other hand, the monthly fixed charges for industrial customers have been increased from Rs 440 to Rs 1250. Similarly, a 100% increase in monthly fixed charges for agricultural tubewell consumers has been approved. It will be increased from Rs.200 to Rs.400.—DNA

Chinese firm to advance radiation oncology technology

BEIJING: The University of Sargodha and leading Chinese firms signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to advance Radiation Oncology Technology for Cancer Treatment in Pakistan and for technological advancement here on Thursday. The University of Sargodha, and Zhong Lu Dong (Shandong) Agricultural Science & Technology Development Co., Ltd signed an MoU to establish the Cancer Research Center in Pakistan to explore the possible pathways helpful to the services of humanity. According to the MoU, the two sides would promote medical education activities for the



research and development of the Scientific Revolution in Pakistan. "Presently, almost 24,000 students are enrolled in the main campuses of the University in different degree programs across eight faculties, four constituent colleges, four institutes, one school, and 40 departments, whereas almost 30,000 students are studying in our 204 affiliated colleges, so in total, we are dealing over 55,000 students as one of the biggest educational setups in Pakistan", Qaisar Abbas, Vice Chancellor of the University of Sargodha said. University of Sargodha and Supper

Accuracy Science & Technology Co., Ltd also signed an MoU for joint research projects, publications, and participation in international conferences. According to this MoU, an exchange of faculty members for research, teaching, and professional development would be held on a priority basis including collaborative projects on plantation practices, and research on sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. The MoU further stated the development and implementation of training programs, workshops, and seminars to promote the use of advanced agriculture technologies.—DNA

931 traffic wardens to regulate traffic during Muharram

A control room would be set up at Traffic Headquarters to monitor the situation while motorists who seek help and assistance can use the CTP helpline 051-9272616

RAWALPINDI: Over 931 Traffic Wardens under the supervision of inspectors and DSPs would perform duties on city roads to control traffic flow during Muharram. According to a City Traffic Officer (CTO), Rawalpindi Tamoor Khan, Traffic Police Officers, and Wardens have also been directed to take action against vehicles having tinted glasses, revolving lights, unregistered vehicles and motorcycles and others moving without proper and fake number plates. In order to ensure the security of the mourning processions during Muharram-ul-Haram, the City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi has issued a comprehensive traffic plan. According to the plan, there would be a complete ban on parking any vehicle or pushcart on the route of the procession. Fork lifters would move with Muharram processions. The CTO informed that the wardens have been directed to remove all kinds of encroachments from the procession routes besides keeping a vigil on suspected persons and things. Entry of vehicles on the route of the processions would be blocked by erecting barricades and other hurdles, the CTO added. The CTO said, Traffic Police officials would be deployed along with district police personnel to ensure the security of the mourners. Strict disciplinary action would be taken against the delinquent officials, the CTO said. He informed that traffic load would be diverted to alternate routes during mourning processions. A control room would be set up at Traffic Headquarters to monitor the situation while motorists who seek help and assistance can use the CTP helpline 051-9272616.—DNA

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Drinking water crisis in Gaza

In the alleys of the Deir Al-Balah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, the child Abdel Razzaq Labad searches for a place to buy a few liters of safe drinking water to quench his thirst in the scorching summer heat. Under the scorching sun, the 10-year-old child walks, searching for his goal, amid dire conditions, as the Israeli genocidal war on Gaza approaches its tenth month. Labad tells the correspondent of the Palestinian Information Center (PIC) that he has been searching for drinking water since the morning hours, but has not found it yet in the extreme heat. Last Tuesday morning, the Israeli occupation forces bombed a group of citizens while they were filling water in the Zeitoun neighborhood south of Gaza City, killing 10 of them and injuring 17 others, their only fault being that they went out to search for a sip of water. Since the start of the genocide in Gaza, water wells and desalination plants have been targets for strikes by the Israeli occupation army, with most of them taken out of service, while many people, according to UN reports, are forced to drink unfit water. The PIC correspondent visited the only desalination plant in the central Gaza Strip, and witnessed the harsh conditions, with hundreds of cars and animal-drawn carts waiting their turn to fill water. Workers at the plant confirm that the plant is not operating at full capacity due to the lack of fuel, and its complete reliance on other energy sources. They explained that the total work of the station and what it produces does not meet a third of the needs of the residents and the displaced people in the center of the enclave, amid the continued tragedy of displacement while the occupation army continues the war of genocide. Since the start of the war on Gaza, the Israeli leaders have announced the cutting of water and food supplies as part of a starvation war, in an attempt to subdue the Palestinians and commit genocide against them. What adds to the suffering of the citizen amidst the war is the horrific rise in water prices, where the price of a gallon (16 liters) has reached 7 shekels, equivalent to \$2. Citizen Muhammad Qishta says that the rise in the price of drinking water has added burdens to daily expenses amid exorbitant inflation in the markets due to the Israeli genocide and the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. Qishta told the PIC correspondent, "Clean drinking water has become a dream for many people amid abject poverty, tight blockade, and the deprivation of the most basic necessities of life." The residents wonder: Where is the world and the international community in the face of this Israeli criminality that does not hesitate to bombard water wells and those searching for them?



Are US defence plans for S. Korea workable?

North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities threaten South Korea and the wider region. The United States has promised extended deterrence for South Korea to protect against these threats, and is resolutely opposed to South Korea developing its own nuclear capability. America's preferred approach is reflected in the nuclear consultative group it set up with South Korea last year, and its efforts to integrate South Korea's significant conventional military powers with US nuclear operations under the so-called conventional-nuclear integration mechanism. Besides the difficulty of bridging this capability gap, there is also the problem of how to coordinate the two countries' strategic commands. South Korea is not content with the US approach, and would like more freedom to pursue its own defence initiatives. There are three options planners in South Korea would like to consider: developing indigenous nuclear capabilities, reintroducing US tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula, and/or building nuclear-powered submarines for the South Korean navy. Unfortunately, the US has instead offered the nuclear consultative group, established in accordance with the Washington Declaration that came out of a summit between South Korean President Yoon Sukyeol and US President Joe Biden on April 26 last year. The consultative group's declared goals include "information sharing, consultative mechanisms, and joint planning and execution" but the details of how to coordinate nuclear operations between the US and South Korea remain unclear. The group needs to become a firmly established and consistent mechanism. Ideally, it should be regulated like Nato's nuclear sharing arrangements with the US, with framework and guideline agreements, and manuals detailing the standard operating procedures. Instead, the US-South Korea nuclear consultative group, which held its third meeting last month, has devolved from national security adviser-level to deputy defence minister-level. Guidelines were drawn up for information-sharing, security systems and consultative procedures during a nuclear crisis, and the operation of a real-time summit-level communication channel. These guidelines are expected to be practised during Ulchi Freedom Shield, the annual combined defence exercises usually held in August. Unfortunately, the coming US presidential election appears to have limited the meeting outcomes. The primary purposes of establishing the nuclear consultative group and conventional-nuclear integration mechanism now seem diplomatic and political. The US has not really addressed South Korea's military concerns and significant disagreements were probably papered over in the official statements that came out of the latest meeting. South Korea is working to establish its own strategic command by the end of this year, and also to align this new command with the US strategic command. Given the many disparities in the command and control structures and functions, integration will be challenging. Many questions are still unresolved. Which functions of the three Ks - the "Kill Chain" defence system, Korean Air and Missile Defence, and Korean Massive Punishment and Retaliation campaign - should be part of South Korea's strategic command? How should this strategic command contribute to the conventional-nuclear integration mechanism? Should South Korea's air force upgrade its F-35A fighters to be able to carry B61 tactical nuclear bombs?

Labour's landslide victory has ushered in a new dawn in British politics

Andrew Hammond

Incoming prime minister Keir Starmer will have little time to catch his breath after the campaign as he will seek to quickly make his mark in international summity. Next week, he heads to Washington for a Nato summit to commemorate 75 years of the military alliance. Moreover, a week later he is expected to host the European Political Community conference of leaders from across the continent. However, while Starmer faces no end to the international dialogue on the horizon, it will be domestic politics that occupies him as

The United Kingdom's Conservative Party has been called the most successful political party in the Western world. Yet, Labour won Thursday's election by a historic landslide that may redefine the UK's polity and economy into the 2030s.

Incoming prime minister Keir Starmer will have little time to catch his breath after the campaign as he will seek to quickly make his mark in international summity. Next week, he heads to Washington for a Nato summit to commemorate 75 years of the military alliance. Moreover, a week later he is expected to host the European Political Community conference of leaders from across the continent. However, while Starmer faces no end to the international dialogue on the horizon, it will be domestic politics that occupies him as he seeks to make the most of his first 100 days in power. Some of the big policies which Labour has said it will move forward with include kick-starting reforms to boost infrastructure development. A part of this process will be new legislation to create "Great British Energy", a new state-owned generator of green electricity which Labour claims will help make the country "a clean energy superpower". The party says the new company will cost around £8.3 billion (US\$10.58 billion) and be paid for by a windfall tax on oil and gas companies. In addition, Labour has pledged to repeal the current de facto ban on new onshore wind farms. Also likely to be scrapped is the Conservative Party's controversial, flagship Rwanda migrant deportation scheme. Labour has pledged to instead create a border security command,

appoint hundreds of investigators and use counterterror powers to "smash criminal boat gangs". To move forward with this big agenda, Labour will seek to take advantage of the disorientation among the Conservatives who have suffered a huge setback. To put Labour's win into historical context, the number of seats the party looks likely to have won is comparable with 1997, under Tony Blair's leadership, which was one of the largest number of seats won in post-war UK history. By almost any standards, Thursday's vote is a new political dawn for the UK. It is also historic in two other potentially important senses. First, the UK has now experienced back-to-back landslides, in opposite directions, in the last two national ballots for the first time in around 120 years. The last time this happened was in 1900, which saw a Conservative landslide, followed by a massive Liberal absolute majority in 1906. That was also the general election in which neither Labour nor the Conservatives won the popular vote. The huge victory for the Liberals in 1906 helped catalyse an era-defining realignment that led to the modern UK electoral system dominated by the Conservatives and Labour. So it is possible that Labour's big win could also herald major political change in the UK. A further dimension of the historic nature of this election is the vastly increased prevalence of digital campaigning. On election day alone, UK political parties are forecast to have spent more than £1 million pounds on online advertisements, more than was spent on online

channels by the parties during the entire 2015 campaign. Ultimately, it was Labour's campaign message of change that got through to voters. Fourteen years after the Conservatives won power, as well as five prime ministers, four election cycles, multiple UK-wide referendums and a global pandemic later, a lot has happened to switch the nation off from the Conservatives. This includes the fact that around 7.6 million people are on waiting lists for hospital treatment in England, which is about three times the 2010 figure. Around 3 per cent of the UK population uses a food bank, all while the cost of groceries, household bills and mortgage repayments has risen significantly since the pandemic. A key question now for the Conservatives is how fast the party will move forward with a contest to find a new leader. In recent years, major party leaders who lose elections badly, like Rishi Sunak now has, have tended to resign quickly. However, Sunak has suggested that he is not likely to resign. The goal would be to stop the party rushing into a leadership election before it has had a period of reflection. Following its massive victory, Labour has much to deliver. While the party will dominate the political landscape for the next few years, whether it wins big again later this decade will depend on whether and how fast the Conservatives rejuvenate themselves.

The writer is an associate at LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics

SCO a model for a just world order

Timofei Bordachev

Sixteen world leaders attended this year's summit. The SCO is now the regional organization with the largest territory and population in the world. Most importantly, it does not serve the interests and values of one of its participants, but upholds the "Shanghai Spirit": equality, mutual benefit and diversity. In this way, the SCO is an example of a new type of cooperation based on mutual benefit rather than imposing its will on the rest of humanity. In the first phase of its activities following its establishment in 2001, the SCO has made a decisive

The possible decline of the idea of states cooperating and creating international organizations is one of the greatest dangers facing us today. This threat is linked to the fact that the US and its allies have long seen all multilateral formats only in terms of their own interests. In recent years, this has largely paralyzed the work of the UN and European security organizations. It is therefore to be welcomed when sovereign states are able to work together on an equal footing in institutions that they themselves have created. One of the biggest examples of this is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Its summit took place this week in Astana, Kazakhstan.

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center of Eurasia invulnerable to external interference through joint development. It is precisely such intervention that has traditionally been seen in the West as a way of influencing the position of Eurasian states and their foreign policy. The SCO creates a Eurasian security space where mutual trust prevails. This is the most important achievement. It must be preserved and developed. Internal trust is also the most attractive feature of the SCO in the eyes of the outside world. The participation in the summit of countries that are not yet members of the SCO proves that many countries see the SCO as a guarantee of their sovereignty. Therefore, today the SCO is creating a new international reality and solving the most important problem for all countries in the world: the protection of their independence in domestic and foreign policy. These ideas are expressed in the Astana Declaration, which reflects the position of the participating countries on key issues of development and security at the global level. The SCO Initiative on World Unity for a Just Peace, Harmony and Development was also presented. Through political and diplomatic means, it will launch a joint search for a formula for a just peace to ensure international security. For the first time, UN Secretary-General António Guterres attended the summit. The UN remains the main institution of the international order, the preservation of which is a priority for Russia, China and the rest of the SCO countries. It seems important that the head of this organization should try to maintain a balance between those who defend the old international

order and those seeking to create a new one. The new international order, unlike the old, will be the result of compromise. But the journey toward that compromise will be long and difficult and will involve many risks to international security. The participation of the UN Secretary-General in the summit is a confirmation of the high authority of the SCO in world affairs. Cooperation in addressing the key development issues of the member states and preventing certain threats is the third area of SCO activity. To this end, the summit adopted the SCO Development Strategy until 2035 and the Strategy for the Development of Energy Cooperation until 2030. The latter document is expected to provide new impetus and tools for cooperation in the fields of oil and gas, electricity and renewable energy. The Cooperation Program to Counter Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2025-2027 and the SCO Anti-Drug Strategy for 2024-2029 were also adopted. For the future, it is important to develop cooperation in artificial intelligence and high technology. The SCO provides an example of how member states can work together in three crucial dimensions: maintaining regional stability, strengthening the global order, and addressing practical issues of development and security. The SCO's activities and achievements show that if cooperation with Western countries is difficult now, it does not mean that cooperation is impossible in principle. The world is not heading toward uncontrolled chaos, and most states continue to seek to manage their relations in a civilized manner.

Briefs

'PTI decides to take part in APC...

FROM PAGE 01 said that the trial of the PTI founder in the Al-Qadri Trust case was held in Adiala Jail. He said that if the cruelty against him does not stop, he will observe a hunger strike in the jail. The PTI leader further questioned why is there no political solution to these issues. The PTI founder said that he would not bow. PTI founder while giving a message to the workers about the Islamabad rally said that his message was true freedom. PTI founder further said that there will be no compromise on real freedom.

Govt hopes Imran Khan to walk...

FROM PAGE 01 the information minister said while addressing the press conference in Islamabad on Friday. The federal cabinet last week approved the launch of the counter-terrorism operation following the National Action Plan's Central Apex Committee's recommendations to root out militance from the country. The country experienced a 12% reduction in overall violence, with 380 fatalities recorded compared to 432 in the first quarter of this year, according to the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) Annual Security report. During the second quarter of the current year, Pakistan witnessed 380 violence-linked fatalities and 220 injuries among civilians, security personnel, and outlaws, resulting from as many as 240 incidents of terror attacks and counter-terror operations.

Army top brass concerned...

FROM PAGE 01 digital terrorism, unleashed by conspirators, duly abetted by their foreign cohorts against state institutions is meant to induce despondency in the nation and sow discord through peddling of blatant lies, fake news and propaganda. However, the Armed Forces along with the nation are fully aware of all such machinations and stand united and committed in defeating the notorious designs of the enemies of Pakistan. Forum reiterated to continue full support of ongoing efforts in uplifting the socioeconomic growth and wholeheartedly assisting the government in curbing all illegal activities which hamper investors' confidence, economic stability and growth.

Punjab requests...

FROM PAGE 01 "Law enforcement agencies will render their services for the peaceful observance of Muharram," the statement said. Akin to Punjab, a security plan has also been formulated in Rawalpindi, under which over 7,500 police personnel and two contingents of the army and Rangers will be on standby to deal with any emergency. Consequently, traffic plans have also been chalked up to help ensure a smooth flow of vehicles in the cities. Each year, law enforcement agencies develop comprehensive security plans to prevent untoward incidents during the Islamic month, especially when mourning processions are held on the 9th and 10th of Muharram across the country.

Govt disallows...

FROM PAGE 01 Committee of the Cabinet on Law and Order was convened to review security and administrative arrangements for Muharram. In this meeting, it was decided to suspend social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram from Muharram 6 to 11 to prevent the dissemination of hate material and misinformation, aiming to avert sectarian violence.

PCB Chief optimistic over Pakistan-India cricket ties

Naqvi confirmed that Pakistan will host all matches of the Champions Trophy

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has expressed optimism about the upcoming Champions Trophy and the future of India-Pakistan cricket relations. Talking to media here Thursday, Naqvi confirmed that Pakistan will host all matches of the Champions Trophy, while hinting at positive news regarding the participation of the Indian team in the event. The chairman acknowledged the challenges faced in upgrading three stadiums ahead of the Champions Trophy. He emphasised the importance of maximising PCB's revenue through ticket sales. He said that measures are being taken to discontinue the practice of free tickets, citing that PCB officials received only four tickets during the ICC World Cup. Furthermore, Naqvi mentioned that there are promising options beyond Cricket Australia for an India-Pakistan series, suggesting that good news may be on the horizon for cricket fans eager for the revival of this historic rivalry. Naqvi further said that the player who fulfills the fitness criteria will get the central contract. "It will be necessary



for the cricketers to pass the fitness test. There will be no compromise on fitness, all the fitness tests including the Yo Yo test will have to be passed. Players who do not play domestic cricket will not be able to join the national team again." Naqvi said that those ex-cricketers will now take over the system whose livelihood is not speaking on different channels. Talking about the incident with Haris Rauf, Naqvi said that FIA is not after those who misbehaved with

Haris Rauf. "I invite those who misbehaved with Haris Rauf to come to Pakistan soon to sort out differences." Naqvi emphasises measured approach to changes in team. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has made it clear that no immediate decision will be taken regarding Babar Azam's future as the captain of Pakistan's cricket team. Amidst widespread speculation following Pakistan's exit from the T20 World Cup, Naqvi emphasised the need for a measured approach to any changes within the team. The PCB chairman confirmed that Shan Masood will continue to lead the national team for the upcoming Test series against Bangladesh. This decision comes after Naqvi held a detailed video call with Masood to discuss strategies for improving the team's performance in Test cricket. Naqvi has been actively consulting with former players for the betterment of Pakistan cricket. One player has submitted an extensive report outlining necessary reforms. However, Naqvi remains cautious, stating that "decisions taken in haste and anger generally lead to more complications," signaling his intent to avoid rash judgments that could further destabilise the team.

Jasmine Paolini beats Andreescu to reach fourth round



LONDON: Jasmine Paolini reached the Wimbledon fourth round for the first time by impressively defeating Bianca Andreescu. The French Open finalist, seeded seventh, won 7-6 (7-4) 6-1 under the roof on Court One. There was little to separate the players in the first set as they both looked to attack at the first opportunity, but Andreescu could not maintain her level. Italian Paolini, 28, is into the second week having never previously won a match at Wimbledon until this year. It continues a remarkable career surge - she had not gone beyond the second round of a Grand Slam until 2024. In the last 16, she will play American 12th seed Madison Keys, who defeated Marta Kostyuk 6-4 6-3. Paolini and Canadian Andreescu played each other in the French Open third round five weeks ago, when the Italian won in three sets. That was Andreescu's first tournament in nine months as she returned from a back problem, the latest in a series of serious injuries that have blighted her career since she won the US Open as a 19-year-old in 2019. Now ranked 176th in the world, she matched her opponent's shot-making in the first set but faded in the second, losing the final six games with Paolini sealing victory with a backhand return winner. "I think I played a good match," said a delighted Paolini. "I tried to be aggressive because, if not, I am going to have to run so much." Elsewhere, Eastbourne champion Daria Kasatkina, seeded 14th, lost 6-7 (6-8) 4-6 6-4 to Spaniard Paula Badosa. Emma Navarro, the 19th seed, beat Russian Diana Shnaider 2-6 6-3 6-4 and will next play second seed and fellow American Coco Gauff or Britain's Sonay Kartal. - Agencies

'Babar is a world class player,' says Shannon

DNA

LAHORE: Australia's leading power-hitting coach Shannon Young declared Pakistan skipper Babar Azam, who has been under fire for the team's performance in the recently-concluded T20 World Cup, as a "world class player". "He is well, he is a world class player," said Young while speaking about Babar's strike rate amid the ongoing criticism which the young skipper is facing. The coach said that Australians are very rarely critical of their world class players. "We back them in and we say they've been world class players, they're gonna be world class players again. I think sometimes the passion tips over that these guys carry so much expectation

through Pakistan's one of the best players in the world, he's gonna be fine," Young added. Showering praise on Babar, the coach said he is a very nice guy and is doing great work with the academy and giving young boys and girls the opportunity which is admirable and fantastic. Young also spoke about his visit to Pakistan, saying that his plan is to bring high performance Australian cricketers and the younger cricketers for tours next year. "We're hoping that maybe April. Previously, and I've always wanted to come to Pakistan, so I got the opportunity and I knew really early on that Australians would love Pakistan. So we're gonna bring hopefully a couple of tours to play cricket here," he expressed. Earlier today, the Pakistan Cricket

Board (PCB) announced the schedule of men's 2024-25 international cricket season. The 2024-25 home international season will begin with Bangladesh playing two Tests in Rawalpindi (21-25 August) and Karachi (30 August-3 September). England will travel to Pakistan for three Tests in Multan (7-11 October), Karachi (15-19 October) and Rawalpindi (24-28 October), and the West Indies will touch down for two Tests in Karachi (16-20 January) and Multan (24-28 January). Additionally, New Zealand and South Africa will take part in an ODI tri-series in Multan from 8-14 February. Apart from the home international fixtures, the men's team will tour Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa from 4 November to 7 January, playing two Tests, nine ODIs and nine T20Is.

PCB announces Pakistan's schedule for 2024-25 season

Pakistan to participate in first ODI tri-series in 21 years on the home turf

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has unveiled the schedule for Pakistan's cricket team's international fixtures for the 2024-25 season. The season includes three Test series and a tri-nation ODI series before the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. The home season will start with a two-Test series against Bangladesh. The first Test will be in Rawalpindi from 21 to 25 August, followed by the second Test in Karachi from 30 August to 3 September. The home international season will conclude with the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, set to finish on 9 March. In between, Pakistan will host England for three Test matches. These will be played in Multan from 7 to 11

October, Karachi from 15 to 19 October, and Rawalpindi from 24 to 28 October. West Indies will tour Pakistan for Tests in Karachi from 16 to 20 January and in Multan from 24 to 28 January. Additionally, a tri-nation ODI series with New Zealand and South Africa will take place in Multan from 8 to 14 February. Besides matches in home, Pakistan will tour Australia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa between 4 November and 7 January, playing two Tests, nine ODIs, and nine T20Is. From August 2024 to March 2025, Pakistan is scheduled to play nine Tests, nine T20Is, and at least 14 ODIs. The number of ODIs may increase based on their performance in the Champions Trophy and the tri-nation series. The nine Test matches against Bangladesh, England, South Africa, and West Indies will count towards the ICC World Test Championship 2023-25. Currently, Pakistan is fifth in the standings with 22 points, having won two out of five Tests in series against Sri Lanka and Australia. - DNA

Garcia 'expelled' by WBC after racist comments

LONDON: Ryan Garcia has been "expelled" by the WBC after using racial slurs and Islamophobic language on social media. The American, who last month was banned for a year from boxing following an anti-doping violation, made the comments on X's spaces platform, which allows people to have live audio conversations. WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman said in a statement: "Exercising my authority as president of the WBC, I am hereby expelling Ryan Garcia from any activity with our organisation. "We reject any form of discrimination." In a since deleted post on X, Garcia, 25, wrote: "I was trolling, I want all the killing to stop. I love everyone, sorry if I offended you." The American has not responded to the WBC's expulsion. After Garcia was handed a one-year doping ban by the New York State Athletic Commission, Sulaiman said the WBC would not issue its own suspension or "punish" him because of concerns about his mental health. It was not immediately clear what the expulsion from the WBC would entail. Garcia failed multiple drug tests around his fight with Devin Haney in April. As well as a one-year ban, Garcia's upset victory over former undisputed lightweight champion Haney was overturned to a no-contest. - Agencies

Two-game ban for Turkey's Demiral over celebration

ANKARA: Turkey defender Merih Demiral has been given a two-match ban for making an ultra-nationalist salute during his country's Euro 2024 win against Austria. Demiral, 26, scored both Turkey's goals as they beat Austria 2-1 to earn a quarter-final spot against the Netherlands on Saturday. The Al-Ahli defender celebrated his second goal with a 'wolf salute', a gesture associated with the far-right extremist group Grey Wolves that is linked with Turkey's ruling coalition party the National Movement Party. Demiral said the salute, which is banned in Austria and France, was pre-planned in case he scored in the last-16 tie. He was charged by Uefa - European football's governing body - for failing to comply with general principles of conduct, for violating the basic rules of decent conduct, for using sports events for manifestations of a non-sporting nature and for bringing the sport of football into disrepute. Jude Bellingham is free to play in England's quarter-final against Switzerland on Saturday after making a crotch-grabbing gesture as he celebrated scoring in the last-16 win over Slovakia. The Real Madrid midfielder, 21, has been given a one-match - suspended for a year - and has also been fined £25,400 (30,000 Euros). Osman Askın Bak, Turkey's minister of youth and sports, responded to Demiral's sanction on X, saying, "We condemn Uefa's unfair and biased decision, which we believe has no legal basis and is entirely political. "We will continue to seek our rights through legal means against this double standard applied to our country and our national football player Merih Demiral. "We believe in our football players. They will also give the necessary answer on the field." - Agencies

Digitization of tax system Govt's top...

FROM PAGE 01 more individuals have filed their tax returns within few week. Besides, the refunds of 4,000 companies have been stopped during last two weeks, following the detection of under-invoicing and forged sales tax refunds. The prime minister said that the tax evaders as well as the officers and staffers facilitating them would be punished and vowed not to spare those plundering the public kitty. Besides, the taxpayers fulfilling their responsibility timely would be acknowledged too, he added. Prime Minister Shehbaz said that state-of-the-art scanners would be installed at the seaports to ensure transparency and prevent corruption in the system. He also sought a comprehensive report on the magnitude of tax evasion and the measures for its prevention. He vowed to introduce a taxation system of international standard in the country and called for engaging well reputed professionals and experts for formulation of tax policy. The prime minister sought a comprehensive strategy on FBR's digitisation and reforms and the set targets in the next meeting.

Swedish envoy praises business...

FROM PAGE 01 During his call on Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, Ambassador Parson highlighted the positive experiences of Swedish businesses in the country, noting their impressive growth and profitability. "I have personally met with all Swedish companies currently active in Pakistan to gather their insights," Ambassador Parson stated. "Remarkably, none of them had anything negative to say. On the contrary, they all reported significant growth and profitability. This is a testament to the conducive business environment in Pakistan." The Ambassador emphasized the enormous potential within Pakistan, particularly in the fields of Information Technology (IT), engineering, and education. He underscored the opportunities for enhancing bilateral trade between Sweden and Pakistan. "Pakistan has the capacity to become a hub of international trade for the entire world," he remarked. "The country offers a fertile ground for expanding trade, especially in high-potential sectors like IT and engineering."

Pak seeks stronger UK ties

FROM PAGE 01 Taking to X, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif felicitated his British counterpart Keir Starmer on the landslide victory of the Labour Party in the general elections. "Looking forward to working closely with the new UK government, under Sir Starmer's wise and able leadership, to further strengthen and broaden the Pakistan-U.K. partnership," he added. Similarly, Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar also congratulated the UK PM, saying: "I extend my heartfelt felicitations to @Keir_Starmer, Leader of Labour Party @UKLabour on the historic victory in parliamentary election in United Kingdom." He noted that Pakistan and the UK share deep-rooted and broad-based ties founded in shared history and people-to-people contacts. "I am confident that under his stewardship our relationship will be further strengthened and we can work together for global peace, prosperity and development," he added.

Pakistan suffer defeat in Snooker Championship final

Thailand win final 3-0 with scores of 61-4, 75-53 and 90-26 as they overpowered their opponents

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: Pakistan lost to Thailand in the final of the ACBS Asian 15 Red Men's Team Snooker Championship 2024 in Riyadh on Friday. Thailand won the final 3-0 with scores of 61-4, 75-53 and 90-26 as they overpowered their opponents throughout the game. In the first single match, Pakistan's Asjad Iqbal lost without giving a proper fight. However, in the second single encounter, Awas Munir showed resilience but ended up making a foul during colour potting after which the Thai opponent cleared the frame and won the match. The situation remained the same in the doubles frame and Pakistan managed to secure a silver medal after a defeat in the final. Earlier in the semi-final against Hong Kong, Pakistan's team comprising Iqbal and Munir, came from behind in the semi-fi-



nal after the defeat in the first frame to win 3-1 against Hong Kong. In the first singles match, Iqbal was defeated 47-72. Munir won his frame 80-44 to level the match at 1-1. In the doubles frame, Pakistan played a 99-clearance break to secure victory. Iqbal defeated Nansen Wan 28-82 in his second singles match and bagged a win. Meanwhile, in the quarters, Pakistan defeated India (2) with a score of 3-0. Pakistan's winning scores were 63-35, 75-22, and 70-06. The India (2) team comprised Sarav Kothari and Hussain Khan. It is worth mentioning that Munir won the Asian 6-Red Snooker Championship in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Tuesday (July 2) after beating Hong Kong's cueist Nansen Wan. Munir secured a 6-3 victory over his opponent. The game was tied at 2-2 and Munir won three sets straight and made his lead 5-2. In the eighth frame, Nansen made a comeback. However, in the ninth frame, Munir displayed excellent control and potting to clinch the victory. Munir won the match with scores 0-65, 35-26, 27-36, 38-20, 0-65, 13-46, 8-60, 34-0, 27-40.

Saturday 07th July
Quarter Final
Portugal vs France
Volksparkstadion
(12:00am)

Briefs

Pope to preside over interfaith meeting in Indonesian mosque

ROME: Pope Francis will preside over an interfaith meeting in a mosque in the world's largest predominantly Muslim country during a four-nation Asian visit in September that will be the longest and most complicated foreign trip of his pontificate.

The Vatican on Friday released the itinerary for Francis' Sept. 2-13 trip to Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. The packed schedule makes clear that the 87-year-old pontiff, who has battled health problems and is increasingly reliant on a wheelchair, has no plans to slow down.

After a day of rest upon arrival in Jakarta on Sept. 3, Francis launches into a typically rigorous round of protocol visits to the four countries' heads of state and government, speeches to diplomats and meetings with clergy and public Masses in each location. In Jakarta, he'll preside over an interfaith meeting at the capital's Istiqlal Mosque.

Sprinkled in the mix are encounters with young people, poor and disabled people, elderly people and Francis' regular meetings with his Jesuit confreres.

The trip was originally planned for 2020 but was called off because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At 11 full days, it's the longest of Francis' 11-year papacy, outpacing by a few days some of his long trips to the Americas and recalling some of the strenuous, globe-hopping trips of St. John Paul II.—DNA

Spain PM's wife to testify in graft probe

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's wife testifies before a judge Friday as part of a preliminary corruption probe into her business ties in a case that has infuriated the Socialist leader. Last month, a Madrid court summoned Begona Gomez to testify on July 5 "as an investigated party" as part of a judicial inquiry into "the alleged offences of corruption in the private sector and influence peddling". She is due to appear at 10:00 am (0800 GMT) for the proceedings, which won't be public.

The preliminary investigation was opened on April 16 following a complaint filed by the anti-graft NGO Manos Limpias (Clean Hands), which is linked to the far right.

The right-wing opposition has pounced on the affair as proof of their claims that Sanchez and his left-wing government are corrupt. But he has denounced it as a smear campaign.

Earlier this week, Sanchez told Cadena SER radio he was feeling "totally calm and confident" because there was "absolutely nothing" in the allegations, denouncing "a legal strategy of harassment aimed at overthrowing" his government.—APP

4.5M internally displaced in Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia is grappling with a severe internal displacement crisis, with an estimated 4.5 million people forced from their homes primarily due to conflict as of June, according to a UN report released Thursday. The Somali, Oromia and Tigray regions are the most affected, said the report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with many displaced for prolonged periods. Over half of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been uprooted for more than a year, while an additional 23% have been displaced for two to four years and 11% for five years or more. Efforts to mitigate the crisis have facilitated the return of 3.3 million IDPs to their areas of origin since January 2022. But the total number of internally displaced persons remains high due to ongoing conflicts, and climatic crises have exacerbated the situation.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on Digitization and Reforms of FBR.—DNA

Indonesia hosts UN meeting to garner support for Palestine

Indonesian FM Retno Marsudi emphasized the urgent need for an immediate and permanent cease-fire in Gaza

NEWS DESK

JAKARTA: Indonesia hosted a meeting of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) to bolster support for Palestine. During the meeting, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi emphasized the urgent need for an immediate and permanent cease-fire in Gaza, unhindered humanitarian assistance, an end to Israel's illegal occupation and settlements, and support for Palestine's full membership at the UN, she said on X. The UN's Indonesia office commended Indonesia's unwavering dedication to the Palestinian cause. It highlighted the role of parliamentary diplomacy in achieving a just and lasting solution to

the Palestinian question. "We had a productive discussion on garnering international support for Palestine and the implementation of the two-state solution through the work of CEIRPP," Marsudi said on X. Israel, flouting a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire, has faced international condemnation amid its continued brutal offensive on Gaza since an Oct. 7, 2023 attack by the Palestinian group Hamas. More than 38,000 Palestinians have since been killed, mostly women and children, and over 87,000 others injured, according to local health authorities. Over eight months into the Israeli war, vast tracts of Gaza lie in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water, and medicine. Israel stands accused of genocide at the International

Court of Justice, whose latest ruling ordered it to immediately halt its military operation in the southern city of Rafah, where over a million Palestinians had sought refuge from the war before it was invaded on May 6. Meanwhile, EU on Friday voiced "deep concern" over Israel's evacuation orders from Khan Younis in Gaza, saying it is "creating a humanitarian crisis within the crisis."

In a joint statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic said that not only were 250,000 people impacted by these orders, but these also threatened the patients and staff of the European Hospital and forced them to relocate to other facilities. "This evacuation decision is certain to worsen overcrowding and cause

severe shortages in the already overwhelmed remaining hospitals at a time when access to emergency medical care is critical," Borrell and Lenarcic said. "Forced evacuations are creating a humanitarian crisis within the crisis. They exacerbate an already catastrophic humanitarian situation, with nearly 1.9 million Gazans displaced within the Strip, as stated by UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza Sigrid Kaag in the Security Council," they said. They stressed that there are no facilities to accommodate people, and humanitarian partners struggle to meet the immense needs of the newly displaced. "The European Union reiterates that for evacuations not to amount to prohibited forcible transfers, they must conform with International Humanitarian Law, guaranteeing

safety in transit and proper accommodation in areas of refuge for Palestinians called on to evacuate," they said. They reminded Israel of its responsibility to guarantee that displaced persons are able to return to their homes or areas of habitual residence once hostilities end. "Displaced people also need to have access to the necessary services and have their needs met," they added. They noted that the EU mobilized all its crisis response and humanitarian tools to channel needed aid to Gaza. "A ceasefire is all the more important now, and would make possible a surge of humanitarian assistance to Gaza as well as the release of all hostages," they said. They also urged the implementation of the orders of the International Court of Justice of Jan. 26, and May 24, as they are "legally binding."

Saudi FM calls for sanctions on Israeli officials

MADRID: Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan has urged European nations to impose sanctions on Israeli officials violating international human rights laws as he warned that Israel's war on Gaza was affecting the entire Middle East, including southern Lebanon. "The situation in the Gaza Strip does not only affect the Palestinian issue but the entire region and contributes to further escalations, which is currently happening in southern Lebanon," he said on Thursday. He was speaking at a panel discussion titled "Wars and shadow wars: What are Europe's options in the Middle East?" at the European Council on Foreign Relations meeting in Madrid. "Basic principles of international law and international humanitarian law are being violated every day in Gaza." Prince Faisal highlighted the international community's silence on Israel's continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank that undermine the peace process in Palestine. He said the least that European countries can do is condemn Israel's failure to abide by its commitments. And they should take stricter steps such as imposing sanctions on those officials violating international human rights laws, the SPA reported. He said the Palestinian people have the right to self-determination and deserve an independent state recognized internationally. "The majority of the international community agrees that the permanent and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the two-state solution, yet they stand idle in the face of matters that could undermine the two-state solution, such as Israel's continued expansion of settlement activities." He praised those European countries that have recognized Palestine as a state, including Spain. This was "a very important move" that supports the peace process and the push toward a two-state solution, he said.—DNA

Pro-Palestine UK politicians defeat Labour candidates

Shockat Adam, Adnan Hussain have emerged victorious in UK general elections after defeating Labour Party candidates in a sign that the party's stance on the Gaza conflict

WEB DESK

LONDON: Pro-Palestinian independent British politicians, Shockat Adam and Adnan Hussain have emerged victorious in UK general elections after defeating Labour Party candidates in a sign that the party's stance on the Gaza conflict caused a rift among voters. Adam, 51, defeated Jon Ashworth, the Shadow Cabinet minister for Labour, in the Leicester South constituency of the East Midlands during the UK general election, while 34-year-old Hussain unseated Labour's Kate Hollern in the northwestern industrial town of Blackburn on Friday. He declared "this is for Gaza" as he won the seat by 979 votes after bagging 14,739 votes against Ashworth, who received 13,760 votes. Meanwhile, political novice, Hussain

managed to secure 10,518 votes, winning by the slim margin of 132 to Hollern's 10,386 votes. Leicester South has long been a stronghold for the Labour Party, with only a short interruption from the Liberal Democrats in 2004 and 2005. Since 1987, the constituency in the East Midlands has consistently elected Labour MPs. Both Adam's and Hussain's wins are credited to their unwavering opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, along with the Labour Party's position on the Israeli atrocities. "The Palestinian cause is very close to the community's heart yet when they needed a loud and clear and distinct voice it was lacking," Adam told the Middle East Eye. "How can we stand by when we are seeing massacre upon massacre?" Gaza running theme in UK general election Gaza

running theme in UK general election Many voters in the UK general elections are planning to vote for candidates prioritizing ending Britain's support for the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza at the core of their foreign policy. Solicitor Hussain, who operates a local legal practice, took a stand in support of Gaza and received the backing of a group of former Labour councilors who left the party due to its Gaza policy. During the local elections in early May, the group became the second-largest party in the borough. "Gaza is important and it's the reason why I stood. But poverty is a massive issue too and so is healthcare," he said. In 2019, Hollern received 64.9 percent of the vote for the Labour Party. However, the party's support for the Israeli aggression against Gaza is believed

to have contributed to her loss of support among Muslim voters, who represent 35 percent of the local voters. Craig Murray, a former British ambassador and candidate for George Galloway's Workers Party, secured third place with 7,105 votes after running on a pro-Gaza platform. Meanwhile, Jeremy Corbyn, the ex-Labour Party leader, successfully secured his position as an independent candidate for Islington North in the parliamentary elections, despite being disqualified from running for the party almost four years ago. The progressive politician garnered 24,120 votes, triumphing with a lead of 7,247 votes against his strong challenger and Labour candidate Praful Nargund, who finished in second place with 16,873 votes.

Erdogan says Türkiye wants to be partner in SCO

Erdogan also said he believed the Black Sea grain corridor, which allowed for the safe shipment of grains amid the Ukraine-Russia war, could be revived after it was halted last year

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said NATO member Türkiye wants to be a partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), adding there was no reason for it not to be a permanent member of the group, the Turkish media outlets reported on Friday. "We are saying to include us here not as a dialogue partner, but as a partner to the organisation like the others," Erdoğan told reporters on a return flight from an SCO summit in Astana. "It may take some time," he was cited as saying. Erdoğan, who met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Astana, also said he believed the Black Sea grain corridor, which allowed for the safe shipment of grains amid the Ukraine-Russia war, could be revived after it was halted last year. Earlier on, The Turkish president on Friday signaled a

new diplomatic peace initiative with Damascus, suggesting a potential invitation to Syria's Bashar al-Assad. "We, together with Russian President Vladimir Putin, may have an invitation to Bashar al-Assad," Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told journalists on his return flight from Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, where he attended a two-day Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. "If Mr. Putin can visit Türkiye, this could be the beginning of a new process." "The passing years in Syria have clearly shown everyone the need for establishing a permanent solution," the Turkish leader said, referring to the violence and chaos since the 2011 civil war in the Arab country. He underlined Syria's critical need for reconstruction and stability, underscoring the impact of widespread infrastructure damage and societal upheaval. Erdoğan said



recent regional tranquility on the matter could open the door to peace with policies and approaches that are free from prejudices. "It is a problem that the instability in the region provides space for terrorist organizations, especially the PKK/PYD/YPG." The eradication of these terrorist organizations is vital for Syria's future, Erdoğan said, advocating for the establishment of democratic foundations and inclusive peace initiatives based on upholding the country's territorial

integrity. "We have always extended and will continue to extend a hand of friendship to our neighbor Syria. We would stand by a prosperous, unified Syria based on a fair, honorable, and inclusive new social contract. All we ask is that Syria initiates this great embrace and achieves recovery in every aspect," the Turkish president said. He said it is not countries but terrorist groups such as the PKK and its offshoots that are worried about Ankara's renewed ties with Damascus. Regarding a recent incident in the Turkish city of Kayseri, which led to violence and negative social media trends against Syrians, Erdoğan said some elements aim to use racism to disrupt unity, but authorities will tackle them. Putin's 'desire for peace' The Turkish president also commented on the Ukraine conflict that has been continuing for over two years, expressing concern that some Western countries and

entities were escalating the risk of World War III in order to benefit arms dealers. He said Putin has recently shown a desire for peace, referring to the Russian leader's remarks that the 2022 Istanbul agreements remain "on the table" and can serve as a foundation for peace negotiations with Ukraine. Erdoğan said achieving peace requires significant mediation efforts, which Türkiye is committed to. "We have asked, 'When will we achieve peace?' The response was that there is no specific timeline, and the key lies in mediators like us making a significant impact." He hoped for a resolution to the conflict soon and mentioned that Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Defense Minister Yasar Guler are actively monitoring the situation. Regarding the Black Sea grain corridor, Erdoğan raised the prospect of opening a new corridor through Türkiye to Africa and other vulnerable regions for food security.

Mexico prepares for Hurricane Beryl landfall

CANCÚN, MEXICO: Tourist resorts in Mexico steered Friday for a hit from Hurricane Beryl, which is expected to bring ferocious winds and a dangerous storm surge to the Yucatan Peninsula after slamming Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. "Conditions to soon deteriorate for the Yucatan Peninsula" with "hurricane-like winds, dangerous storm surge, and damaging waves expected to begin shortly," the National Hurricane Centre (NHC) warned 01:00 am (0600 GMT) Friday. Having restrengthened to a Category 3, Beryl is bearing down on tourist destination Tulum with winds of up to 115 miles an hour (185 kilometres an hour) and "little change in strength is expected before landfall" on Friday, the NHC said.

The storm has left a trail of destruction across the Caribbean and the coast of Venezuela, killing at least seven people. It is the first hurricane since NHC records began to reach the Category 4 level in June and the earliest to hit the highest Category 5 in July. In Mexico, schools in the area bracing for a hit were suspended and shelters set up for locals and tourists.

In Cancun, a two-hour drive from Tulum, people have been stocking up on food and other essentials for days and hotels have boarded up their windows. Around 100 domestic and international flights scheduled between Thursday and Friday have been canceled at Cancun airport, the main hub in the Mexican Caribbean.—APP

France bans rallies in New Caledonia

NOUMEA: Gatherings have been banned this weekend in the restive French Pacific territory of New Caledonia during the second round of France's parliamentary polls. France is on tenterhooks ahead of Sunday's run-off vote, with centrist and left-wing forces hoping to prevent the anti-immigration far right from winning an absolute majority in the National Assembly.

The High Commission, which represents the French state in the archipelago where deadly protests erupted in May, said public gatherings would be forbidden from Saturday morning to Monday night.

"A suitable security presence, including 3,500 police officers and gendarmes, will be put in place on Sunday... to guarantee the smooth running of voting operations," it said.

A ban on weapons and alcohol sales, as well as a nighttime curfew that has been in force since the unrest started, will also be extended until July 15. A wave of rioting and looting erupted in New Caledonia in mid-May over a proposed reform to update the electoral roll to include people originally from outside the territory but with more than 10 years of residency. Indigenous Kanak people fear the plan will leave them in a permanent minority compared with French from the mainland, putting independence hopes out of reach.—APP

Global food prices hold steady in June

London: World food prices held steady in June, with increases in vegetable oil, sugar and dairy products offset by a fall in the price of cereals, the United Nations food agency said Friday. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 120.6 points in June, unchanged from May. The May figure was revised from an initial reading of 120.4. The FAO index hit a three-year low in February as food prices receded from a record peak set in March 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The June reading was 2.5% down from a year earlier and 24.8% below its 2022 high. Cereal prices fell 3.0% month on month amid slightly improved production prospects in some major exporting countries, including Kazakhstan and Ukraine, the FAO said.—APP

Briefs

30,000 evacuated from California wildfires

CALIFORNIA: Thousands of people in northern California have been told to leave their homes as wildfires grow across the state during a heatwave. About 28,000 people were under evacuation warnings or orders on Thursday after the Thompson fire broke out two days earlier, according to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire). Dangerously hot weather is expected to continue with temperatures of 118F (47C) forecast in some areas until early next week. No one has died, while 74 structures across the state have been destroyed or damaged from fires this season. As of Thursday evening, the Thompson Fire was 7% contained, indicating a little bit of progress as a crew of nearly 2,000 battles the flames. At least four people were injured, according to CalFire, although the extent of their injuries is unknown. Roughly 241 miles (387km) south of the Thompson Fire, the French Fire emerged suddenly on Thursday evening, forcing evacuations and road closures in Mariposa County. Local news reported deputies going door-to-door to notify residents of evacuation orders, as patients at a local hospital were told to shelter in place. - Agencies

Saudi FM calls for sanctions on Israeli officials

MADRID: Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan has urged European nations to impose sanctions on Israeli officials violating international human rights laws as he warned that Israel's war on Gaza was affecting the entire Middle East, including southern Lebanon. "The situation in the Gaza Strip does not only affect the Palestinian issue but the entire region and contributes to further escalations, which is currently happening in southern Lebanon," he said on Thursday. He was speaking at a panel discussion titled "Wars and shadow wars: What are Europe's options in the Middle East?" at the European Council on Foreign Relations meeting in Madrid. Prince Faisal highlighted the international community's silence on Israel's continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank that undermine the peace process in Palestine. He said the least that European countries can do is condemn Israel's failure to abide by its commitments. And they should take stricter steps such as imposing sanctions on those officials violating international human rights laws, the SPA reported. - Agencies

"Reverie of Highlands" by Gaynor Shaw launched at Serena Hotel

Gaynor Shaw, wife of former Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Dr. Geoffrey Shaw, has artfully documented her experiences and insights in book



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels, under the banner of Cultural Diplomacy, hosted the book launch of "Reverie of Highlands" by Gaynor Shaw at the Islamabad Serena Hotel. The event celebrated Shaw's journey through the northern regions of Pakistan, capturing the en-

chanting landscapes, vibrant culture, and resilient people through her lens as an artist and photographer. The book launch was attended by diplomats, cultural patrons, tourism enthusiasts, and members of the literary community, making it a significant cultural event. Gaynor Shaw, the wife of former Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Dr. Geoffrey Shaw, has artfully documented her experiences and insights

in this compelling book. "Reverie of Highlands" is a tribute to the beauty and diversity of Pakistan's northern areas, reflecting her deep connection and appreciation for the region. Former Pakistani diplomat Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry shared his impressions of the book, highlighting its significance in promoting Pakistan's cultural heritage, followed by an inspiring speech from Shaw herself, offering insights into her journey and the creation of her book.

The event continued with Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins addressing the audience, emphasizing the importance of cultural exchanges and the role of such works in fostering understanding and appreciation between nations. Aziz Boolani, CEO of Serena Hotels, underscored the hotel's commitment to supporting cultural and literary initiatives, marking the formal launch of this remarkable publication.

Hamas rejects any foreign military forces in Gaza

We responded positively to the latest Gaza ceasefire proposal: Hamas

NEWS DESK

GAZA: Hamas has said it rejects any statements and positions that support plans for foreign forces to enter the Gaza Strip under any name or justification, Reuters reports. The group said the administration of the Gaza Strip is a purely Palestinian matter. "The Palestinian people [...] will not allow any guardianship or the imposition of any external solutions or equations," it added. Hamas has responded positively to the latest Gaza ceasefire proposal, the head of the National Relations Department of the Hamas Movement abroad, Ali Baraka, said on Friday. He pointed out that the Movement informed the mediators that Hamas and other resistance factions are open to any initiative that meets the demands of the Palestinian people, which include a permanent ceasefire, a complete withdrawal of the Israeli occupation army from the Gaza Strip, the return of the displaced to their homes, the provision of aid, and the start of reconstruction. "The ball is in Israel's court because Netan-

yahu refuses a permanent ceasefire and constantly asserts that he wants to continue his aggression against the Palestinian people," Baraka said. Israeli official media earlier quoted political sources as saying that Netanyahu agreed to send a negotiating team to engage in ceasefire talks with Hamas in Doha. The sources indicated that Israel is optimistic about agreeing on the outlines, after "Hamas abandoned its demand to obtain guarantees to end the war," according to the sources. The Al-Mayadeen satellite channel quoted a well-informed source in Hamas as saying that the Movement made new amendments to the last Israeli paper, in a way that does not affect the fundamental issues. According to the source, Hamas retained its demands on a permanent ceasefire, complete withdrawal from the Strip, and the return of the displaced. Hamas insists on the necessity of withdrawing from the Philadelphi axis and the Rafah crossing, refusing any veto to the release of Palestinian prisoners sentenced to life. The source said that Hamas has shown flexibility in the items 8 and 14 to ensure the continuation of negotiations until reaching a permanent ceasefire.

Hungary's PM meets Putin in Moscow for talks on Ukraine

Budapest: Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban has met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow for talks on the war in Ukraine. The visit has been criticised by EU leaders, who have emphasised that Mr Orban is not acting on behalf of the bloc. Mr Orban is the EU's only head of national government to have kept close ties to the Kremlin following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. He described the trip as a "peace mission" in a post on X. It comes days after he visited Kyiv, where he spent three hours with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday. Both legs of the trip were carefully choreographed to emphasise Mr Orban as a global statesman,

rather than an outsider. Hungary has just taken over the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and will hold it to the end of the year. Viktor Orban, speaking in Moscow, said: "Hungary will slowly become the last European country that can talk to everyone." The Kremlin said on Friday that talks between the two leaders would last at least two or three hours, but could go on "as long as needed". Officials are accompanying them, but there is a possibility they could speak one to one. In footage of the meeting, Mr Putin said Mr Orban was visiting "not just as a long-time partner" but as a European Union representative. However, European leaders openly condemned the Moscow trip and emphasised he was not representing the EU. "The EU rotating presidency has no mandate to engage with Russia on behalf of the EU," Charles Michel, President of the European Council, wrote on X. "The European Council is clear: Russia is the aggressor, Ukraine is the victim. No discussions about Ukraine can take place without Ukraine." "Appeasement will not stop Putin," European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X. - Agencies

3 killed in IED blast targetting police van in Mardan

SHAMIM SHAHID

MARDAN: At least three people were killed and seven others injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast near a police van adjacent to Jalala bridge in the Takhtbhai area of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on Friday. Rescue teams, police and security forces immediately reached the site following the blast and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital. As per details, nearly 11 people were injured when the blast occurred. The wounded were rushed to the hospital, where three of them succumbed to their injuries. Mardan District Police Officer (DPO) Zahoor Barbar Afridi confirmed the number of casualties of the bomb blast that targeted police. He said that two cops travelling in the van were among the injured. The official said that the explosive material was planted by the road, which blew off as soon as the law enforcers' van passed by. He said that a rickshaw present nearby was hit by the blast. One of the deceased was a passenger of this rickshaw, he added. The DPO further stated that a search operation was launched after cordoning off the area. On Wednesday, at least five people, including former senator Hidayat Ullah, were killed in a "remote-controlled" bomb explosion targeting a vehicle in KP's Bajaur district. Hidayat, who was a former independent senator from erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), was killed in the bomb explosion along with four others. Police had said that the incident took place in Bajaur's Damadola village where the former senator's vehicle was targeted via a remote-controlled device, Pakistan has witnessed a sharp rise in militant attacks, especially in KP and Balochistan, since the banned outfit, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) put the truce with Islamabad to an end. However, no group has claimed responsibility for the latest attack yet. In order to turn up the heat on militants, the federal government last month approved the launching of a counter-terrorism operation on the National Action Plan's Central Apex Committee's recommendations. Taking notice of the incident, KP Governor Faisal Karim Kundi condemned the explosion and expressed sorrow over the loss of two lives in the blast. He extended sympathies to the bereaved families and prayed for the highest place of the victims in eternal peace and speedy recovery of the injured.

Petroleum dealers call off nationwide strike

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Petroleum Dealers Association (PPDA) announced the immediate end of the nationwide petrol pump strike on Friday. Speaking at a press conference in Karachi, PPDA Chairman Abdul Sami Khan, alongside other officials, declared the decision to suspend the strike. "We made this decision immediately due to tourists being stranded in the northern areas. Our one-day strike has been successful, but people are suffering because motorbikes can't run," he said. Khan explained that tourists in Malakand, Swat, and Hazara were among the reasons for ending the strike. "The strike wasn't easy, as the entire government was against it," he added. Abdul Sami warned that the sale of smuggled petrol in the country is likely to increase, attributing the situation to the government's double taxation policies. The association had called an emergency meeting earlier today to decide on the next course of action for their countrywide strike. PPDA Chairman Abdul Sami Khan stated that no negotiations had taken place with the government or administration. Earlier in the day, the strike by the petroleum dealers against federal budget taxes saw some petrol stations shut down across many cities and major highways.

Britain must rediscover its identity: UK's new PM

King Charles III accepted resignation of Sunak, appointed Starmer as prime minister

LONDON: New Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Britain needed to rediscover its identity and undergo a wider reset, in his first words outside his new office at 10 Downing Street, promising to fight to restore trust in politics and serve all voters. Greeted in Downing Street by a large crowd of cheering aides and supporters after formally accepting the King's invitation to become prime minister, Starmer's first address made the case for a moderate politics to repair voters' broken trust. "It is surely clear to everyone that our country needs a bigger reset, a rediscovery of who we are, because no matter how fierce the storms of history, one of the greatest strengths of this nation has always been our ability to navigate a way to calmer waters," he said. "This depends upon politicians, particularly those who stand for stability and moderation, as I do." He added: "My government will fight every day until you believe again. From now on, you have a government unburdened by doctrine, guided only by the determination to serve your interest. To defy those quietly those who have written our country off." "You have given us a clear mandate, and we will use it to deliver change." Earlier, King Charles III

officially appointed Starmer as prime minister at Buckingham Palace. A photograph released by the palace showed the monarch shaking hands with Starmer, whose party won a landslide election victory. "The King received in Audience The Right Honourable Sir Keir Starmer MP today and requested him to form a new administration," a palace statement read. "Sir Keir accepted his majesty's offer and kissed hands upon his appointment as prime minister and first lord of the Treasury." Starmer vowed to bring change to Britain as its next prime minister after his Labour Party surged to a comprehensive win in a parliamentary election, ending 14 years of often tumultuous Conservative government. The centre-left Labour was set to win a massive majority in the 650-seat parliament with Sunak's Conservatives poised to suffer the worst performance in the party's long history as voters punished them for a cost of living crisis, failing public services, and a series of scandals. "Change begins now," Starmer said in a victory speech. "We said we would end the chaos, and we will, we said we would turn the page, and we have. Today, we start the next chapter, begin the work of change, the mission of national renewal and start to rebuild our country." - Agencies

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