



**Pakistan offers vast investment opportunities in IT sector: Amin**

Minister for Information Technology, Syed Amin Ul Haque has said that there are vast investment opportunities in information technology sector in Pakistan and the government is providing immense incentives to foreign investors in this regard.



**Russia: No plan for nuclear escalation**

Russia does not intend to take the path of nuclear escalation in its standoff with the West over Ukraine but others should not test its patience, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday. Her comments follow a flurry of warnings by senior Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, that Western military support for Ukraine is increasing the risks of a catastrophic nuclear conflict. (Details on Page 5)

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**Democratic Process**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif addresses a session of the National Assembly after getting the Vote of Confidence on Thursday.



Photo: PID

**Ready to face removal but will never hurt Parliament's trust: PM**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday categorically said he was ready to face the ouster for respecting the Parliament's decisions, but would never undermine the trust it had reposed in him. The prime minister, after voluntarily getting the vote of confidence of 180 members of the National Assembly, said it was his duty to respect the Parliament's decisions. The resolution for vote of confidence was moved by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari saying, "The National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reposes its full confidence in the leadership of Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, as the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan." Consequently, 180 MNAs arose from their seats to support the resolution. "Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was unjustly martyred, Nawaz Sharif was disqualified, Yusuf Raza Gilani was disqualified. Today the Parliament has given me the vote of confidence. By God, if they oust me in response to this vote of confidence, I am ready to go back thousands of time but will not let them down," the prime minister resolved as the members thumped their desks. He said it was not possible that the court granted a stay on a law passed by the Parliament even before its finalization. "The framing and amendment of the Constitution is the Parliament's right. The court has no power to rewrite the Constitution... If the Parliament raises its voice... the threat of contempt is given," he remarked. He reiterated that the coalition government would only accept the 4-3 verdict of the Supreme Court bench. APP

**For Political Stability**

**Govt, PTI to resume talks on election date today**

First round of negotiations between govt and opposition concludes in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: A committee of leaders representing the federal government and a team of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leaders finally kicked off highly-anticipated negotiations at the Parliament House on Thursday in efforts to build consensus on holding elections for the national and provincial assemblies on one date. The government nominated Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leaders Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique, Law Minister Azam Tarar, and Ayaz Sadiq and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leaders Yousaf Raza Gillani and Syed Naveed Qamar as members of the committee. The MQM-P's Kishwar Zehra was also a part of the government-nominated committee. Meanwhile, PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Barrister Ali Zafar and senior leader Fawad Chaudhry represented the former ruling party. Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) skipped the talks. As per details, the first round of

talks between the government and the opposition concluded Thursday evening, with both sides set to meet on Friday at 3pm to continue the negotiation process. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Gillani said that PTI will present its demands before the government negotiating committee tomorrow. "Today's discussions were held in a positive atmosphere," he said. He also mentioned that the government has no specific demands and will present PTI's demands to coalition leadership. Finance Minister Dar said the government committee had taken a principled stance to handle the matter within constitutional limits. He emphasised the importance of taking into account the interest of the state and the people. He said that both committees after the meeting. Furthermore, he said that there will be a detailed meeting tomorrow (Friday) at 3pm to discuss the matter further. The development comes

hours after Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani wrote separate letters to the leader of the house and the opposition to nominate members from both the treasury and opposition benches to constitute a special committee for holding political dialogue. In the letter, the Senate chairman said that both leaders, Senator Ishaq Dar and Dr Shahzad Waseem, are requested to provide the names of four members for inclusion in the special committee within two days. Sanjrani stated that the Senate of Pakistan, House of Federation, being a stabilising factor of the federation is constitutionally bestowed with the responsibility of protecting the national and political harmony vis-a-vis the national and public interest. "By assuming this responsibility and taking note that the Parliament is the right and the only forum for the resolution of political issues, given the prevailing political and economic situation, a committee comprising of members of the Senate belonging

to both sides of the aisle has been proposed to address the ongoing political and economic crisis, including the holding of general elections," he furthered. The special committee is under the joint convenorship of the Leader of the House and the opposition and comprises members from each side. The much-debated negotiations follow Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Umar Ata Bandial's comments that "courts cannot force political parties to hold negotiations", stressing that the apex court merely sought adherence to the Constitution and an end to the impasse over the delay of elections. The CJP's comments came earlier in the day as the Supreme Court resumed hearing the case related to delay in Punjab polls. Attorney General of Pakistan Mansoor Awan told the court that the Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani would form a committee comprising members from both sides of the aisle to evolve a consensus to hold elections of

national and provincial assemblies on one date. The three-judge bench suggested the political parties evolve consensus on one date for elections in the national interest, respect of the Constitution, and welfare of the people. "Otherwise," the court feared, "things would stay the same." Last week, adopting a carrot and stick policy, the apex court had asked all political parties to evolve a consensus on the date for holding simultaneous general elections of the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies expeditiously; otherwise, the court had noted, its order regarding the Punjab Assembly elections on May 14 would come into force. A day earlier, addressing separate huddles of the parties in the ruling coalition, the PML-N parliamentary party and cabinet, the premier said elections were an issue that needed to be decided in parliament and the appropriate time to conduct them was either in October or November. Agencies

**NAB authorised to take legal action if IK not join probe: IHC**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday disposed of the petitions against NAB notices to PTI's chairman Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in toshakhana gifts case. The court said that the bureau was authorised to take action against Imran Khan as per the law if he was not joining the investigation process. It remarked that the court couldn't even stop the investigation process of the anti-corruption watchdog. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), in its comments submitted to the bench, stated that the former prime minister was sent a questionnaire, but he didn't bother to answer it. Imran Khan also didn't appear before the investigation team despite summons issued by the NAB, it said, adding that action would be taken against PTI's chief as per the law. The NAB said that Imran Khan deliberately wanted to delay the matter, adding that he had received a total of 58 gifts from toshakhana. The prosecutor said that the petitioners had only challenged



the NAB notices dated February 16th, and 17th while the bureau had also served a third notice to the accused. He said that the petition had become ineffective with regard to the two NAB notices after serving of the third. Chief Justice Aamer Farooq instructed the NAB to send the next notices in line of the directives of the top court. The court also directed the NAB to proceed the matter within the limit of law and remarked that it couldn't stop the investigation process of the anti-graft body. After this, the bench disposed of the cases. It may be mentioned here that the NAB had served call-up notices to Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi regarding toshakhana gifts. The PTI chief had challenged the move instead of appearing before the court. APP

**SBP-held reserves rise to \$4.46b**

Total liquid foreign reserves stand at \$10.02 billion

KARACHI: As the country tries to find ways to secure external financing and keep itself afloat, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)-held foreign exchange reserves recorded a meagre rise. The SBP, in its weekly bulletin, mentioned its reserves have jumped by \$30 million to \$4.46 billion as of April 20, which will provide an import cover of less than a month — a position that has been the same for several months now. The net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stand at \$5.56 billion, \$1.1 billion more than the SBP, taking the total liquid foreign reserves to \$10.02 billion. Although the central bank did not specify the reason behind the increase, there was a \$300 million rise in the reserves last week — which was due to the loan provided by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.



The \$350 billion economy is in turmoil amid financial woes and the delay in an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that would release much-needed funding crucial to avoid the risk of default. The government has been in talks with the Washington-based lender since end-January to resume the \$1.1 billion loan tranche that has been on hold since November, part of a \$6.5 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreed upon in 2019. A deal with the IMF will also unlock other bilateral and multilateral financing avenues for Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves.

**Historic display of unity in NA: Marriyum**

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Thursday said there was a historic display of unity in the National Assembly as 180 members of the House reposed their full confidence in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. "Historic display of Unity and Strength - 180," the minister wrote on her Twitter handle, attaching the "supplementary orders of the day" that Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will move the resolution in the National Assembly reposing full confidence in the leadership of the prime minister.

**PTI disputes PM's trust vote result**

Fawad says 20 votes in favour of PM Shehbaz were cast by party's dissident members

ISLAMABAD: The PTI on Thursday disputed the number of votes garnered by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during the vote of confidence, saying the premier had lost the trust of parliament as 20 votes were cast by their dissident members, while terming the victory a "big defeat" for the premier and the coalition government of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). Earlier in the day, PM Shehbaz had taken vote of confidence from the National Assembly with 180 lawmakers reposing "full confidence" in him. The unexpected move came days after Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb denied that the prime minister had decided to take a vote of confidence from parlia-

ment. The resolution for the vote of confidence moved by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, stated: "The National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reposes its full confidence in the leadership of Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, as the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan." Responding to the development, PTI Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry claimed that the premier had lost the confidence of the House, as 20 lawmakers, who voted in his favour, were disgruntled legislators of the PTI. "(PM) Shehbaz Sharif has lost confidence of the majority of members [of parliament]. Vote of 20 members of the assembly cannot be counted in the prime minister's

favour as they belong to the PTI. Therefore, Shehbaz Sharif gained the support of only 160 members instead of 172," the PTI leader tweeted. "Today's vote (of confidence) is a big defeat for Shehbaz Sharif and PDM," he continued. The National Assembly has a total of 342 seats and a party needs at least 172 votes to form the government. PTI Chairman Imran Khan was ousted from the office of premier through a vote of no-confidence on April 9 last year. Following the development, all PTI lawmakers resigned en masse before the scheduled voting began for electing a new prime minister, except the 20 dissident party members. Agencies

**Türkiye gains nuclear status**

With delivery of 1st nuclear fuel to Akkuyu power plant, says President

ANKARA: Türkiye's first nuclear power plant Akkuyu has been officially granted nuclear facility status with the delivery of the first nuclear fuel to the plant site, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday. "With the delivery of nuclear fuels by air and sea to our power plant, Akkuyu has now gained the status of a nuclear plant," Erdogan said during his virtual address to the first nuclear fuel delivery ceremony. Türkiye has risen to the league of countries with nuclear power in the world, albeit after a 60-year delay, he added.

## Economic Agenda

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar presided over the meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Thursday.



Photo: PID

## ECC okays tech supplementary grants of Rs912m

ECC also approves four licences for oil & gas exploration in Attock, Chakwal

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee has approved technical supplementary grants worth over 912 million rupees.

The approval to this effect was granted during a meeting of ECC that was held in Islamabad on Thursday with Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq

Dar in the chair.

The Committee approved technical supplementary grant worth 284.5 million rupees in favour of Ministry of Interior for disbursement of amount as financial assistance to the Shuhada and injured persons of terrorism incident occurred in Peshawar on 31st January this year.

It also approved 67 million rupees in favour of Ministry

of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination.

The Committee approved another supplementary grant worth 61 million rupees in favour of Ministry of Law and Justice for Federal Shariah Court to meet the shortfall being faced by it during current Financial Year.

A supplementary grant of 500 million rupees was

approved in favour of Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety for Benazir Income Support Program Nashonuma project.

The ECC gave approval to extension in renewal of Bhal Syedan Development and Production Lease covering an area of 16.41 square kilometers located in District Attock, Punjab.

The grant of five years

renewal to Pariwali Development and Production Lease field covering an area of 121.95 Square Kilometers located in district Attock, Punjab also got approval by the committee.

Further, the committee approved grant of five years renewal over Minwal Development and Production Lease, covering an area of 18.85 square kilometers located in district Chakwal, Punjab.

## President calls for increased ties with Iran, Romania

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday called for boosting cooperation with Iran and Romania in all areas of mutual interest.

He expressed these views in separate meetings with the envoys of Iran and Romania here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Talking to the outgoing Iranian Ambassador Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the president said Pakistan greatly valued its fraternal relations with Iran as both brotherly countries shared historic linkages and cultural affinities, besides having commonalities of views on issues of regional

and international significance.

He emphasized the need for increasing economic cooperation and expanding the trade volume for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

The president also highlighted the atrocities being committed by the Indian security forces against Muslims in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and other parts of India, saying Muslims were being isolated and persecuted in India and the Muslim world needed to take notice of the Indian brutalities against Muslims. He thanked the Iranian government for its support and stance on the Kashmir issue.

Appreciating the landmark initiative taken by Iran and Saudi Arabia to normalise diplomatic relations, President Alvi said normalization of relations between the two countries would lead to peace and stability in the Middle East.

The meeting also underscored the need for promoting counter-terrorism cooperation to eliminate the menace of terrorism.

Ambassador Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini underlined the need for enhancing economic, cultural and political cooperation between the two countries. He said both countries had great potential to further expand economic

cooperation. Both sides had agreed to construct six border markets that would boost bilateral trade, he added.

He apprised the president of the ongoing electricity transmission projects that would benefit the people of Balochistan.

The president appreciated the contribution of the outgoing ambassador to promoting bilateral cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

In his meeting with Ambassador of Romania Nicolae Goia, the president said Romania was an important country in Eastern Europe and Pakistan desired to deepen its relationship with it in

the fields of trade and economy. He thanked the Romanian government for its support to Pakistan in granting and continuation of GSP plus status.

Both sides underscored the need for improving economic relations and undertaking regular exchanges and interactions at the highest levels to further cement bilateral ties.

The Romanian ambassador conveyed gratitude on behalf of the President of Romania for the support provided by Pakistan in the evacuation of the Romanian nationals from Afghanistan during August and September 2021.

At UNGA's debate

## Veto responsible for non-resolution of Kashmir, Palestine issues, says Pakistan

NEW YORK: Pakistan has told the UN General Assembly that it considers the veto power vested in the Security Council's five permanent members an important issue that needed to be tackled as part of the 15-member Council's reform to make it more effective.

Speaking in a debate marking the first anniversary of the 193-nation Assembly's landmark resolution that requires the permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the U.S. — to justify the use of veto, Ambassador Munir Akram said the Security Council has been paralyzed by the strategic rivalries of its permanent members and the exercise of the veto.

"It is precisely for this reason that longstanding disputes such as Kashmir and Palestine could not be resolved," the Pakistani envoy said, adding that the vetoes in the Council have prevented and hindered the implementation of UN resolutions.

"The final resolution of the issue of the veto will have to be resolved — not separately — but as an integral part of the reform of the Security Council," he added.

The 2022 Assembly's resolution, adopted by consensus, calls for the General Assembly to automatically meet within 10 days if any of the five permanent members uses their right of veto.

The aim is to hold those countries accountable for exercising this special voting power, which allows them to block any Council resolution or decision.

This right is enshrined in the UN Charter, the Organization's founding document, because of their key roles in establishing the global body more than seven decades ago.

All five have exercised the right of veto at one time



or another, with 44 vetoes alone since the year 2000.

In his remarks, Ambassador Akram said that experience has confirmed that the abolition or restraint on the misuse of the veto rights of the permanent members will have to be an integral part of the Security Council's reform, pointing out that it was for this reason that Pakistan — together with the UFC (Uniting for Consensus) Group — remains opposed to the creation of new permanent members on an expanded Security Council.

"More permanent members and more veto powers will multiply the likelihood of paralysis and inaction in the Security Council," the Pakistani envoy told the General Assembly.

Progress towards restructuring the Security Council remains blocked as the so-called Group of Four — India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — continue pushing for permanent seats, while the Italy/Pakistan-led Uniting for Consensus (UFC) group opposes any additional permanent members.

As a compromise, UFC has proposed a new category of members — not permanent members — with a longer duration in terms and a possibility to

get re-elected.

Besides the five permanent members, the Security Council has 10 non-permanent members elected to two-year terms.

Noting the negative power of the veto, Ambassador Akram said this can be "balanced" by, on the one hand, placing restrictions on the use of the veto, and, on the other, enhancing the role of non-permanent members through larger and perhaps longer representation.

At the same time, the Pakistani envoy said that any measures to restrict or constrain the veto must be in line with the rules of the Charter.

Pakistan, he said, remains convinced that the IG (Inter-governmental Negotiations) process offers the best avenue to reach an agreed outcome on the Council's reform.

"It is only through patient exchanges, mutual accommodation, and compromises that we can broaden the areas of convergence and reduce the points of divergence and thus evolve a 'model' for the reform that can be accepted by the widest possible majority of member states."

In his opening remarks, General Assembly President Csaba Korosi said "The issue of the use of the veto affects the whole UN. And the decisions taken in these halls — or the lack of decisions — reverberate world-wide," adding that "vetoes should always remain the very last resort."

He said this first-ever formal debate on the veto initiative was being held "to figure out the best ways to exploit this new instrument in our big UN toolbox." He urged ambassadors to "ask tough questions" and "seek game-changing solutions", stressing that "there is no wrong answer, only new ideas."

## Pak, China agree to enhance bilateral coop

PM Shehbaz, Chinese premier speak over telephone

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and the Premier of China Li Qiang, spoke over the telephone on Thursday wherein they agreed to enhance their cooperation in all spheres so as to realize shared objectives of benefiting peoples of their countries, while also contributing to regional peace, prosperity and stability.

The conversation was marked by traditional warmth and cordiality that has always characterized Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, the Prime Minister office said.

The Prime Minister extended his warm congratulations on the Chinese Premier's recent election to this high office, which reflected the deep-seated trust of the Chinese nation and confidence in him, stemming from his many achievements in public service.

As All-Weather partners and close friends, Pakistan appreciated China's peaceful development as a positive factor of international peace and stability, and was confident that

China would continue to achieve milestones on its journey towards modernization and rejuvenation.

The Prime Minister reiterated Pakistan's unstinting support to China on its core issues, including the "One China" policy, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea. He expressed Pakistan's sincere gratitude for China's principled position on the Jammu & Kashmir dispute, and support for Pakistan on core issues.

The Chinese Premier appreciated Pakistan's support for China and reaffirmed China's continuing support to Pakistan's national development, sovereignty and territorial integrity. As an All-Weather Friend, China would continue to stand with Pakistan at all times.

Recalling the Prime Minister's visit to China in November 2022 and wide-ranging conversations with President Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership, the two leaders took stock of bilateral cooperation in key areas, including China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

## JI wants PM Shehbaz to take 'trust vote from nation'

LAHORE: Reacting to the vote of confidence secured by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif from the National Assembly, Jamaat-e-Islami Emir Siraj ul Haq on Thursday said it would be better if the premier also takes the trust vote from the people.

With 180 MNAs reposing full confidence in his leadership, PM Shehbaz won the trust vote from the NA earlier today.

Haq — who played an important role in bringing the incumbent government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to the table — stressed the need for general elections to end the ongoing political crisis and steer the country out of the quagmire.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led government and the PTI finally sat on the negotiating table today to discuss the poll date following Supreme Court's orders.

In the first round of talks — which lasted for around two hours — at the Parliament House's Committee Room Number 3, both sides informed each other about their top leadership's stance, sources told Geo News. The second meeting will be held tomorrow.

Talking to a journalist, the JI leader said that both sides would have to show flexibility for the success of the



negotiation.

"The parliament and the judiciary have come face to face," he said.

Haq said that everyone is interpreting the Constitution by themselves. He maintained that all the constitutional, political, and economic crises were impacting just the masses.

Stressing the need for consensus among all the political forces, the JI leader said that the election date can't be fixed on the wish of a single party. "Election with consensus is the sole solution [to the ongoing crisis in the country]," he added.

"Just like lawmakers, judges are also not on the same page," Haq said, adding that instead of making decisions in haste, the matter should be left to the politicians.

The JI leader said that his party had demanded in the beginning that a full-court bench should be formed to hear the election case. Agencies

## Another CPEC project of Rs 1.25trn approved: Asad

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Federal Minister of Communications Asad Mahmood has announced that a project worth Rs 1.25 trillion to connect Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with Balochistan through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route had been approved.

He stated this during a meeting with a delegation of Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazl (JUI-F) local leadership on Thursday.

The minister said this project of a 210-km long road would connect Yarik to Saggu and then Saggu to Zhob which would be completed with

the joint cooperation of the governments of Pakistan and China.

He informed that the secretary of communication was on a visit to China for the final approval of matters from China.

Asad said that the completion of this project would make the travel between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan easier.

He said this route would pass through the areas of both provinces which remained neglected during the past, adding, it would also ensure economic prosperity in the areas. APP

## Fazl to hold rallies, conventions nationwide Says it is ECP's job to conduct the election

ISLAMABAD: In what is considered to be the beginning of preparations for elections, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) chairman and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Moulana Fazlur Rehman on Thursday announced that his party would hold rallies and conventions across the country.

Talking to media on Thursday, he said that the dialogues with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was the agenda of yesterday's meeting of the allied parties chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The JUI-F chief said that the Supreme Court was forcing political

parties to hold talks over elections in Punjab. Federation is main part of the structure and the whole building collapses if one of its part collapse, and saving the federation is equivalent to saving the country, he said.

Why is our honorable judiciary stuck to the 90 days, the JUI-F chief asked.

Mr Rehman said that the judiciary is using hammer to pressurise the political leadership on holding talks, adding that the court orders are unacceptable. It is Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) job to conduct the election, and the institution should take the matter forward. Agencies

# Karachi Express inferno claims 7 lives near Tando Masti Khan

The ill-fated passenger train was heading from Karachi to Lahore

KARACHI: At least seven passengers were killed when a coach of Karachi Express caught fire near Tando Masti Khan in Sindh's Khairpur district on Thursday.

According to the Ministry of Railways, the ill-fated passenger train was heading from Karachi to Lahore when it met with the accident in the early hours.

"Seven passengers, including three children, lost their lives while four others went missing when a passenger coach of the train caught fire," read the statement.

Immediately, the train was stopped near Tando Masti Khan Railway Station and the fire was doused.

The cause of the fire has yet to be ascertained.

Meanwhile, Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique ordered an inquiry into the tragic incident.

Addressing the National Assembly session today, the minister hinted at the possibility of sabotage in the tragic incident.

Apparently, the fire erupted inside the coach due to a short-circuit, Rafique added. He further said that the facts



about the incident will come to the fore in a day or two.

In June 2021, over 50 passengers were killed and more than 100 others

sustain injuries when two trains collided in Sindh's Ghotki.

The Millat Express derailed and the Sir Syed Express train hit it soon after-

wards, railways officials had said, adding that the collision took place between the Raiti and Obaro railway stations. Agencies

Amir Khattak for early completion of under construction Nishtar Hospital 2



MULTAN: Commissioner Aamir Khattak and VC Nishtar Medical College University Dr Rana Altaf visiting Nishtar Hospital 2 site area in Multan.

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: Commissioner Engineer Aamir Khattak said that work should be done on a war footing for the early completion of the under construction Nishtar 2 Hospital. The process of tree planting and landscaping should be initiated in the hospital. Director Development Rubina Kausar, Additional Commissioner Arshad Gopang, Axion Highways Ghulam Nabi and Assistant Commissioner President Amir Iftikhar Nishtar will monitor the various sectors of the hospital, road construction, PHA work, installation of machinery.

These views were expressed by Commissioner Aamir Khattak on the occasion of site visit of Nishtar 2 Hospital. He said that all the funds have been provided by the Punjab government. Delay in project completion increases the cost of the project. He said that the Chief Minister of Punjab has strict orders not to extend the deadline for the completion of the scheme. If the work is not completed, severe consequences will be faced. On this occasion, a detailed briefing was also given by the concerned officers.

Security forces officials met dignitaries, elders in DI Khan



Adam Khan Wazir

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Security Forces conducted an interaction with Local people, elders, dignitaries, notables, elected members of local government, youth and Ulama of Yarik area of District DI Khan.

During interaction the following points were discussed in detail. Efforts of Security Forces for peace and prosperity in the area and role of locals. Cooperation of locals with Security Forces and in turn provision of a sense of Security to them. Role of notable, dignitaries elders, Ullamas and youth in the efforts for peace and prosperity in the area. Denying entry of terrorists to villages, and denying logistics support to terrorists. Role of Elders towards wholesome peace of the area.

Role of elected members for uplift and prosperity of the area. The locals appreciated the efforts and initiative of Security Forces in ensuring peace and stability in the area and pledged to extend full cooperation in this regard.

The local people announced to support the security forces to ensure peace and stability in the area, however, appreciating their efforts and supports, pledged to cooperate fully in this regard for prosperity and peace in the area.

Overall unemployment rate in Punjab is 6.7%: Gallup

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Research conducted by Gallup Pakistan and PRIDE, using data from the Labour Force Survey 2020-21, shows that the overall unemployment rate of youth in Punjab is 6.69%.

The overall unemployment rate in the Punjab province is 6.69%, with the unemployment rate of females being substantially higher than males (8.32% vs. 6.06%) and that of urban residents being relatively higher than the rate for their rural counterparts (7.94% vs. 6.11%). The analysis of division-wise youth unemployment rate in Punjab shows that the overall youth unemployment rate varies from a low as 4.45% for Bahawalpur division to as high as 17.78% for Rawalpindi division.

The distribution of unemployed youth by level of education indicates that youth having education level of 'matric but below Intermediate', make up the highest proportion of unemployed youth at 20.01%, while youth having 'less than one year of education' comprises the lowest share of unemployed youth at 0.39%.

23.52% of unemployed female youth in Punjab have a Masters level degree. This share is over 7 times higher than the corresponding share of unemployed male youth (around 3% of unemployed males have a Masters degree).

The research analysis shows that the Lahore division has the highest population (20.7 million) in Punjab province, whereas Sahiwal division has the lowest population at 7.9 million.

## Shura Hamdard members express sorrow over demise of Justice (r) Haziq-ul-Khairi

Spokesman Report

KARACHI: Shura Hamdard members from all chapters expressed deep sorrow and grief over the demise of Speaker Shura Justice (r) Haziq-ul-Khairi during a combined online condolence and memorial reference, held yesterday at Hamdard Corporate Head Office, presided over by Ms. Sadia Rashid, President of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan. The Karachi chapter members attended the proceedings in person, whereas members from different locations joined virtually through the Zoom platform. The attendees prayed to Allah for forgiveness and blessings upon the departed soul.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Sadia Rashid expressed that the late Haziq-ul-Khairi was a remarkable and esteemed judge, who held prestigious positions such as Chief Justice of the Federal Shariat Court, Judge of the Sindh High Court, Ombudsman of Sindh, and Principal of Sindh Muslim Law College.

Prof. Dr. Fakhar-ul-Islam, Speaker Shura Hamdard Peshawar, said the deceased was a wise and far-sighted member of the Shura who set a benchmark for the highest judicial



standards within the Shura Hamdard proceedings. His memory will endure in academic circles for a long time. May Allah bestow upon him the highest degree of closeness and grant him paradise.

General (r) Moinuddin Haider, former Governor of Sindh said that Haziq-ul-Khairi's proficiency and remarkable acumen in administrative affairs had enabled him to carve out a niche for himself in his illustrious judicial career. Acknowledging his exceptional traits and virtues, Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said had handpicked him to lead as Chairman of Shura Hamdard. Haziq-ul-Khairi upheld Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said's punctuality tradition.

Zafar Iqbal said that Haziq-ul-Khairi (r) was a man of unimpeachable integrity, unwavering courage, and unassailable principles. As the Chief Justice of the Federal Sharia Court, he

remained steadfast in his commitment to upholding the sanctity and honour of the court and never shied away from speaking up for justice and impartiality. Moreover, the deceased was a patriotic individual who harbored deep-seated affection for his country and its people.

Senator Abdul Haseeb Khan stated that the world is a realm of mortality, and all living beings must inevitably experience death, as mentioned in the Holy Quran. Regrettably, Haziq-ul-Khairi's demise has resulted in the loss of a prominent scholar and legal expert in the country.

Dr. Rizwana Ansari said that the late Haziq-ul-Khairi's contributions are not limited to the legal profession alone. He was also a prolific writer and literary intellectual. By highlighting his noteworthy accomplishments, we can provide aspiring young minds of the nation with influential role models to emulate.

Umar Zaheer Mir, a member of Shura Hamdard Lahore, informed the attendees that the Women Protection Bill was drafted by Justice (r) Haziq-ul-Khairi. The ideal approach to safeguard the valuable legacy of our forefathers and elders is to actualize their desires and aspirations.

## Strong Performance Continues

### NBP earns pre-tax profit of Rs18.2b, 13.2% up YoY

Our Correspondent

KARACHI: The Board of Directors of National Bank of Pakistan "NBP" "the Bank" met today to approve the interim condensed financial statements for the quarter ended March 31, 2023.

For Q1'23, the Bank generated gross interest income of PKR 192.4 Bn i.e. more than double the PKR 79.2 Bn for the similar period of 2022. The Bank's investments portfolio averaged PKR 3,519.2 Bn (Mar'22: PKR 1,984.6 Bn) and generated mark-up/interest income of PKR 146.2 Bn. Whereas, the placements averaged PKR 66.2 Bn (Mar'22: PKR 110.6 Bn) and generated mark-up income of PKR 2.7 Bn (Mar'22: PKR 2.7 Bn). During the quarter, the Bank's loan book averaged PKR 1,411.4 Bn and generated mark-up income of PKR 43.5 Bn i.e.

PKR 17.3 Bn or 66.2% higher than PKR 26.2 Bn for Q1'2022. This significant growth in earnings was achieved through both, a volumetric growth, as well as the favourable YoY rate variance. Likewise, cost of funds for the period also recorded a significant YoY increase and amounted to PKR 159.9 Bn as against PKR 53.4 Bn for the corresponding period of 2022. Consequently, net interest income for the period closed at PKR 32.5 Bn, depicting a 26.1% increase against PKR 25.8 Bn of Q1'22. Non-fund income for the period stood at PKR 7.5 Bn which is PKR 0.6 Bn or 7.3% lower than PKR 8.1 Bn of Mar'22. Reflecting the inflationary pressures and the Bank's continued investment into its IT systems & infrastructure, operating expenses amounted to PKR 21.2 Bn which is 26.3% higher YoY. The Bank

is investing significantly to improve & strengthen its IT infrastructure & systems for creating synergies in business processes, rationalising operating costs and achieving higher efficiency. Overall, operating costs translate into a cost-to-income ratio at 52.9% which



is in line with the industry norms. Positively, provision charge amounted to PKR 0.68 Bn as compared to PKR 1.1 Bn a charge for Q1' 2022. As tax-charge amounting to PKR 7.5 Bn, profit after-tax stood at PKR 10.7 Bn

i.e. PKR 0.85 Bn or 8.7% higher than PKR 9.8 Bn for Mar'22. This translates into Earnings per Share of Rs. 5.02 as compared to Rs. 4.62 for Mar'22.

Total assets of the Bank amounted to PKR 6,055.6 Bn, depicting a 15.6% increase from PKR 5,240.4 Bn levels of December 31, 2022. In the prevailing high interest rate scenario, the Bank is pursuing a prudent loan growth strategy for better credit risk management. Accordingly, the loans & advances of the Bank amounted to PKR 1,452.9 Bn i.e. slightly above the PKR 1,438.6 Bn at end of the year 2022. Given the limited quality loan growth market and a steady growth in customer deposits, excess liquidity with the Bank is mostly placed in shorter-term government securities to capitalize on price volatility in the currently hiking policy rate environment.

## PEMRA raids cable networks during Eid holidays

For relaying illegal Indian channels

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: On the special directions of Chairman PEMRA, Regional Offices in Multan, Lahore, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Gujranwala, Karachi and Hyderabad conducted enforcement drive during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays on violations by the cable operators for airing illegal Indian Channels/Content, in defiance of directions of the honorable Supreme Court of Pakistan as well as those issued by the authority from time to time.

In Karachi, Hyderabad, Sanghar, Thatta and Sujawal, during inspections PEMRA enforcement team seized all the equipments

being used in the said illegal activity which includes 14 Satellite Receivers, 11 modulators, 5 transmitters and 2 digital boxes. The Show cause notices were duly issued to the violators and the fine were also imposed on the violations conducted earlier.

In Multan, enforcement team conducted surprise inspections in various localities of Bahawalnagar, D.G. Khan City, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan and raided 34 Cable. Among them 20 were found airing illegal Indian channels as well as Indian content and imposed fine as well.

Field staff in PEMRA Regional

Office Lahore has initiated drive against illegal/Indian content and conducted 89 surprise inspections in all 7 districts. Total number of violations found was 3 in Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib and Kasur. All three operators have been strictly warned and issued show cause notices and called for personal hearing. During the mentioned raids, the enforcement teams confiscated illegal equipments. Moreover, Regional Office Sargodha conducted surprise inspections of 15 Cable Operators in Khushab and Sargodha and seized equipment being used for airing illegal Indian Channels and excessive in-house channels.

Moreover, PEMRA Regional Office Gujranwala field staff conducted 14 surprise inspections in different cable networks in Gujranwala City, Wazirabad, Sambrial, Lalamusa, Kharlian, Ladhewala wariach, Mandi Bahuddin, Gujrat, Narowal & Hafizabad and confiscated their Receivers deployed for illegal transmissions.

During a surprised drive in Faisalabad City, Jaranwala, Chak Jhumra, Tandlian Wala and Sammundri receivers for illegal transmissions were confiscated from two loop holders of M/s Media Com CATV(Pvt.) Ltd. i.e. M/s Jutt Cable Network and M/s Mudasar.

## Govt should provide financial support to sportsmen

Mian Rashid Asghar

FAISALABAD: The government of Pakistan should provide financial support and encouragement to the sportsmen who have made the name of Pakistan, as well as provide government jobs. Alhaj Naseer Yousaf Vohra has said this while expressing his opinion to the media.

He further said that they should also be allocated quota in the government services.

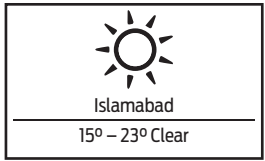
He said that by selling their (Sportsman) houses, motorcycles and other items, they go to other countries and pay tribute to the players who made Pakistan famous. But here not appreciating their passion is a sign of indifference & open discouragement.

The President Central Cloth Board Alliance Group further clarified that the boxing player "Son of Faisalabad & proud of Pakistan Ali Raza Butt" has given honor and respect to Pakistan by winning the award of Boxing Asian Champion 2023 in the Asian countries competition to be held in Azerbaijan, Baku. In front of the world media by calling his victory in the name of Palestine is an extraordinary passion. Alhaj Naseer Yousaf Vohra, President Central Association of Merchants Cloth Board Ithahid Group Pakistan, paid tribute to Ali Raza Butt, who received the Boxing Asian Champion 2023 award & from the bottom of his

heart for bringing the name of Pakistan to the world also paid salute to his services. On this occasion, Ali Raza Butt said that the resources are limited and there is no patronage at the government level. He said that, he sold my bike and game machine in order to fulfill expenses to compete in other countries and even being an international player borrowed money from friends. He elaborated that he participated in this competition while the government of Pakistan did not provide any patronage in this regard. Ali Raza Butt told to Naseer Yousaf Vohra in a sad tone that my future is in danger and I will not be able to continue my game in such conditions.

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**SERVICES**

**Namaz Timings**  
 Fajr .....3:54 am  
 Zohr .....12:06 pm  
 Asr .....4:51 pm  
 Maghrib .....6:48 pm  
 Isha .....8:18 pm

**EMERGENCY**

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

**Women Police Stations**

Islamabad ..... 9222596  
 Rawalpindi ..... 9270601-20

**ENQUIRY**

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

**HOSPITALS**

CMH .....561111  
 MH .....561116  
 MH .....561116  
 Cantt Hospital .....9270907-11  
 DHQ .....5556311-4  
 RGH .....9290301-7  
 Holy Family .....9290322-7  
 PIMS .....9261170-79  
 Polyclinic .....9218300-09  
 Shifa International .....4603666

**DEPARTMENTS**

CDA .....9221334-43  
 CDA .....9208301-04  
 Met Office .....9250360-6  
 RDA .....5555864  
 TMA .....5770886  
 Cantonment Board .....9270151-3  
 Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation .....9209224  
 Potohar Town .....9209224  
 Rawal Town .....5773343

**COMPLAINTS**

Water Tanker Service  
 E-7, F-10 & F-11 .....9204654  
 G-5, G-6, G-7, G-8, .....9203883  
 G-9, G-10, G-11, G-12, H-8 .....9266316  
 Wapda Islamabad .....9217579-80  
 Sui Gas Complaint .....119, 9272249  
 Wasa Water Tank  
 Rawalpindi .....0331-5022125

# ICCI, DHO Islamabad to create awareness about dengue virus

*The dengue cases normally increase in September/October*

**Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD: Dengue fever kills many people every year in Pakistan and there is a greater need to create maximum awareness to save people from this endemic.

The dengue cases normally increase in September/October and it is our responsibility to work with the local health authorities to control the spread of dengue virus in its peak season.

This was said by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry while talking to Dr. Zaem Zia, District Health Officer, Islamabad during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI), said a press release issued here.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that as per World Health Organization (WHO), 62 deaths were reported in Pakistan from January to September 2022 from a total confirmed cases of over 25,900 dengue virus and 74 percent of these cases were reported in September 2022. It shows that Pakistan is vulnerable to

this virus. He stressed that DHO Islamabad and all relevant health authorities should accelerate efforts to create maximum awareness in the people about this dangerous virus to save their lives.

He assured that ICCI in collaboration with Market Associations would work with DHO Islamabad for organ-



izing awareness sessions on the dengue virus and its preventive measures in the business community and the citizens in the Federal capital.

He said that ICCI is also ready to provide volunteers to DHO Islamabad for an awareness campaign.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Zaem

Zia, District Health Officer, briefed the President ICCI about the plans of his organization to save people from the dengue virus in the Capital.

He said that ICCI should join hands with DHO Islamabad for raising awareness about the dengue virus through various campaigns including a cycling event and UNICEF would also be engaged in the campaign.

He said that DHO Islamabad intends to create a sustainable volunteer group in Islamabad that would be provided proper training to cope with the dengue fever.

He said that an option on DHO Islamabad's website would be provided to get online feedback from the citizens. It was agreed that DHO Islamabad and President ICCI would visit various hospitals to see the arrangements to cope with the dengue fever.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG also shared useful ideas to control the dengue virus in the Capital and lauded the efforts of DHO Islamabad to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and dengue virus.

## Risky Game

ISLAMABAD: A young student is trying to cross the busiest IJP Road, which have extreme chances of being hit by someone, as after completing the most part of IJP Road, there is still no over head pedestrian bridge and any other facility for pedestrians, which is causing trouble to them, needs the attention of concern authorities.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

**Asim Tanveer**

MULTAN: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi provided financial assistance to the families of the youths who died in police firing on Eid-ul-Fitr. Assistance provided In this regard, on the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Umar Jahangir, Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance Malik Muhammad Sami reached the house of deceased Muhammad Usman and Syed Abdul Sami and provided checks of 10 lakh rupees per person to the families on behalf of the Chief Minister.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance Malik Muhammad Sami also conveyed the message of the Chief Minister of Punjab to the deceased and recited Fatiha on behalf of the district administration. There is no substitute for human life, but the brothers of the deceased will be provided with government jobs and full support. ADC Finance said that they offer their condolences to the families of the tragic incident.

# G-20 event in IOJK a smokescreen to hide Indian dirty face from world: Mushaal

*Says India utilizing soft power to give legitimacy to August 5, 2019 illegal actions*

**Spokesman Report**

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of Peace and Culture Organization, Mushaal Hussein Mullick fired salvo at the fascist Narendra Modi government and said that Indian plan to host G20 meeting in Srinagar was an attempt to mislead the world about Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir's (IOJK) real situation, which was classified as the world's most militarized zone with a 1:8 military and civilian ratio.

In a statement on Thursday, Mushaal, wife of jailed Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, said that

the G20 event in the occupied valley was mere a smokescreen and fascism Modi regime wanted to bolster its normalcy claims by hosting the mega event in the strife-stricken region.

The Chairperson stated that the G-20 event in the IOJK was intended to divert attention from India's rising massive human right violations in Kashmir. Moreover, she said that India wanted to give legitimacy to its August 5, 2019 illegal actions by holding the summit in the region.

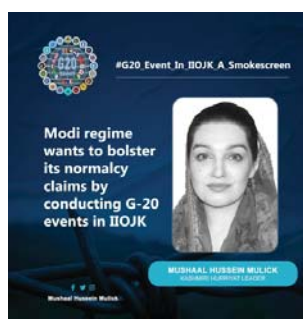
Mushaal urged the G-20 countries that they must remember that India had illegally occupied

the IOJK and it was a disputed territory as per UN resolutions.

However, she said that they should refuse to participate in the event because it would hurt the reputation and credibility of G-20 forum if it accepted Modi's mala fide invite to hold its meeting in the disputed region.

Besides, the Hurriyat stated that G-20 leaders would be seen as siding with the oppressor if they accepted tyrant Modi's invitation to visit IOJK.

She advised that G-20 countries instead of accepting fascist Modi's invitation must force the supremacist Hindutva regime to settle Kashmir dispute as per UN



resolutions, as it would further boost their credibility and honor in the comity of nation.

Mushaal went on to say that India should allow foreign fact-finding missions to the

*Plan chalked out to achieve anti-polio drive's targets*



ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration was held here on Thursday to meet the targets for polio vaccination of children under five years of age in the Federal capital.

The meeting chaired by Additional Deputy Commissioner East Islamabad and attended by officials from the Health Department, Assistant Commissioners, and other stakeholders received a briefing on the immunization plan to vaccinate every child.

The meeting was informed that polio teams will visit every house to immunize children besides providing services at other places, including bus stands, public places, and hospitals.

Additional Deputy Commissioner urged parents and caregivers to ensure that their children receive the life-saving polio vaccine so that they remain protected from poliovirus.

"It is essential that we reach as many children as possible with the vaccine now to curb polio transmission," he added.

He said that the polio programme has taken all efforts to ensure the vaccination of children to keep them safe from this highly infectious disease in the context of positive environmental samples detected in some cities. APP

## 21 Schemes underway across district: Commissioner



RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chattha has said that work on 21 schemes is underway across the district at a cost of Rs 27527.965 million in Attock.

He was accompanied by Additional Commissioner Revenue Rawalpindi Kanza Murtaza, Additional Commissioner Rawalpindi Ch Abdul Majid, Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif Raza, Chairman Attock Press Club Regd Sh. Faisal Javed, Chief Coordinator Nisar Ali Khan, Amjad Iqbal and administrative officers from all Tehsils of Attock.

He was informed that among them a sum of Rs10233.957 million is being spent on 26 schemes of highways, Rs 2487.363 million on 22 schemes of buildings, Rs1426.304 million on seven public health schemes and Rs135 million on two local government schemes.

Speaking on the occasion, Chattha has stressed for effective steps should be taken to complete all development projects on time and quality should be ensured.

He was of the view that the senior officers should take ownership of the work of the development projects and supervise them, he said.

He instructed the officers to take the local community of the place where there was a public project into confidence and work with their cooperation, adding that the government would not let the cost go beyond the fixed limit by controlling the expenditures.

On this occasion, he also encouraged the best-performing officers, especially Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif Raza and deputy director information Shahzad Niaz Khokar. APP

# COMSTECH initiative to strengthen dev of traditional medicine in OIC States

**Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Chinese scientists and Industrialists visited COMSTECH secretariat on Thursday to promote cooperation for research and development in the fields of natural products, biotechnology, public health and traditional medicine through institutional and industrial linkages between China and OIC member states, and help strengthen academic and research initiatives between the People's Republic of China and the OIC member states. The delegation comprised of top tier leadership of industries in the area of traditional medicine. Participants from several OIC member states also joined

the discussions virtually. OIC member states such as Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia are already exploring traditional medicines in their own capacity. Through this collaboration, COMSTECH seeks to liaison between OIC member states and Chinese institutions for strengthening cooperation in the field of healthcare.

To strengthen this collaboration and enhance the networking, COMSTECH organized this dialogue which included a series of key talks on the subject by scientists, and representatives of pharmaceutical industries of China. The event was attended by researchers, relevant personnel from the research laboratories and industries and representa-

tives from the embassies of the OIC member states in Islamabad. The aspects of collaboration such as set up of Joint labs, exchange programs for scholars of OIC member states and product based research was also discussed.

Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary gave a comprehensive briefing to the delegation on COMTECH programs and initiatives, its scope and avenues of collaboration. He explored the avenues for Sino-COMSTECH collaboration for the development of natural products, biotechnology, public health and traditional medicine in OIC member states. Prof. Choudhary briefed the delegation on various ways of institutional cooperation,

capacity building, establishment of traditional Chinese medicine clinics and research lab.

President of Hunan University of Chinese Medicine, Prof. Dr. Aiguo Dai, said that our meeting will promote the international cooperation of traditional medicine between our school and "Belt and Road Initiative" countries. He said that the relations between China and Islamic countries are traditionally friendly. Prof. Dai said that China attaches great importance to friendly relations with Islamic countries and regards the OIC as an import bridge for China to cooperate with the Islamic countries.

Science Commissioner of Embassy of People's Republic of China in Islamabad, Mr.



Yin Shengxin appreciated the Sino-COMSTECH initiative. He said that the work of Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary is a good example of nurturing cooperation. He reiterated time tested Sino-Pak friendship. Mr. Shengxin said that traditional Chinese medi-

cine cures diseases and brings health to the people.

Director General (EC & OIC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Asima Rabbani, said that China has a rich history of traditional medicine, which has been practiced for over two thousand years.

She said the Sino-COMSTECH initiative is strengthening cooperation in traditional medicine and allied biomedical sciences in OIC countries is a significant step towards promoting collaboration between China and OIC states. Ms. Rabbani said that COMS-

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 Whatsapp: **0346-5008408**

## Pakistan fully capable to thwart any aggression

For the welfare of the people and to save the country from default, the government restored the contract with IMF, although it had to pay a huge political price for this step, but the government put the country's interest first. The government had also taken unpopular steps for economic recovery of the country but such difficult decisions saved the country from default which is a great success on the part of the government. Besides, the PDM government immediately revived the CPEC and it is also working on several other development projects despite the economic challenges. The allied government is providing relief to the poor people of the country in various ways and in this regard, like other relief programs, the free flour scheme is one of the welfare steps. Government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is determined to provide targeted relief to the people so that the lower classes can get maximum relief.

Pakistan does not allow any kind of terrorism to thrive in the country. Those who are doing terrorist activities in the country are non-state actors and the government is continuously operating against them. The Foreign Minister can play an important role in presenting a clear stand against terrorism by going to the SCO meeting to be held in India next month. Unfortunately, ever since Modi came to power in India, bilateral relations between the two countries could not improve due to his egoism. Modi himself does not want good relations with Pakistan. If he had taken even one step forward, not only the bilateral relations between the two countries would have been stable but also stability in the region.

Bilawal Bhutto's visit to India to participate in the SCO meeting can bring more stability to the region. The visit of Foreign Minister can surely bring far-reaching positive results. The DG ISPR recently gave a detailed briefing about the war against terrorism and the challenges being faced by the country. Unfortunately, terrorism has once again surged in the country, however, our armed forces and police are carrying out successful operations against the terrorist elements. Terrorists are targeting Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Balochistan particularly and trying to destabilize Pakistan. It is particularly mentioned that banned out fits TTP, BLA and Daesh are carrying terrorist activities in Pakistan, but they will be dealt with iron hands.

Our armed forces, police and Law Enforcement Agencies are fully active and ready to foil designs of the foes of the country. Pakistan has zero tolerance policy against terrorists. Pakistan's security forces are carrying out successful Intelligence based operations against terrorists, and the time is not very far away when the country will be free from this menace. War against terrorism will be continued till the elimination of last terrorist from the country. International community should recognize Pakistan's sacrifices in war against terrorism and it would not be wrong to say that international community enjoys fruits of peace only due to efforts and sacrifices of Pakistan in war against terrorism.

## Clean initiative to realize UN 2030 Agenda

Li Xinlei

China has been building communication platforms to push for global low-carbon energy transitions and green recovery to realize the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

As the world faces cascading crises including accelerating climate change, surging energy prices and sluggish growth of economy, the aspirations set out in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are in jeopardy. Amid intensifying major-country competition, the global clean energy transition is faced with new development trends as well as multiple challenges. China is playing a significant role in the global clean energy transition and gradually becoming a key driving force in advancing the transition.

Over the past few years, with accelerated technological innovation, constantly falling prices and ever-expanding application scenarios, clean energy has displayed growing potential in solving the climate crisis, ensuring energy security, improving access to modern energy services, and stimulating green recovery. Wind and solar generated a record amount of global power in 2022, accounting for 12 percent of global electricity generation, up 2 percentage points from 2021, according to the Global Electricity Review published by the independent climate think tank Ember.

Despite the growing global consensus on clean energy transition, hurdles are emerging on the path to clean energy. Aside from addressing uncertainties associated with breakthrough green technologies and project implementation, we have to navigate several major challenges

to realize the energy transition.

To start with, the growth in clean energy generation falls well short of what is needed to meet the carbon neutrality goal.

To ensure short-term energy supplies and rein in energy prices, countries around the world have been accelerating the clean energy transition and at the same time, investing in and subsidizing fossil fuels, thus resulting in a rapid rebound in carbon emissions in the post-pandemic era. Furthermore, the share of clean energy use is much lower in the traditional industrial sector than in the power generation sector. Obstacles to green recovery are stark because of carbon lock-in and path-dependence amid green energy transitions. Currently, the nationally determined contributions are not on track to meet global climate goals. To solve the problem within eight years, all countries must increase their levels of ambition to reduce emissions, which is a grave challenge for all.

Second, the global North-South divide over clean energy development and divergences on the transition have been growing.

To date, Chinese startups have attracted over one-third of global early-stage venture capital investment in the energy sector and China is increasingly playing an irreplaceable and important role in global clean energy technology value chains. China has noticeable advantages in the production of wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicle batteries, etc. For instance, China takes up seven spots among the world's top 10 wind turbine manufacturers for wind power. China's photovoltaic industry has taken a lead in the world, accounting for around 70 percent of the global output. The country has been instrumental in bringing down costs worldwide for solar PV. China is also

home to 70 percent of the global production capacity for cathodes; CATL and BYD collectively account for over 50 percent of the global power battery market.

Second, according to data from China's National Energy Administration, China's investment in renewable energy projects in Belt and Road Initiative partner countries has been growing in recent years, and has remained at more than \$2 billion annually.

In 2022, Chinese companies completed power generation projects in 87 countries and regions. As a result, the new energy power generation industry (solar PV, wind power, biomass and energy storage) maintained a growth momentum, and 195 projects with a total contract value of \$19.22 billion were signed, increasing by 9.9 percent year-on-year and accounting for 56.5 percent of the total energy project contract value.

Currently, Chinese clean energy companies and green investment projects are making great efforts to go global. The foundation for international cooperation on clean energy has been constantly consolidated. The key projects include the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor and the Sino-African cooperation, among others.

In the meantime, China has been advancing the integration between the green development of the Belt and Road and South-South cooperation on climate change. Since 2020, China has signed memorandums of understanding with Laos, Cambodia and Seychelles on low-carbon demonstration zones for

addressing climate change. These cooperation schemes will help countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative to improve their climate resilience and capacity for green transitions from both software and hardware. China has not only provided clean-energy materials, including solar PV, wind power equipment and electric vehicles, but also jointly mapped out low-carbon development plans in collaboration with the recipient countries and strengthened assessment of clean energy development potential and low-carbon talent training.

Last, China has been advocating open, win-win international multilateral cooperation to share development opportunities with the rest of the world, building communication platforms to promote global low-carbon energy transitions and green recovery and to realize the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and constantly pushing the establishment of a new governance order concerning climate change and new energy development.

The global clean energy partnership is an important platform and channel for China to carry out global climate governance, which helps promote relevant governance mechanisms by making them more fair, reasonable and efficient and provides a feasible pathway toward better governance of global clean energy.

(Courtesy: China Daily)

The author is a research fellow with the Institute of Contemporary Socialism and a professor in the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



## Local solutions should come first in Syria

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

Since Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan's visit to Damascus last week, the discourse in the international community has centered on whether or not to talk to Bashar Assad. Actually, what the international community should do is move from a normative discourse to a more practical one. It should talk to whoever makes a difference on the ground.

The UN-backed meetings in Geneva are not representative of the people, nor can they make a difference on the ground. Assad, despite the claim he has control over 70 percent of the country, in reality has no real control over any part of the country. His army is nothing but a collection of gangs and fragments ruled by Assad-affiliated warlords that take the name "shabiha." The only two legions that have a cohesive command and control structure are the 4th Armored Division of Maher Assad, which is under Iranian control, and the Tiger Force commanded by Suhail Al-Hassan that takes orders directly from the Russian base of Hmeimim.

So, even if Assad agreed to anything, would he be able to enforce it? Not really. On the other hand, the opposition that meets in Geneva, how much are they in touch with the people on the ground? Again, if they agree to anything, could they enforce it on the ground? Is the armed opposition accountable to them? Not really, the armed opposition is as fragmented as the Syrian army and is only accountable to its foreign backers.

This is only regarding the domestic actors. If we talk about the regional and global players, the situation gets even more complicated. Can we have an agreement whereby the US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Iran are all on the same page regarding Syria? Very unlikely.

There is no one solution for the entirety of Syria simply because the landscape is not the same in the different parts of the country. The

landscape in the northeast is different from Idlib, which is also different from the southwest and the areas bordering Lebanon. The actors are also different. Jordan is very active in the southwest because it is next to its borders, whereas it has no presence in Idlib.

In this respect, the international community should set clear, achievable goals and realize that Syria cannot be fixed and become a modern, democratic state as a result of a deal signed in Geneva. The goals should be to stabilize the security situation, ensure the safe return of refugees and jumpstart the local economy so that people can sustain themselves. Once those basic goals are achieved, then the international community can have the luxury of talking about political systems and democracy.

To achieve those three basic goals, a deal needs to be brokered with actors on the ground. In fact, in this approach, at least four deals need to be brokered, each one with different actors.

In the southwestern Deraa region, the international actors are Israel, Jordan and Russia. Israel and Jordan need to have their borders secured. Russia is the one that brokered a deal between opposition groups and the regime in July 2018. The main group, Quwaa Shabab Al-Sunna, which was rebranded as the 8th Brigade, is still very much in charge of the security of the area, of course under Russian tutelage. Hence, the Russian-brokered deal should allow refugees to negotiate an agreement regarding their safe return. In parallel, a plan should be laid out to allow for local development with the involvement of the community.

Regarding the areas around Lebanon, a deal should be clinched with the Iranians and Hezbollah to allow refugees to return. Hezbollah would want to cover its back and make sure no hostile force is at its doorstep.

As for the northeast, the Americans have a moral obligation toward their Kurdish allies, who were instrumental in pushing back against Daesh and still today guard the prisons housing extremists. However, the Americans need to

apply pressure to their Kurdish partners to make sure they share power with their Arab neighbors and offer security guarantees to Turkey.

As for Idlib, the main power in control here is Turkey. Idlib also has a high concentration of internally displaced people. When the Russians came to save Assad in 2015, the armed opposition groups had the choice of either reconciling with the regime or taking the green buses to Idlib. The Russian plan was to concentrate the opposition in one place, separate it from the regime and make a truce between them. It could then broker a deal between Assad and the opposition that would stabilize the country and allow Moscow to reap the benefits of its intervention. However, events did not go as expected and Assad kept playing the Russians off against the Iranians in an attempt to remain relevant.

Since then, Idlib has gathered all of the opposition to Assad. Today, they are under Turkish influence. This is why Idlib should be the last area to be handled. Once the other areas of the country are stabilized, then it can be tackled and an orderly return of internally displaced people from Idlib to all the different areas of Syria can be planned.

Given the chaotic situation the country is currently experiencing, the fragmented security situation and the lack of any legitimate representatives of the Syrian people, it is very unrealistic, even pedantic, for the international community to ask the Syrians to agree among themselves and find a settlement that will end the war and transition Syria into a democracy. So, the international community should move from the frame of mind of a comprehensive solution to a series of localized solutions. Once local solutions are found, the Syrian people themselves can find a solution for the entire country. (Courtesy: Arab News)

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib is a specialist in US-Arab relations with a focus on lobbying. She is president of the Research Center for Cooperation and Peace Building, a Lebanese nongovernmental organization focused on Track II.

## Putting an end to the crisis in Sudan

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

Any violence and instability in Sudan will not only have a devastating impact on the people of Sudan, but it also runs the risk of spiraling out of control and subsequently spilling over to neighboring countries. This could have severe repercussions for the entire Horn of Africa region.

This is why finding a realistic and effective political solution for Sudan is critical in order to put an end to the conflict and prevent future violence.

One of the consequences of intensified violence in Sudan is that the refugee crisis could worsen, potentially affecting other countries. Sudan shares borders with seven countries — Libya, Egypt, Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. As the World Bank has warned: "The high incidence of conflict, particularly past fighting that led to South Sudan's secession, has led to a large population of refugees and internally displaced persons. Sudan is now a source, destination and transit country for irregular migration, including refugees and asylum seekers using the East African northbound migratory route through Libya to Europe. The country hosts an estimated 800,000 South Sudanese refugees and 330,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia, CAR, Chad, and Yemen."

The first key step to take in this kind of situation is to keep humanitarian corridors open in order to allow humanitarian and medical assistance to enter the conflict-affected areas and to permit the evacuation of civilians from the conflict zone. As UN Special Envoy for Sudan Volker Perthes told reporters last week, when safe passages and humanitarian corridors are not respected, "We cannot deliver when our staff is

attacked, is thrown out of their offices, when their offices are destroyed, their vehicles looted, and sometimes even their residences being under fire or destroyed."

Secondly, mediation plays a vital role in helping to encourage reconciliation between the parties in conflict. Otherwise, an armed conflict in Sudan could spiral out of control and impact the whole Horn of Africa region. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned: "Any further escalation could be devastating for the country and the region. I urge all those with influence over the situation to use it in the cause of peace, to support efforts to end the violence, restore order and return to the path of transition."

Several countries have already shown their desire to resolve the situation by reaching out to the Sudanese leaders. For example, in a tweet posted on the day violence erupted, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said: "We call on the brothers in Sudan to quickly stop military operations, exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation, and give priority to the interest of the brotherly Sudanese people by preserving their gains and capabilities, and to return to the framework agreement that aims to reach a political declaration that achieves security, stability and prosperity for Sudan and its brotherly people." And the UAE Embassy in Khartoum stated the "importance of de-escalation and working toward finding a peaceful solution to the crisis between the concerned parties."

In a nutshell, the armed conflict in Sudan could quickly spiral out of control, exacerbate the nation's refugee crisis and potentially spill over to neighboring countries, which would have severe repercussions for the whole region. This is why the existence of functioning humanitarian corridors and mediation are critical at this time. (Courtesy: Arab News)

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a Harvard-educated Iranian-American political scientist.

IS New civil war fears rise

Sound of air strikes echoes in Khartoum as US pushes for truce

Hundreds of people have been killed in nearly two weeks of conflict between the army and a rival paramilitary force

KHARTOUM: The United States and African nations were racing to secure an extension of a ceasefire in Sudan on Thursday...

Many foreign nationals remain stuck in Sudan despite an exodus marking one of the largest such evacuations since the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces from Afghanistan in 2021.

At least 512 people have been killed and close to 4,200 wounded by the fighting since April 15.



An evacuated to Jordan by plane, expressed shock at how the violence had begun suddenly and with such intensity.

nation where a third of the 46 million people were already reliant on humanitarian aid.

stopped operating. Much of the fighting has been focused in Khartoum, where RSF fighters have embedded themselves in residential areas...

Deadly clashes broke out in Geneina in West Darfur on Tuesday and Wednesday, resulting in looting and civilian deaths...

Tension had been building for months between Sudan's army and the RSF, which together toppled a civilian government in an October 2021 coup.

The friction was brought to a head by an internationally-backed plan to launch a new transition towards elections and a government led by civilian parties.

A final deal was due to be signed earlier in April, on the fourth anniversary of the overthrow of long-ruling Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir in a popular uprising.

Russia: No plan for nuclear escalation

Russia has strongly criticized the supply of Western arms to Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russia does not intend to take the path of nuclear escalation in its standoff with the West over Ukraine but others should not test its patience...



Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, a close Putin ally, said earlier this week that the world was "quite probably on the verge of a new world war."

Putin casts the 14-month war in Ukraine — something he calls a "special military operation" — as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West...

nation and put it to the test in practice," she added.

Russia has strongly criticized the supply of Western arms to Ukraine and the expansion of the NATO military alliance closer to its borders.

The United States and its allies have condemned Russia's war in Ukraine as an imperial land grab. Ukraine has vowed to fight until all Russian troops withdraw from its territory...

Australia to overhaul immigration system

For smooth entry for skilled workers

SYDNEY: Australia proposed on Thursday overhauling its immigration system to speed up getting highly skilled workers into the country and smoothening the path to permanent residency.



steps would be taken to retain international students.

Temporary skilled visa holders, who had been denied even the opportunity to apply for permanent residency, will be able to do that by the end of this year, O'Neil said.

The federal Labor government said the current system used to select skilled migrants — the points test — will be modified to identify people with the correct skill sets the Australian economy needs going forward.

tantly, it is failing Australians. That cannot continue," Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said in a speech at the National Press Club.

Germany, to lure more skilled migrants, with the surge in demand exacerbated by an aging population.

In September, Australia raised its intake of permanent migrants to 195,000 this financial year, up by 35,000, to help businesses battling widespread staff shortages and pledged more staff and funds to speed up visa processing.

"Our migration system... is broken. It is failing our businesses, it is failing migrants themselves. And most impor-

Australia has been competing with comparable countries, like Canada and

Germany, to lure more skilled migrants, with the surge in demand exacerbated by an aging population.

Inflation in developed nations raises concerns for US economy

NEW YORK: That core consumer price indexes in major developed economies remain high has not only led to disagreement on their future monetary policies, but also increased concerns about their economic outlook...

The overall eurozone inflation slowed to 6.9 percent in March, but core prices, which excludes energy, food, and alcohol and tobacco prices, rose to a 5.7 percent record high.

Japan, too, has struggled with its core inflation figures. Japan's core CPI excluding fresh food rose 3.1 percent year-on-year in March, rising for the 19th consecutive month.

The situation in the US is more typical. In March the US' CPI rose 5 percent from a year before, down 1 percentage point from February, but core prices rose 5.6 percent, up from 5.5 percent in February.

Advanced economies are facing a somewhat similar conundrum, that is, monetary policy needs to find a solution that balances the interests of all parties by suppressing inflation, avoiding recession, and dealing with financial risks.

China holds summit to boost digital development



FUZHOU: UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Li Junhua delivers a video address at the opening ceremony of the 6th Digital China Summit in Fuzhou, southeast China's Fujian Province, April 27, 2023.

Li Shulei, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, delivered a keynote speech at the opening ceremony.

Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Leung Chun-ying also attended the event. The two-day summit focuses on showcasing the latest achievements of the Digital China initiative, and on sharing experience in digital development.

Giant panda Ya Ya arrives in Shanghai

BEIJING: Female giant panda Ya Ya arrived in Shanghai from the United States at 4:26 p.m. (Beijing Time) on Thursday, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.



Accompanied by veterinarians and other related workers, Ya Ya is now heading to a special quarantine site set up by the Shanghai Zoo, where she will stay for a month.

The zoo has prepared abundant bamboo and supplementary foods for the 23-year-old panda. An expert team from the Beijing Zoo will stay at the quarantine site to attend to her needs during the period.

The team will provide nursing, health monitoring, diagnosis and treatment for the aging panda to help her adapt to life back home.

Ya Ya was born at the Beijing Zoo on Aug. 3, 2000. She and fellow giant panda Le Le arrived at the Memphis Zoo in April 2003 as envoys of friendship, and they were warmly welcomed.

Sadly, Le Le died of heart disease in February this year, ahead of the pair's scheduled return to China. The remains of the 25-year-old panda were repatriated on the same flight as Ya Ya today.

IS Pakistani expert

BRI is future of global youth development

2023 marks the 10-year anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. Qaiser Nawab, an international expert on the Belt and Road Initiative, sat down for an exclusive interview with China Daily in Beijing.

Q: There's been a narrative among Western media and politicians that China has used "debt-trap diplomacy" to expand its influence, burdening countries with debt to dominate their economic and political agendas. What's your take on this? Is China's "debt trap" a myth?

A: The debt trap is a myth. China's commitment to harmonious coexistence and its 21st-century socialist economic model has been instrumental in uplift-

ing the lives of its citizens and, indeed, those of other nations around the globe. This model, which emphasizes state-led investment in infrastructure, innovation and social programs, has enabled China to become a global economic powerhouse and significantly reduce poverty levels within its borders.

Q: What do you think is the BRI's biggest contribution to Pakistan? What benefits has it brought to its economy and people?

A: Pakistan has been a major beneficiary of the Belt and Road Initiative, thanks to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The CPEC has provided a significant boost to Pakistan's economy by facilitating energy and infrastructure development, generating employment opportunities and enhancing regional connectivity.

Q: China has signed over 200 Belt and Road cooperation documents with more than 140 countries and more than 30 international organizations. What are your expectations for the future development of the BRI?

A: I believe the BRI is the future of youth development and it is a ray of hope that can connect the youth and bring prosperity to them. During my visit to different countries, youth are showing deep interest in BRI-related job opportunities.

Q: What do you think of Chinese modernization in terms of bringing peace and stability to the globe?



(Courtesy: China Daily)

**Bull & Bears**  
**PSX 100-Share**  
**Index Fluctuation**

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index		
Current	Prev. Close	
41,463.91	41,099.58	
Day's High	Day's Low:	
41,518.74	41,081.07	
Index Value	Change	
5,161,192,012	+364.33	
Percentage	Time	
+0.89%	27 Apr, 2023 5:00 pm	
Europe: FTSE 100 Index		
Index Value	Change	
7,831.58	-21.06	
Percentage	Time	
-0.27%	27 Apr, 4:35 pm GMT+1	
USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average		
Index Value	Change	
33,576.63	+274.76	
Percentage	Time	
+0.83%	27 Apr, 11:52 am GMT-4	
Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average		
Index Value	Change	
28,457.68	+41.21	
Percentage	Time	
+0.15%	27 Apr, 3:15 pm GMT+9	
Open Market Forex Rates		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	188	190
Bahrain Dinar	753.9	756.36
Canadian Dollar	212	214.5
China Yuan	40.9	41.3
Danish Krone	41.73	42.13
Euro	315.5	318.5
Hong Kong Dollar	36.24	36.59
Indian Rupee	3.47	3.58
Japanese Yen	2.2	2.25
Kuwaiti Dinar	925.95	926.06
Malaysian Ringgit	64.96	65.56
New Zealand \$	173.87	174.47
Norwegians Krone	27.93	28.23
Omani Riyal	736.27	744.27
Qatari Riyal	78.6	79.3
Saudi Riyal	76.2	77
Singapore Dollar	213	215
Swedish Korona	27.32	27.62
Swiss Franc	317.72	320.22
Thai Bhat	8.33	8.48
U.A.E Dirham	78.2	79
UK Pound Sterling	360	363
US Dollar	288	290.3

**Urea**  
**production by**  
**FFC stands at**  
**633 thousand**  
**tonnes**

**Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD: Fauji Fertilizer Company Limited (FFC) has announced its financial results for the period ended March 31, 2023 in its Board of Directors' meeting held on Thursday.

Urea production by the Company stood at 633 thousand tonnes whereas sales were recorded at 631 thousand tonnes, same as last year.

The Company continued to face economic challenges including very high level inflation, escalating GST rates, increased interest rates, besides continued devaluation of the Pak rupee, negatively impacting the operating and financing costs of the Company. Shortage of foreign currency reserves have also caused delay in procurement of essential spares and machinery.

The increase in interest rates enabled the Company to earn income on deposits of Rs 3.5 billion. This income also included an unrealized exchange gain of Rs 930 million earned on the foreign exchange deposits of the Company due to devaluation of Pak rupee.

The net profitability of the Company thus stood at Rs 7.7 billion with earnings per share of Rs. 6.08 per share compared to Rs 4.90 per share for 2022. The profitability in dollar terms however declined to USD 30 million compared to USD 35 million last year.

The Board of Directors of FFC have announced first interim dividend of Rs 4.26 per share, for the first quarter of 2023.

# Influential sugar mafia robbing poor masses

*Dr. Hanif Mughal says uncontrolled exports, smuggling will push up the prices to Rs200 per kg*

**Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Hanif Mughal, Senior Vice President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW) on Thursday said powerful sugar mafia is depriving poor masses of billion of rupees by constantly increasing the price of the commodity.

Inflation is increasing due to the increase in the price of sugar and if the indiscriminate export and smuggling of sugar is not stopped, its price will reach two hundred rupees per kg, he said.

Dr. Hanif Mughal said in a statement issued here that the consumption of sugar in the country is five million tonnes and an increase of one rupee per kg in its price increases the burden of five billion rupees on the public, which is transferred to the coffers of the sugar mafia.

He said that before the export of sugar, many circles had expressed the fear of its price hike,



but the warning were ignored to please the influential.

The political interest and the acquisition of wealth are always more important than the interest of the people for the rulers, he said.

Mughal said that the sugar which was available at 95 rupees a kg a few months ago is now available at 120 to 140 rupees in different parts of the country and its price is set to increase.

In the months of February and March last year, not even a kg of sugar was exported. But this year, in the same two months 172,180 tonnes has been exported, and the process continued during the April.

In the month of March, three times more sugar was exported than in February. While in April, May and June, the speed of exports will be increased to provide benefit of billions to the sugar mafia at the cost of masses, he lamented.

He said that orders of a crackdown against sugar smugglers, hoarders, and profiteers issued in the mid of this month was nothing but an eyewash.

## Steps needed to increase cotton production in Multan Division: Amir

**Asim Tanveer**

MULTAN: The Chief Minister of Punjab has ordered to take measures on an emergency basis to increase cotton production in Multan division like the whole province. These views were expressed by Commissioner Amir Khattak while presiding over the cotton cultivation review meeting. He said that cotton production has been decreasing for the past several years. Preparation of quality seed is indispensable for improving the crop. Supply of quality seed should be ensured with the consultation of experts.

Aamir Khattak said that cotton is white gold and an important source of foreign exchange. Steps should be taken to increase the production of cotton per acre. On this occasion, giving special suggestions on increasing the production of cotton, the well-known industrialist Khawaja Anis said that the need of cotton in the country is one and a half million bales. The current production of cotton in Pakistan is 46 lakh. There is a lump. The problems of farmers and cotton gins need to be solved.

## Robust Growth

# MCB posts profit before tax Rs23.02b in Q1

**Staff Reporter**

LAHORE: The Board of Directors of MCB Bank Limited (MCB) in its meeting held under the Chairmanship of Mian Mohammad Mansha on April 27, 2023, reviewed the performance of the Bank and approved the condensed interim financial statements for the first quarter ended March 31, 2023. The Board of Directors has declared first interim cash dividend of Rs. 6.0 per share i.e. 60% for the quarter ended March 31, 2023.

With a strong build up in core earnings, MCB's Profit Before Tax (PBT) for the first quarter of 2023 increased to Rs. 23 billion with an impressive growth of 54%. Profit After Tax (PAT) posted a growth of 46% to reach Rs. 13 billion; translating into an Earning Per Share (EPS) of Rs. 11.02 compared to EPS of Rs. 7.52 reported



in corresponding period last year.

On the back of strong volumetric growth in current account and timely repositioning within the asset book, net interest income for 1Q'23 increased by 66% over corresponding period last year. YoY average current deposits of the Bank registered a remarkable growth of Rs. 178 billion (+31%).

Non-markup income increased to Rs.

5.9 billion (+3%) against Rs. 5.7 billion in the corresponding period last year with major contributions coming in from fee commission income. The Bank registered a growth of 27% in fee commission with income from trade and guarantee business up by 59%, cards related income up by 42% and income from home remittances up by 39%.

The Bank continues to manage an efficient operating expense base and manage costs prudently.

Amidst an exceptionally persistent high-inflation, impact of sharp currency devaluation and rapidly escalating fuel and utility costs, the operating expenses of the Bank reported at Rs. 11.8 billion (+25%). The cost to income ratio of the Bank improved significantly to 32.77% from 39.65% reported in corresponding period last year.

# Soneri Bank posts profit before tax Rs2,694m

**Our Correspondent**

KARACHI: The Board of Directors of Soneri Bank Limited, in their 198th meeting held in Karachi on Thursday, approved the Bank's condensed interim financial statements for the quarter ended 31 March 2023.

The Bank posted profit before tax (PBT) of Rs. 2,694 million and profit after tax (PAT) of Rs. 1,489 million for the quarter ended March 2023, as compared to Rs. 917 million and Rs. 543 million respectively in the same period last year. The Bank's EPS was recorded at Rs. 1.3506 per share for the current reporting quarter, as compared to Re. 0.4921 for the comparative prior period indicating an impressive growth of 174.46 percent. The Bank's Net Interest Income for the quarter improved significantly

to Rs. 4,839 million, growing by 68.10 percent against Rs. 2,879 million reported for the same period last year, mainly due to improved yields. Non-interest income for the period was reported at Rs. 1,770 million as against Rs. 841 million for the comparative prior period.

Growth in expenses was restricted at 25.31 percent as compared to the prior period with Non-markup expenses reported at Rs. 3,497 million for the current quarter.

The bank's Deposits registered an increase of 8.14 percent when compared to 31 December 2022, ending at Rs. 443,004 million at 31 March 2023. Period end CASA mix improved to 79.86 percent as against 79.19 percent at 31 December 2022. More importantly, the Bank's CA mix improved to 33.37 percent in March

2023 as against 32.73 percent at December 2022, with period end Current Accounts at Rs. 147,828 million at 31 March 2023 as against Rs. 134,080 million at the year end.

The Bank's net advances portfolio stood at Rs. 173,798 million as at 31 March 2023, 16.62 percent lower than the year end 2022 level. Net investments however, witnessed a volumetric increase of Rs.44,059 million or 17.08 percent from the year-end balance of Rs. 258,007 million, ending at Rs. 302,066 million as at 31 March 2023.

The Board of Directors recognized and appreciated the efforts of the management in meeting most Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) amidst challenging times. The Board expects that with continued efforts, the Bank would be able to deliver on its targeted KPIs over the course of the year.

# First Fund launched under Digital AMC Framework

**Staff Reporter**

KARACHI: The recent economic situation in Pakistan has put a large population to face job insecurities and economic hardships due to various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic, floods, and economic downturns. Families without a steady income are particularly vulnerable during these challenging times. With the absence of a citizen-friendly and efficient safety net in Pakistan, the citizens are left with no option to plan and secure their economic future.

Realizing the economic hardships that the country and its citizens are going through, Mahaana Wealth has launched Pakistan's first fixed income Islamic fund under the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan's (SECP) Digital

Asset Management Company (AMC) framework. The launch of this fund marks a major milestone in Pakistan's financial landscape, as the first digital asset management company goes live in the country. The fund will be offered to a limited number of clients till commercial launch is allowed by SECP.

This Shariah-compliant Money Market fund offers a secure and stable investment option that aims to provide investors with a potential profit rate of up to 20%, which is significantly higher than the profit rates currently offered by Islamic banks in Pakistan, hovering around 8-10%. CIO, Mahaana Wealth, Mubashir Zuberi, said "We strive to provide higher savings & investments return to retail investors, which were previously available only to the high-net-worth individuals."

# Nestlé Pakistan reports first quarter sales

**Staff Reporter**

LAHORE: Nestlé Pakistan reported first quarter sales for 2023, of PKR 49.5 billion. The figures reflect a growth of 31.3% compared to the same period last year. The operating profit also improved, as a result of sales growth, favorable product mix and tighter control on fixed costs.

The results were shared at the end of the Company's Board of Directors' meeting at its Head Office.

The Company's focus on its growth pillars as well as a

favorable portfolio mix and pricing management initiatives attributed to the boost in revenue. The improvement in financial results was achieved despite external challenges of record high inflation and commodity prices, increased taxation, currency devaluation, reduced imports due to limited availability of foreign exchange along with remnant impacts of the devastating floods of 2022.

The Company maintains a cautious outlook for the rest of the year in view of the continuing external challenges.

# ATM to welcome over 2,000 exhibitors from over 150 countries

**Spokesman Report**

DUBAI: Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023 is ready to welcome the global travel, tourism and hospitality community to the UAE from Monday 1 to Thursday 4 May. The 30th edition of the show will host over 2,000 exhibitors, representatives from more than 150 countries and an anticipated 34,000 attendees.

Taking place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) in collaboration with the emirate's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), this year's conference will once again form a central component of the UAE's annual Arabian Travel Week.

In line with its theme, 'Working Towards Net Zero', ATM 2023 will provide a forum in which participants can forge new connections, share knowledge and showcase innovations with the potential to expedite the global travel sector's journey towards decarbonisation.

Vasyli Zhgalo, Managing Director of IHG Middle East and Portfolio Director of WTM, IBTM and RX, said: "Following the very successful WTM Africa and WTM Latin America earlier this spring it is great to now see the international travel community engage with Arabian Travel Market. We've seen a robust increase in exhibitor growth across all show areas and it's exciting to be able to welcome back our Chinese colleagues after remaining Covid restrictions were lifted in

the region."

"With sustainability an ever-increasing consideration for the travel industry, and indeed across the WTM and IBTM event portfolios, it's never been more important for the sector to interact with ATM 2023's theme, 'Working Towards Net Zero' and explore the vast array of business trends and opportunities showcased around this topic at the show."

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, added: "ATM 2023 will provide a platform for a diverse array of public and private-sector speakers, all of whom will offer expert insights into sustainable travel trends, responsible tourism and a host of other industry-critical issues."

"Our opening session, for instance, will see policymakers take to the ATM Global Stage for a ministerial debate on how travel can tackle the climate crisis," Curtis continued. "Moderated by CNN's Eleni Giokos, this panel will see His Excellency Abdullah Bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy; His Excellency Makram Mustafa Abdul Karim Al-Qaisi, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Jordan; His Excellency Minister of Tourism Eng. Walid Nassar, Minister of Tourism, Lebanon; and Sukit Mohanty, Chief of the UNDRR for Arab States; come together to explore the ways in which our industry is working towards net zero."

Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corpo-



From left to right: Haitham Mattar, Managing Director, IHG Hotels & Resorts; HE Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, part of DET; Vasyli Zhgalo, Managing Director, RX Middle East / Portfolio Director WTM and IBTM, RX; Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director for the Middle East, Arabian Travel Market; and Adnan Kazim, Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates.

ration for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, commented: "It is indeed fitting that this year's ATM theme focusses on sustainability to build a better future for tourism. For us, this theme assumes even greater significance as 2023 is UAE's Year of Sustainability and Dubai will be hosting COP28, the UN Climate Change Conference. Dubai has made significant strides in this area, with strategies to reduce carbon footprint and create a more environmentally conscious tourism industry, aligned with the ambition of our visionary leadership to make Dubai the best city in the world

to visit, live, and work in. As momentum continues to accelerate across the global tourism and MICE segments, we welcome the pursuit of a more evolved, collaborative, inclusive and long-term approach to sustainable growth and practices for the industry."

Adnan Kazim, Chief Commercial Officer at Emirates, said: "As we celebrate 30 years of partnership and commitment at ATM, it's remarkable to see this event's evolution and growing prominence on the global stage. We are proud of the role we have played in the growth of ATM and strengthening its mindshare as an

industry event, as well as the growth of our home city Dubai, which is at the forefront of global tourism. This year, Emirates will be showcasing our latest products, connecting with our industry partners as well as demonstrating our commitment to minimise our environmental impact and sustainable aviation practices."

Haitham Mattar, Managing Director of IHG Hotels & Resorts, added: "As the official hotel partner for ATM 2023, we look forward to the event's momentous 30th edition. It is a fantastic opportunity to showcase our wide-ranging portfolio of hotels in the region, introduce new and upcoming hotels and delve further into our new IHG One Rewards' loyalty offering for both leisure and business travellers. Given the theme of this year's event, 'Working towards Net Zero,' we will also be showcasing our commitments to drive environmental and social change across our estate. Most importantly, we will be focussed on connecting with new and existing partners, suppliers and industry peers to ensure we facilitate greater, collective success for the hospitality sector at large."

The 30th edition of ATM will take place as part of Arabian Travel Week, a festival of events dedicated to enabling industry professionals from all over the world to collaborate and capitalise on market opportunities through exhibitions, conferences, breakfast briefings, awards, product launches and networking events.

## Pak vs NZ

# Fakhar scores century as Pakistan win first ODI by 5 wickets

## Babar Azam misses half-century by just one run

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan took 1-0 lead in the ODI series against New Zealand as they chased down 289 runs target for the loss of five wickets, thanks to Fakhar Zaman's ninth ODI century in Rawalpindi stadium on Thursday.

Pakistan were given a great start as their openers Fakhar Zaman and Imam-ul-Haq as they scored their seventh opening partnership century.

They added 124 runs for the opening wicket, before Imam-ul-Haq was dismissed by Ish Sodhi after scoring 60 runs.

Babar Azam also looked in great touch as he added 90 runs for the second wicket partnership with Fakhar Zaman but he was dismissed just one run short of another fifty.

Fakhar Zaman stayed there and went on to score his ninth ODI century and was dismissed after scoring 117 runs.

Shan Masood (1) and Salman



Ali Agha (7) could not enter the double digits and Pakistan lost their fifth wicket for 273 runs.

But Muhammad Rizwan

stayed strong and remained unbeaten on 42 off 34 balls as they reached the target in the 49th over.

The second ODI will be played on Saturday, 29th April as Pakistan are looking for the top spot in ODI rankings with a whitewash.

Pakistan elected to field first after winning the toss and New Zealand's openers added 48 runs, before Chad Bowes was dismissed by Haris Rauf for 18 runs.

Will Young and Daryl Mitchell had a century partnership for the second wicket, which made their position strong.

Will Young became victim of Shadab Khan after scoring 86 runs and missed his second ODI century by just 14 runs.

New Zealand's skipper Tom Latham could add 20 runs on the 36 balls he faced and was trapped LBW by Shaheen Shah Afridi when the tourists lost their third wicket for 222 runs.

The hero of New Zealand from the T20I series, Mark Chapman was bowled by Haris Rauf for 15 runs but Daryl Mitchell reached his century.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf took two wickets whereas Shadab Khan picked got one scalp. Agencies

## Babar Azam becomes 2nd fastest Asian batter to score 12000 runs

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Cricket Team's skipper Babar Azam got his name registered in the record books once again, as he became second fastest Asian batter to score 12,000 International runs, in the match against New Zealand on Thursday.

Babar Azam, who already has record for being the fastest Asian batter to score 10,000 and 11,000 International runs, failed to level Virat Kohli's record by difference of one inning only.

Virat Kohli had done it in 276 matches whereas Babar Azam did it in 277 matches. Sir Vivian Richards holds the world record for scoring 12,000 runs in 255 innings only.

Last year, Babar Azam had levelled Virat Kohli's world record for fastest 3000 runs by reaching the milestone in 81 innings against England.

Babar Azam is also on verge of becoming the fastest batter to score 5000 ODI runs as he has more than 4850 runs already and might break this record in this series.

Hashim Amla had completed 5000 ODI runs in 101 innings whereas Babar Azam is playing his 94th ODI innings in the first ODI against New Zealand.

Babar Azam has scored 29 centuries and 80 half-centuries in his 277 innings. Agencies

## Saim Ayub gets call for Pakistan Zimbabwe tour

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Team's left-hand batter Saim Ayub got a call from Pakistan Shaheens for the tour of Zimbabwe after Sahibzada Farhan got injured.

Opening batter Sahibzada Farhan got his thumb injured during the training camp in Karachi, where team were practicing at the Hanif Muhammad High Performance Centre.

Saim Ayub would not travel with Pakistan Shaheens, as the team will play four-day matches first and One-Day matches would be played later.

The young batter will travel with team consultant Abdul Rehman on 13 May, who was also coach of the side in Afghanistan series.

Saim Ayub had made his debut in the same series and he would be hoping to impress in the 50-over format as well.

Pakistan Shaheens Squad

Imran Butt (captain) (Lahore), Hussain Talat (vice-captain) (Lahore), Aamir Jamal (Islamabad), Abdul Wahid Bangalzai (Quetta), Haseebullah (Quetta), Kamran Ghulam (Peshawar), Mehran Mumtaz (Rawalpindi), Mir Hamza (Karachi), Mohammad Ali (Sialkot), Mohammad Huraira (Sialkot), Mubasir Khan (Islamabad), Omair Bin Yousuf (Karachi), Qasim Akram (Lahore), Rohail Nazir (wicketkeeper) (Islamabad) and Shah Nawaz Dahani (Larkana). Saim Ayub (Karachi, 50-over matches only), Asif Mehmood (Hyderabad), Athar Mehmood (Gujranwala), Saad Khan (Hyderabad) and Waqar Ahmad (Peshawar) (all reserves)

## PSB welcomes sports enthusiasts at its multiple sports facilities

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The South Asian Games is a quadrennial multi-sport event held among the athletes from South Asia. South Asia Olympic Council (SAOC), the governing body of these games allocated 14th Edition of South Asian Games which will be held in 2024. Repair/Renovation/Up gradation work of sports facilities of Sports Complex Islamabad and Coaching Centres is underway to make them of international standards so that the Games could be held in a befitting manner. Due to repair/renovation/up gradation work, some facilities were temporarily closed for the safety of athletes and members. However, most of the facilities like Lawn Tennis Courts, Fitness Gym, Athletics Track & Football fields, Liaquat Gymnasium, Sportsperson Hostels are opened for members and national training camps of various sports disciplines are in progress since long. Besides, a number of sports events have been organized by public & private sector educational & other organizations at sports complex Islamabad during the last 1 year. Rodham Hall and Hamidi Hall will also be inaugurated in 2nd week of May 2023 whereas, Swimming Pool will be opened in 1st week of July 2023. The management of Pakistan Sports Board is making its efforts best to get readily available the sports facilities after improvement for the athletes and general public as soon as possible.

## China's Si reaches semifinals at snooker World Championship

LONDON: China's debutant Si Jiahui edged out Anthony McGill 13-12 to reach the semifinals at the Snooker World Championship in Sheffield on Wednesday.

Si, 20, grabbed his chance to play at the Crucible Theatre for the first time after winning three matches in the qualifiers. The world No. 80 then saw off 2005 champion Shaun Murphy and veteran Robert Milkins to set up a clash with McGill.

In a seesaw encounter, Si kept his cool to beat the 32-year-old McGill, who reached the quarterfinals at the World Championship for the third time in four years. Xinhua

# Pakistan wins Int'l Team Match in Smart City 62nd National Golf

Tahir Amin Malik

LAHORE: The Pakistan Golf Federation backed Smart City 62nd National Amateur Golf Championship brings glad tidings for the Pakistan Team as they win the International Team Match by beating players from Sri Lanka and also the Pakistan B Team players. This International Team Match Contest was played over two days (36 holes) and the Pakistan Team A comprising of Salman Jehangir and Qasim Ali Khan emerged as the victorious team with two rounds aggregate scores of 300. Their main adversaries from Sri Lanka, R. A. U. Akash Priyamantha and M. H. Chalitha Pushpika had to be content with the runners up position with a team aggregate score of 308. Pakistan Team B with team members Omar Khalid and Hussain Hamid also achieved the score of 308 but Sri Lanka was awarded runners up position as one of their players had a better score in the second round. This was in accordance with the Championship Rules.

National Golf Championships are always loaded with twists and turns and in keeping with that pattern the

second round of this Smart City 62nd National Golf Championship at the Lahore Gymkhana Golf Course saw quite a few strong aspirants fall out of the race for success as they lost strokes with gay abandon either through inaccurate hitting or lack of crispness in their approach shots to the green.

The new leader, at the end of the second round remains M. Shoaib of Lahore Gymkhana in this four rounds championship. This young man came up with a feast of stroke making and during the 18 holes on Thursday, he bore the pressure well and translated his potential into a score that helps him to retain top position on the leaderboard. As a leader he has two rounds scores of 71 and 73 and an aggregate of 144. Placed three strokes behind him are two relentlessly efficient players Salman Jehangir and Ahmed Zafar Hayat. Salman is at 147 by virtue of two rounds scores of 72 and 75 and Ahmed Zafar Hayat owes his meritorious posi-



tion to scores of 76 in the first round and an outstanding 71 in the second round. Others hoping to stay in the winning loop after their two rounds effort are Chalitha Pushpika of Sri Lanka followed by Nouman Ilyas and Danyaal Jehangir (Gymkhana). Chalitha is placed at an aggregate score of 151 and Nouman and Danyaal are at 152. At 153 are Qasim Ali Khan (Pakistan) and Dean Naime (Egypt). Just one stroke behind at 154 are five competitors and they are Hussain Hamid, Omar Khalid, Umair Saleem, Sameer Itikhar and Saad Habib Malik.

In the Inter Provincial Team Match, the Punjab Golf Association Team is in the forefront with two rounds team scores of 451, followed by Federal Golf Association Team A at 467 and Sind Golf Association at 469.

And in the Inter Association Team Match for Senior Amateurs, the Punjab Team comprising of Sardar Murad, Tariq Mehmood, Air Cdre Tariq Usman and Col Asif Mehdi (Captain) won the title

with a team score of 475. Runners up Team is Sind Golf Association composed of adept players Khurram Khan, Azhar Abbas, Khalid Jameel Siddiqui and M. A. Mannan. Sind Golf Association had a team score of 507.

Ladies entered the contest yesterday and the total entrants numbered 22 with two from Qatar namely Eve Sofia Garvey (handicap 4) and Nida Mir (handicap 1). Tremendously excited about their chances, the lady contestants played the first round of 18 holes devotedly enough and demonstrated good rhythm in their golf swings. Leading contenders after first 18 holes were Humna Amjad and Parkha Ijaz bracketed as leaders with a gross score of 77. Aania Farooq Syed is at 79. Others carded modest scores. Suneya Osama had a round of 85 and Eve Sofiya Garvey (Qatar) also played 85. Amina Tiwana played 87 as did Ana James Gill. Dania Syed and Bushra Fatima scored 88. Those who lag behind are Ghazala Yasmin, Zain un Nisa and Nida Mir (Qatar).

The third round of the Smart City 62nd National Amateur Golf Championship will be played today and final round on Saturday.

# Ronaldo considering options for next chapter in football career

DUBAI: Portuguese football icon Cristiano Ronaldo has reportedly decided to leave Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr, as Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has offered him an ambassadorial role at his former club.

The news follows reports of Ronaldo's desire to remain in Europe and his attempts to secure a return to Real Madrid, where he became a legend during his nine seasons at the Santiago Bernabeu, scoring 450 goals and providing 131 assists in 438 games. However, Perez blocked Ronaldo's potential return to the club, despite the player's reported desire to do so.

It is understood that the 38-year-old striker, who joined Al Nassr in January, is not looking to retire just yet. With 11 goals in 14 games across competi-



tions for the Saudi Pro League team, he continues to demonstrate his prowess on the pitch. Ronaldo's contract with Al Nassr is said to be worth €200 million per year and is set to expire in 2024.

While Ronaldo's future in football remains uncertain, Perez has reportedly offered him the opportunity to serve as a club ambassador or be part of the sports organisation chart at Real Madrid once he hangs up his boots. Such an offer would allow Ronaldo

to maintain his connection with the club and return to the place where he enjoyed so much success in his playing career.

As for Ronaldo's immediate future, it is unclear which destination he will choose next. With his impressive record of achievement, there is no shortage of clubs who would be eager to secure his services. However, his reported desire to remain in Europe may limit his options somewhat.

Despite the uncertainty, it is clear that Ronaldo's impact on the sport is unlikely to diminish any time soon. With his exceptional talent and dedication to the game, he has become one of the most celebrated footballers of all time, inspiring admiration and awe in fans and fellow players alike. Agencies

## Pelé's name added to dictionary to signify 'unique'

NEW YORK:

Pelé, the late football legend, has been officially associated with the adjectives "exceptional, incomparable, unique".

The Michaelis dictionary, a popular Portuguese-language dictionary in Brazil, has recently added the term "Pelé" as a new adjective to its online edition. The Pelé Foundation launched a campaign to honour the football star, which successfully collected over 125,000 signatures, leading to the inclusion of the word in the dictionary.

Pelé, who passed away at the age of 82 in December, is widely considered to be the greatest footballer in history, having won the World Cup three times — a feat unmatched by any other player. Agencies



# Rayo stun La Liga leaders Barcelona

## Even after 2-1 loss, Xavi's side remain 11 points clear of second-placed Real Madrid

BARCELONA: Rayo Vallecano stunned impotent La Liga leaders Barcelona on Wednesday with a 2-1 win, outplaying the Catalans at a rowdy Vallecas.

Atletico Madrid cut the gap on second-place rivals Real Madrid to two points with a 3-1 win over Real Mallorca, celebrating their 120th anniversary in style.

Xavi Hernandez's Barcelona remain 11 points clear of second-placed Real Madrid with seven matches remaining.

After the champions lost at Girona on Tuesday their hopes of defending the title are virtually over, despite Barcelona following suit with a deserved defeat in the capital.

Xavi's side have won just one of their last four league matches — a narrow triumph over Atletico on Sunday — as they limp towards

the finish line and a first title since 2019.

Barcelona's coach urged his players to be wary of Rayo's threat before the game, but they did not heed his warning. The Catalans have not beaten the Madrid club in their last four league meetings.

"The league is not finished, this is the problem — we have to deserve La Liga, today we deserved defeat," Xavi told reporters.

"What annoys me is that today we did not compete how the game required us to. But we will get players back (from injury), there's another game on Saturday.

"Here a lot of teams have lost, and others have had a lot of trouble winning. Luckily, there's another game on Saturday."

The coach was without suspended captain Sergio Busquets but handed Pedri his

first start since he was injured in February.

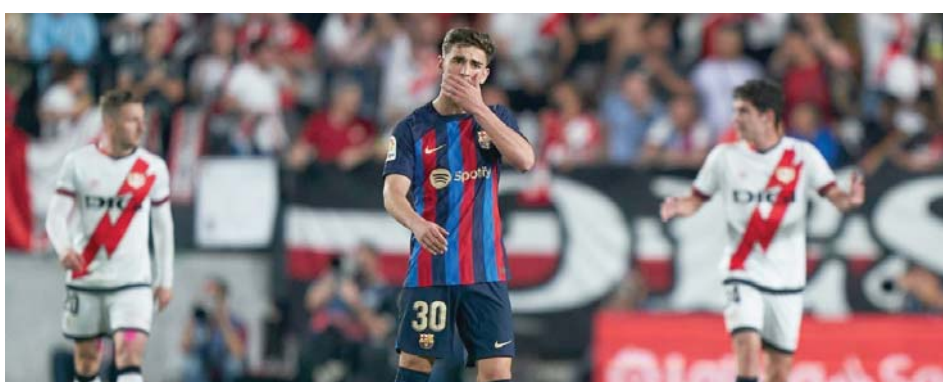
Rayo broke the deadlock early on when Alvaro Garcia drilled home across Marc-Andre Stegen and into the bottom corner.

Robert Lewandowski should have equalised for Barcelona but Rayo goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski denied the forward one-on-one, and then the Pole had a goal ruled out for offside.

Rayo doubled their lead after the break when left-back Fran Garcia pressed Frankie de Jong, collected the ball and drove on to score.

"We knew that it was an important day for us, they say the giant-killers are back," said Fran Garcia.

"The atmosphere can't be described... we want to give it back in the best way possible."



Lewandowski pulled one back for Barcelona after Franck Kessie's shot was blocked, ending a run of four games without a goal for the division's top scorer.

Rayo held on for only their second win in their last 11 league matches — and third in four games against Barca for coach

Andoni Iraola.

Diego Simeone's Atletico Madrid, on the club's 120th anniversary, put on an entertaining display in their win over Mallorca with Antoine Griezmann at the heart of it once again.

The forward produced two assists as Rodrigo de Paul, Alva-

ro Morata and Yannick Carrasco struck for the hosts at the Metropolitanano.

After Real Madrid were thumped 4-2 by Girona on Tuesday, Atletico capitalised to reel in their neighbours.

Atletico, wearing special blue and white kits at home to mark

the occasion of their anniversary — the design was based on their first ever shirt — had their celebrations disrupted early on.

"It's impossible not to get stuck in with this atmosphere," Someone told DAZN.

"After such a bad start (to the season), to get back on our feet fills me with pride, because it was not easy."

Matija Nastasic put Mallorca ahead against the run of play after 20 minutes, heading in from a corner.

De Paul equalised in first-half stoppage time after Predrag Rajkovic parried from Griezmann, but the Frenchman laid the rebound across for his team-mate to finish.

Atletico took the lead early in the second period when Nahuel Molina crossed for Morata to powerfully head home. AFP