



FM seeks closer ties with UNDP for climate resilience, SDGs

Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar has expressed Pakistan's desire to enhance cooperation with the UNDP in strengthening climate resilience, adaptation, and pursuing Sustainable Development Goals and socio-economic development. He made these remarks during a meeting with Assistant Secretary-General of the UNDP, Kanni Wignaraja on Wednesday. (Details on Page 8)



Ex-Google executive Tania Aidrus back to Digital Pakistan project

Tania Aidrus, who headed Digital Pak initiative in Dec 2019, became part of the federal govt's digitalisation project, yet again, following the approval of incumbent PM Shehbaz Sharif. Tania Aidrus, a former Chief of Staff and Head of Strategic Initiatives on the Next Billion Users (NBU) team at the US tech giant, was appointed as "convener" of the Digital Pakistan committee, a notification issued by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication read.

Simultaneously published from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan

PM calls for

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a briefing regarding various developmental projects of the Sindh Government, in Karachi on Wednesday.



Photo: PID

PM calls for joint efforts to ensure Pakistan's economic uplift

The Prime Minister announced to give 150 buses in a pool of 300 buses

Our Correspondent

KARACHI: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has called for harmony among federal and provincial governments and collective efforts to bring economic stability in the country.

Addressing the meeting of Sindh cabinet along with Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah in Karachi on Wednesday, Shehbaz Sharif said his visit is aimed to take all the provinces on board for the development projects.

He said Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz respects mandate of all parties and we must now work together for the development and prosperity of the country.

The Prime Minister said that recent visits of the foreign delegations are a welcome sign.

He said new agreements with neighboring and friendly countries and establishment of border markets will boost

trade. Shehbaz Sharif said the visits of Saudi Arabian and Iranian delegations will increase foreign investment and strengthen economy of the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Sindh Chief Minister informed the Prime Minister about the financial problems of the province.

He informed that the School Rehabilitation Project, Barrages Project, and Solid Waste Project are pending with the Federal Government for necessary approval.

The Prime Minister directed the Federal Finance Minister to resolve the financial issues.

On the request of Transport Minister Sharjeel Memon, the Prime Minister announced to give 150 buses in a pool of 300 buses.

He also directed to resolve the issue of K-4 water project and Karachi Circular Railway project.

Pak, Iran agree on swift FTA finalisation

Both countries target \$10 billion trade over five years

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Iran agreed to expeditiously finalize the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and boost their bilateral trade to USD10 billion over the next five years through joint economic projects, setting up of joint border markets, economic free zones, and new border openings. The bilateral ties and cooperations were discussed during the delegation-level talks between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Iran's President Dr. Seyed Ebrahim Raisi who was on an official visit to Pakistan from April 22-24, accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, as well as other members of the cabinet and senior officials.

Agreeing to turn the common border from a 'border of peace' to a 'border of prosperity', both countries reiterated the importance of cooperation in the energy domain, including trade in electricity, power transmission lines and Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project, according



to a joint statement issued by Foreign Office on the culmination of Raisi's visit on Wednesday. Both sides underscored the imperative of a long-term durable economic partnership and collaborative regional economic and connectivity model, particularly for socio-economic development in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan and Pakistan's Balochistan provinces. The two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of Pakistan-Iran bilateral

relations, exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual concern, and signed multiple accords. Pakistan and Iran reiterated their commitment and dedication to further strengthening the bilateral fraternal relations by promoting academic, cultural and tourism activities, and enhancing tourism to historic religious sites.

Both leaders reiterated the importance of forging regular

Both countries agree to designate Reemdan border point as an international border crossing point

cooperation and exchange of views between political, military and security officials of the two countries to combat threats such as terrorism, narcotics smuggling, human trafficking, hostage-taking, money-laundering and abduction. For swift finalization of FTA, both sides agreed to hold the next sessions of Annual Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) and Joint Business Trade Committee (JBTC) as well as the 22nd round of the negotiations of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) soon. They also agreed to facilitate the

regular exchange of economic and technical experts, as well as delegations from chambers of commerce from both countries to intensify economic cooperation.

The declaration of 'Reemdan border point' as an international border crossing point under TIR and opening of the remaining two border sustenance markets was also agreed upon. There was consensus to fully operationalize barter trade mechanisms between the two sides to facilitate economic and commercial activity, particularly under ongoing collaborative endeavours, such as border sustenance markets. Regarding connectivity, two sides expressed satisfaction over the regular shipment of goods under the TIR Convention and agreed to fully operationalize the Convention for further efficient, speedy and barrier-free trade. As members of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the

Continued on Page 8

Govt to provide affordable electricity to consumers: Law Minister

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly resumed its session at the Parliament House in Islamabad on Wednesday with Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in chair.

Responding to a calling attention, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said the government is making all-out efforts to enhance the energy mix to provide affordable electricity to the consumers. He said a plant with the help of China will be set up in Pakistan to manufacture solar panels in the country to reduce cost.

Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar today laid in the House the authenticated copy of President Asif Ali Zardari's address to the joint session of the parliament.

The joint session of both houses of the parliament was assembled on the 18th of this month. Agencies

by illegal settlements. He said the government is committed to retrieve the encroached land from illegal occupants.

Replying to another calling attention notice, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said the government is making all-out efforts to enhance the energy mix to provide affordable electricity to the consumers. He said a plant with the help of China will be set up in Pakistan to manufacture solar panels in the country to reduce cost.

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Ambiguous terms in 'Nikah Nama' can't be used: SC

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that ambiguous terms in the 'Nikah Nama' (marriage contracts) could not be used against women.

"The bride has full freedom to express her consent before the terms and conditions are fixed in the marriage contract. If there is ambiguity or doubt in the terms and conditions of the marriage contract or in any entry or column, then the benefit will be given to the wife," the court observed.

The SC ruling said, "If the marriage certificate is filled by someone else without meaningful consultation of the bride, it cannot be used against the bride. It is settled law that if there is any ambiguity in the terms, it will be determined by the original intention of the parties."

The SC said that the courts should keep the points in mind while interpreting the terms and conditions of a marriage contract. It should be seen whether the bride had full freedom to express her consent before fixing the terms and conditions in the marriage contract. APP

IMF to discuss 'approval of \$1.1b funding for Pakistan on April 29'

Govt seeking new long-term, larger IMF loan

WASHINGTON: The executive board of the International Monetary Fund will meet on April 29 to discuss the approval of \$1.1 billion funding for Pakistan, the fund said on Wednesday.

The funding is the second and last tranche of a \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) with the IMF, which it secured last summer to avert a sovereign default and which runs out this month.

The South Asian nation is seeking a new long-term, larger IMF loan. Pakistan's Finance Minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, has said Islamabad could secure a staff-level agreement on the

new program by early July. Islamabad says it is seeking a loan over at least three years to help macroeconomic



stability and execute a long-due and painful structural reforms, though Aurangzeb has declined to detail what seize of programme the country seeks.

Islamabad is yet to make a formal request, but the Fund and the government are already in discussions. If secured, it would be the

24th IMF bailout for Pakistan.

The \$350 billion economy faces a chronic balance of payment crisis, with nearly \$24 billion to repay in debt and interest over the next fiscal year—three-time more than its central bank's foreign currency reserves.

Pakistan's finance ministry expect the economy to grow by 2.6% in the current fiscal year ending June, while average inflation is projected to stand at 24%, down from 29.2% in fiscal year 2023/2024.

Inflation soared to a record high of 38% last May. Reuters/Agencies

PSX surges past 72,000 points

KARACHI: The bullish trend continued in the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday as the KSE-100 index breached the 72,000 mark for the first time in the bourse's history.

Previously, in a landmark achievement, a record-breaking high was achieved as the PSX crossed 71,000 points on Monday.

During trading today, the PSX gained more than 900 points owing to improved economic metrics. Overall investor confidence, sound financial results, positive economic indicators and a possible reduction in interest rate contributed to the bourse achieving a new high.

The buying of stocks by foreigners in the cement and banking sectors also played a role. Investor confidence is also buoyed due to positive talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Experts say that if the government increases taxes in the real estate sector, investors will turn to the stock market and this could lead to KSE-100 eventually crossing the 100k mark in 2025.

Media playing role of fourth pillar of democracy: Atta Tarar



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Friday said media in the country was playing the role of fourth pillar of democracy.

In a meeting with a delegation of Karachi Press Club here at the Governor House, he said the government supported the freedom of media in the country. Tarar said incumbent government soon after assuming office took steps to clear outstanding dues of the media houses with the aim to provide much-needed relief to journalists and media workers.

The meeting discussed vari-

ous matters pertaining to the welfare of journalists and media workers.

Responding to their invitation, the minister assured the KPC office-bearers that he would visit the club soon to address their concerns directly.

KPC President Saeed Sarbazi underscored the Karachi Press Club's significance saying that it was one of the country's largest clubs with a rich history of working for flourishing democracy.

The KPC president and General Secretary Shoaib Khan apprised the minister of the challenges and problems being faced by the workers of both print and electronic media.

The minister handed over the cheque of Rs one million to KPC President Saeed Sarbazi at the Sindh Governor House. Agencies

Author riding the wave of love for Gujrat feted

PPA

GUJRAT: A notable author who pulls the heartstrings of people with his works expressing his love and devotion for the soil and its people was celebrated here at Hafiz Hayat Campus by his contemporary men and women of letters on Wednesday.

The event, titled "Gujrat's Portrayal: Through the Pen of Sheikh Abdul Rashid," was jointly organized by University of Gujrat Reader's Club and Quaid-e-Azam Library as part of the ongoing book fair at the varsity.

Renowned columnist, poet and scholar Dr Sughra Sadaf was the chief guest. Among the distinguished guests were Director-General Punjab Libraries Kashif Manzoor, Dr Amjad Tufail, Peer Zia-ul-Haq Naqshbandi, Kaleem Ehsan Butt, Gagan Shahid, Atiq Anwar Raja and Sheikh Abdul Rashid himself. Dr Rukhsana Riaz

of the Reader's Club was in the host's chair.

Dr Sughra Sadaf emphasized that Gujrat being a city of knowledge and learning, historical research is a challenging endeavour. She said, "Sheikh Abdul Rashid has carefully dug out historical facts and missing links scattered around the corners of Gujrat. Through various biographical writings, Sheikh Abdul Rashid has successfully tried to preserve the lost history of Gujrat for future generations.

"A dynamic, versatile and literature-loving person" was the portrayal of Sheikh Abdul Rashid by Kashif Manzoor. Lauding his works as a social historian, Manzoor emphasised that Sheikh Rashid's role was much akin to that of a historian of Gujrat, with a penchant not just for writing but writing well.

Dr Amjad Tufail said, "Sheikh Abdul Rashid has successfully introduced

forgotten men and women of letters and great personalities to the present generation."

Peer Zia-ul-Haq Naqshbandi highlighted the importance of book culture. He stressed that "books are the source of knowledge and the soul of civilization" and called for promotion of Sheikh Abdul Rashid's books.

Kaleem Ehsan Butt delineated Sheikh Abdul Rashid as a vibrant personality who pulls the heartstrings of people through his eloquence. "He has a deep understanding of personalities and his gaze is fixed on societal issues."

Gagan Shahid said that documenting local history is a challenging task. "Sheikh Abdul Rashid's books are, in a manner of speaking, are a tribute to our forgotten litterateurs." Atiq Anwar Raja said that Sheikh Abdul Rashid has brought to the fore achievements of great personalities for the younger

generation. "His books diffuse a new life into the Gujrat's vibrant history." Sheikh Abdul Rashid's straightforward and engaging style resonates with readers.

Sheikh Abdul Rashid said that identity of Gujrat is the pivot of his writings. "Many notable personalities of Pakistan have emerged from this region. Writing about Gujrat is actually repaying the debt of the soil. My love for the land of Gujrat is embedded in my breaths."

Dr Rukhsana Riaz said that Sheikh Abdul Rashid's style of expression captivates the reader. She expressed her gratitude to the guests for attending the session.

A large number of students, faculty members, HoDs, chairpersons, and administration officials, including former vice-chancellor of KFUEIT Dr Muhammad Suleman Tahir, attended the session.

APWA Women's Celebrate Eid Milan Party in Multan.



Kiran Asim

MULTAN: On the completion of one year of All Pakistan Women's Association Multan, Apwa the Eid Milan ceremony was organized and a large number of Apwa members, women social leaders, including Commissioner Multan Ms Marium Khan participated. The Eid Milan dinner ceremony was held on this occasion Commissioner Multan Division Maryam Khan, Chairperson of Apwa Lahore Mrs. Seema Zahid Mrs. Darshehwar, Director Railway Nabila Khan Mrs. Deputy Commissioner, SSP City Huma Naseeb was speaking at the ceremony Commissioner Multan Division Maryam Khan for her services to empower the women of Apawa Multan. Tribute to Apwa members including Begum Farrukh Mukhtar and Farah Faisal Appreciated and said that Apwa is enabling girls to play their role in the economic field by teaching them various skills which is admirable and appreciable. She assured that Apwa is with Multan and step by step. Chairperson of Apwa Lahore, Seema Zahid, will provide guidance and support He said that the efforts and services of Apwa are commendable, we will continue to support them fully so that the girls of South Punjab can realize the dream of poverty reduction and independence of women by becoming skilled Vice Chairperson Apwa Multan Farah Faisal, General Secretary Nazia Yasir Said that Apwa Multan deserving girls of backward areas They are also promoting equality by providing facilities through education and skills and enabling them to enter their practical life with independence. Commits to work in a year different from Apwa Multan Thousands of girls benefited from the ceremony. Tahira Najam, Joint General Secretary Tahmina Munir, Principal Apwa Abida also spoke while at the end of the ceremony, singer Nancy Angelina performed her art in the musical program. Chaudhry, Bina Younis, Fadia Kashif, Nadia Wasim, Zeiba Javed, Yasmin Bukhari, Rifat Sadaf, Yasmin Khakwani, Ayesha Ghazi, Hina Babar, Komal Ejaz, Mehek Butt, Hania Mansoor, Shamaila Mirza, Nasreen Fareed, Rabia Shahzad, Hina Chughtai and hundreds of other women participated.

Multan. Nabila Khan, Hamanaseeb, Tehmina Munir, Saima Faisal, Mrs. Naheed Zulfikar Chaudhry, Bina Younis, Fadia Kashif are speaking at the Eid meeting ceremony of Apwa Multan., Nadia Wasim, Zeiba Javed are present on the stage.

Nomination papers approved of Dr Rubina Akhtar from Constituency NA 148



QuratulAin Asim

MULTAN: Political leader Of Tehreek-e-Insaf Dr. Rubina Akhtar has said that her political career 17 years. In these 17 years, she not only worked hard and diligently for Tehreek-e-Insaf, but also endured prison terms twice. He said that he hopes that Tehreek-e-Insaf will give tickets to those who have worked for 17 years The genuine workers of Tehreek-e-Insaf Party will be encouraged, She added that She is very excited that She is getting an opportunity to serve the people of NA-148 constituency and I am ready to do it to the best of his ability, if the people will. If they are elected, this constituency will be called an ideal constituency. Dr. Rubina Akhtar said that the government has rigged the plan in the by-election. Fair elections in Pakistan have become a dream. Dr. Rubina Akhtar further said that on the occasion of the visit of the President of Iran to Pakistan, not discussing the Pakistan-Iran Gas Pipeline project due to America's opposition is tantamount to enmity with the people of Pakistan. Dr. Rubina Akhtar said that there is a shortage of Sui gas across the country due to which people are facing severe difficulties in cooking at home. Due to shortage of gas in the country, the industry is suffering from crisis. Due to non-availability of gas, the textile industry and other industries are not fully functional due to which the industrialists are not able to fulfill the export orders. He expressed these thoughts during the press conference along with Anita Baqir and Safia Irshad.

Collectorate of Customs Enforcement Multan action against smuggled Iranian diesel worth five crores was seized

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: A major operation by the Collectorate of Customs Enforcement Multan, smuggled Iranian diesel worth five crores was seized, three smugglers were also detained, the smuggling of a large consignment of Velo at Multan Airport was also foiled Collector Customs Imran Sajjad Bukhari On the instructions of Collectorate Customs Office Enforcement Multan Seventy thousand liters of smuggled Iranian diesel worth five crores were seized in a joint operation with Sargodha Collectorate. On this occasion, three persons who smuggled diesel were also detained. 70,000 liters of smuggled Iranian diesel in LPG Bowser was being smuggled. Chief Collector Punjab Rabab Sikandar is determined that full operations against the scourge of smuggling will continue. On the other hand, under the leadership of Additional Collector Shah Faisal Sahu, a successful action was taken against the smugglers. During the operation, the smuggling of a large consignment of Velo was foiled at Multan International Airport. Additional Collector Shah Faisal Sahu had earlier taken successful action against smugglers in Ghala Mandi Multan as well.



Kashmir Conference

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Head of Mission Embassy of the State of Palestine to Pakistan Nader K. Alturk during a seminar titled "Role of Diplomacy on Kashmir Conflict" at Kashmir House in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Azad Kashmir assembly calls for urgent U. N. Security Council meeting on Kashmir

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of Azad Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Senior Parliamentarian Chaudhry Latif Akbar strongly condemned the alarming situation arising from the continuous bloodshed of innocent freedom fighters in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine from the platform of OIC Security Council. called for an emergency meeting and said that if the United Nations and influential countries do not give up the double standard by revising the policies subject to interests, then global peace will collapse and meaningful progress for the global



village will become a story. Pakistan is the strong fortress of the world of Islam and the country that wants to have relations with mutual respect around the

world and is the defender of humanity against terrorism. According to Ms. Benazir Bhutto Shaheed's enlightened and progressive philosophy of politics, time and circumstances are calling for the whole nation to put aside all ideological differences and come together under the shadow of the green crescent flag. While talking to the media after the meetings with the public delegations in his chamber, he said that the international forces will have to take a firm stand in the movements of independence and secession. It is one thing, but the non-implementation of the approved resolutions of this organization is a historical pattern of

both the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Chaudhry Latif Akbar said that the two occupying countries have openly committed violations of the Geneva Convention, but they have been given an open leave. Speaker Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Latif Akbar said that in Pakistan The established democratic government should fulfill the duties and responsibilities of highlighting the Kashmir issue at every forum by forming the National Kashmir Committee in consultation with the Kashmiri leadership of both sides. Tehreek-e-Insaf Azad Kashmir condemns rigged Punjab by-elections

Christian communities have announced their support to Syed Ali Qasim Gilani

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: Various Christian communities have announced their support for Syed Ali Qasim Gilani, the son of former Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, in the NA 148 by-election. It was held in the joint corner meeting, which was chaired by Member National Assembly Naveed Amir Jiva, the special guests were Khawaja Rizwan Alam senior vice president of PPP South Punjab, Father Patrick Patris, Pastor Shahzad George, Safira Walter, Javed Anjum, Raheel Anjum, Dawood, Nabeel, Dr. Shaukat, Sohail Abrar, Dr. Dozens of representatives of different communities participated in this occasion, including Robert Paul Christian leaders declared their unconditional support and explained their problems, they said that Christian students should be included in the scholarship scheme given



by the government, they should be included in the computer, laptop and motorcycle schemes. Speaking on this occasion, MNA Naveed Amir Jeeva said that the People's Party has served the Christian community before and will continue to do so, the problems identified by the Christian leaders were solved on a priority basis. Of course, former Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani

is the person who committed religious minorities Five percent quota in government and semi-government jobs for Also issued, such efforts of Mohsine Multan in any case It cannot be forgotten, the minority community will always appreciate the efforts of Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, the seat of NA 148 belonged to the Gilani family before and will continue to belong to the

Gilani family. Khawaja Rizwan Alam said that PPP's The most work was done for the rights of the minorities in every period and also in the future for the People's The party will continue to protect the rights of minorities, People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, like his grandfather martyr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his Sons Mir Shah Nawaz Bhutto and Mir Murtaza Bhutto and mother martyr

democracy Ms. Benazir, knows the rights of every class including the minority community living in Pakistan and also respects them. also have the leadership ability to solve, us on them Proud. He said that the problems identified by the Christian leaders will be solved on priority basis and a special unit of Benazir Income Support Program will be established in Christian areas, so that deserving Christians can benefit from it. Christian leaders for unconditional support of Ali Qasim Gilani Thank you, speaking on the occasion. Pastor Patrick Patras said that the Masih community has unanimously announced the support of Syed Ali Qasim, the hope of the Pakistan Peoples Party. will make them successful, we are sure that they will fulfill our expectations by being elected and will pay special attention to solving the problems of the Christian community.



Islamabad
15° - 23° Clear

SERVICES

Namaz Timings

Fajr 3:57 am
Zohr 12:06 pm
Asr 4:50 pm
Maghrib 6:46 pm
Isha 8:16 pm

EMERGENCY

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

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

Day 2 of LIIBS 2024—Uniting Visionaries for Collaborative Growth

PPA

ISLAMABAD: The vibrant atmosphere of collaboration and innovation continued to flourish on the second day of the highly anticipated 7th Edition of the LEADERS IN ISLAMABAD BUSINESS SUMMIT (LIIBS). Hosted at a local hotel in Islamabad, the event brought together visionary leaders, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders to drive economic development on both regional and global scales.

The 7th Edition of LIIBS is jointly hosted by Nutshell Group and Unity Foods Limited, in collaboration with OICCI (Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry), with Faysal Bank Limited as the Platinum partner, and InfraZamin Pakistan as the strategic partner. The theme of the event this year is 'Collaborating for Growth'.

Air Chief Marshal Sohaib Aman (Rtd), Pakistan's Chief of Air Staff (2015-2018), thanked the participants and delegates for contributing to the success of this event. "The private sector should take responsibility. This call to action highlights the key role that private businesses and enterprises can play in driving economic growth, job creation, and innovation."

The day started with an inspiring dialogue, Forging the Future. Moderated by Dr. Shahid Mahmud, Chairman & CEO, Interactive Group of Companies. The panel comprised Konstantin Makarov, Senior Executive Officer, StartLink, Middle East & Africa; Strategic Advisor, Global Markets, Van Tuyl Companies & Perry Ellis International; Arshad Saeed Hussain, Managing Director, Oxford University Press, Pakistan; Dr. Zeeshan Bin Ishaque, Chief Executive Officer, Shifa International Hospital; and Ali Khizar, Head of Research, Business Recorder.

Turkmenistan advances TAPI energy project with strong commitment to international law

PPA

ISLAMABAD: Turkmenistan is making significant progress on the TAPI natural gas pipeline, which aims to supply 33 billion cubic meters annually to South Asia. Speaking at the Turkmen Energy Investment Forum (TEIF 2024) currently being held in Paris, Muhammetmyrat Amanov of TAPI Pipeline Company Limited highlighted that the Turkmenistan section of the pipeline is complete and the ongoing discussions to advance the project beyond Turkmenistan are in strict alignment with international standards.

The project emphasizes environmental sustainability by leveraging natural gas to reduce emissions significantly compared to coal and oil, thereby tackling indoor pollution and enhancing regional air quality.

Importantly, Turkmenistan is implementing the project in strict adherence to international law. Mr. Amanov emphasized, "In light of the ongoing Project developments, Turkmenistan remains



committed to upholding international law, fulfilling its obligations, and adhering to international norms and regulations." This approach reaffirms Turkmenistan's dedication to global cooperation and legal integrity in executing the TAPI project. Looking ahead, the project's focus is shifting to the Herat Offtake Strategy in Afghanistan, which will play a critical role in environmental protection by reducing air pollution, while also contributing

to maintaining public safety and further promoting the project. Additionally, it will provide early revenue streams and increase confidence amongst lenders.

Upon completion, TAPI will significantly impact the energy landscape in South Asia, supporting energy security and promoting regional development, all while maintaining the highest standards of international legal practice.

President Asif Ali Zardari lauds IIUI for promotion of higher education

PPA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad: President of Pakistan/Chancellor of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday lauded the role of IIUI in the promotion of higher education in the country and assured his all-out support for the institution's uplift.

The president said this in a meeting with IIUI Rector Dr. Samina Malik IIUI and President Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi and here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

In the meeting, President Asif Ali Zardari emphasized that skilled youth is imperative for the country's bright future and universities needed to equip its students with soft skills, such as critical thinking, effective communication and teamwork, besides providing technical/hard skills.

The university rector apprised the president of the IIUI's performance and services in the higher education sector. The President of Pakistan was told by Dr. Hathal that the IIUI had formulated a Strategic Plan 2022-2026 to promote



research and development, innovation and digitalisation that would also help improve the university's financial and administrative affairs. On the occasion, The President of Pakistan/Chancellor, IIUI was briefed by IIUI Rector and President on the implementation of the new organogram and its implementation at the faculty level in the light of the university's strategic plan. The President of Pakistan was also briefed about the

administrative reforms initiated at the university such as provision of the peaceful milieu for students, while he was in the briefing, President Zardari was told that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was extending assistance for the university's uplift and development. Both the IIUI Rector vowed that the university will keep striving to progress at double speed in the light of the vision of the Chancellor, IIUI.

AKU Professor wins Advocate of the Year Award in neurology

PPA

KARACHI: Mohammad Wasay, Professor of Neurology at the Department of Medicine, Aga Khan University has been honoured with the Advocate of the Year Award by the American Academy of Neurology for Global Patient and Neurology Advocacy in Colorado.

Prof Wasay is a consultant neurologist with expertise in general neurology and stroke. He has also served as the President of the Pakistan Society of Neurology and was recently elected as a trustee of the World Federation of Neurology and as a fellow of the World Academy of Science. With interests spanning across neural sciences and neural imaging, he has spearheaded multiple task forces and advisory committees in the public and private sector.

"I am grateful for the extensive opportunities and support provided by AKU for



furthering my research and advocacy work alongside my colleagues and students,"

said Prof Wasay while commenting on the accomplishment.

His latest accolade recognizes his role as a leader and an advocate in patient wellbeing in the field of neural sciences, following in the footsteps of the late Kenneth M. Viste, Jr., MD, after whom the award is named.

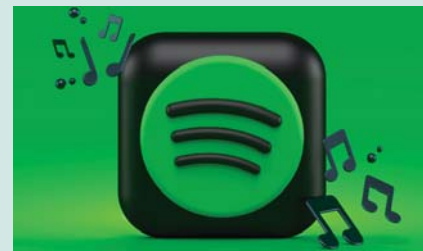
"We are proud to have Prof Wasay as a revered member of our neurology faculty," said Dr Adil Haider, Dean Medical College, AKU. "We are grateful for his incredible contributions and are privileged to support his impactful academic endeavours."

Prior to this award, Prof Wasay received the American Academy of Neurology's Teachers Recognition Award and Advocacy Leader of the Year Award, the Pakistan Society of Neurology's Distinguished Teacher Award, as well as the Pakistan Academy of Medical Sciences' Junior Award and Gold Medal.

Spotify launches 'Your K-Pop Persona' to celebrate the K-Pop fandom*

PPA

ISLAMABAD: K-Pop has undeniably become a cultural phenomenon worldwide, captivating audiences with its diverse sounds, mesmerizing performances, and magnetic personalities. In Pakistan and across



Southeast Asia, the love for K-Pop has surged dramatically in recent years. Since 2014, K-hip-hop streams on Spotify have skyrocketed by 95 times globally, and since 2018, K-Pop streams have soared by over 420% in Southeast Asia, reflecting the genre's growing influence and popularity in the region and beyond.

Spotify is adding its personalized touch to the K-Pop craze by launching "Your K-Pop Persona". This innovative interactive experience is designed to celebrate the vibrant and passionate K-Pop community not just in Pakistan but all over the world, allowing fans to discover and embrace their ideal fan role within the genre.

"Your K-Pop Persona" invites fans to explore their connection to K-Pop uniquely and engagingly. By answering five questions about their stan habits, participants will receive their "Main Role" in the K-Pop fandom, such as Main Visual, Main Vocal, Main Rapper, Main Dancer, or Trainee. Whether a seasoned stan or a newcomer to the K-Pop scene, all fans are encouraged to join in the fun and discover their persona.

There is more to it than just unlocking their Main Role as Spotify users can also reveal an additional Fan Role based on their K-Pop listening habits. This personalized experience celebrates each individual's unique fandom journey, offering a digital photo-card that can be customized and shared on social media platforms.

To make the experience even more exciting, Spotify has collaborated with some of the hottest names in K-Pop to release "Your K-Pop Persona." Fans can compare their results and hear from K-Pop icons like Cha Eun-woo, TOMORROW X TOGETHER, SEVENTEEN, BOYNEXTDOOR, and THE BOYZ on the K-Pop ON! Spotify YouTube channel.*

"We are thrilled to bring 'Your K-Pop Persona' to Pakistani fans and celebrate their love for K-Pop in a creative and interactive way," said Mark Abou Jaoude, Head of Music MENA & South Asia (excl. India) at Spotify. "This experience not only highlights the diversity and talent within the genre but also underscores the power of music to unite fans from all walks of life."

"Your K-Pop Persona" will be available until May 10th, 2024, offering fans time to participate and share their results with friends and fellow K-Pop enthusiasts. For more information and to unlock your K-Pop Persona, visit <https://spotify.com/yourkpoppersona> on your mobile device.

COMSTECH organizes Certificate Course on Neurology in Kampala, Uganda



PPA

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH in collaboration with Equator University of Science & Technology, Masaka, and Habib Medical School, Islamic University in Uganda, Kampala organized 2-day certificate course on neurology.

The Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary said that in Africa, where the weight of neurological diseases is significant and often made worse by socioeconomic factors, the significance of neurology in healthcare provision is particularly crucial. He emphasized the need of specialized knowledge and resources to confront neurological diseases effectively. He said that this course is aimed to equip healthcare professionals with fundamental expertise and competencies in neurology.

The High Commissioner of Pakistan in Uganda H. E. Muhammad Hassan Wazir addressed the gathering as a chief guest. He commended the efforts of the organizers of the course on neurocritical care. He said this course will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration and innovation which are essential to address challenges. He said that Pakistan and Uganda share a deep bond of friendship and cooperation. He invited Ugandans to visit state of the art medical facilities of Pakistan and the embassy would fully facilitate your medical tourism endeavors.

Prof. Dr. Ismail Simbwa Gyagenda, Rector, Islamic University in Uganda commended the efforts of the Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary in organizing the important course at the Islamic University of Uganda. He urged the participants of the course to make strong networking with the relevant experts for future knowledge and expertise exchange.

The course was led by a world renowned Neurologist and COMSTECH Distinguished Scholar, Prof. Dr. Mohammad Wasay. His team of experts included Prof. Dr. Foad Abd-Allah from Egypt and Prof. Dr. Dilraj Singh Sokhi from Kenya.

Colorful Cultural Festival Concluded at NUML

PPA

ISLAMABAD, APRI: Day long Spring Festival concluded at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad on Wednesday. The chief guest of the ceremony was Rector NUML Major General Shahid Mahmood Kayani HI (M) (Retd), while Director General NUML Brig Shahzad Munir, representatives of various embassies, dignitaries, Pro Rectors, Deans, Directors, people from all walks of life, faculty members and large number of students also attended the ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion Rector NUML Major General (retd) Shahid Mahmood Kayani said that Pakistan is such a beautiful country, and it has a unique cultural diversity. Every culture of the motherland is beautiful and has



equal respect. Today, NUML students showed the world that Pakistanis are one Nation, they respect each other's culture and know how to celebrate their respective cultural diversity with such humbleness and brotherhood.

Rector NUML encouraged the students who participated in cultural activities and announced that spring festival will be organized regularly in future. Rector thanked all the diplomatic community for their support and



participation in the event. Earlier, he visited various cultural stalls of various countries, regional cultural stalls, book stalls and food stalls.

It is pertinent to mention that NUML Spring Festival was organ-

ized from April 22-24, in which various activities like cultural, co-curricular, entrepreneurial and many other events like kitab mela, ghazal & Naat competition etc. were arranged. International Stalls by embassies were also

set up. Students presented all Pakistani cultures i.e. Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto, Punjabi, Kashmiri & GB, Chitral, Hazara and Saraiki. Honourable guests from various embassies encouraged the students on their performances.

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Message from 22 Billion kilometers away...

NASA scientists were shocked when Voyager-1, an interstellar spacecraft currently around 15 billion miles (22 km) away from Earth, stopped transmitting data in November 2023 for the first time since it began its interstellar voyage 46 years ago. This unexpected halt in communication cast a gloom of sadness and despair over NASA. A team of NASA scientists and engineers was hastily assembled to identify the fault and attempt to address it remotely, despite the immense distance of 15 billion miles, but with little or no hope of success.

Voyager 1, originally designed for a mission of five to six years, was launched by NASA on September 5, 1977, from Cape Canaveral, Florida, aboard a Titan IIIE/Centaur rocket. Its primary mission was to study the outer planets of the solar system, including Jupiter and Saturn, along with their moons.

Later, Voyager 1's objective shifted to studying the interstellar medium and providing data on the heliosphere's boundary, where the influence of the Sun ends and the interstellar medium begins. It achieved the remarkable feat of becoming the first human-made object to reach such a distant location. Voyager 1 has been responsible for identifying new Jovian moons, discovering another Saturnian ring, and capturing the solar system's first and only "family portrait," which includes our eclectic gang of planets.

Furthermore, Voyager 1's observations have provided insights into the nature of magnetic fields, plasma, and cosmic rays in interstellar space. It has also transmit-

ted stunning images of planets, moons, and other celestial bodies in outer space, enriching our understanding of the universe.

The development of the Voyager spacecraft and its instruments led to advancements in technology that have been applied to various fields, including communication, imaging, and spacecraft design. These advancements have contributed to the development of new technologies that have improved daily life for many people. This knowledge has contributed to humanity's collective knowledge and has inspired generations of scientists and researchers.

The Voyager missions have captured the imagination of people around the world and have inspired interest in space exploration and science. This inspiration has led to increased support for scientific research and education, which has benefited society as a whole.

Voyager 1 carries the Golden Record, a time capsule containing sounds and images from Earth, intended to communicate the diversity of life and culture on our planet to any intelligent extraterrestrial life that may encounter the spacecraft. It also contains greetings from Earth, intended to provide a snapshot of life and culture on our planet.

If decoded, it could give the alien civilization insights into Earth's biodiversity, languages, music, and more, helping them understand humanity and our planet in ways previously impossible. It

could open up the possibility of communication between our two civilizations leading to exchanges of knowledge, ideas, and potentially even diplomatic relations. It contains cultural artifacts intended to represent the diversity of human culture. If understood by the alien civilization, it could lead to a cultural exchange between our two civilizations, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.

The technology used to create the Golden Record, as well as the spacecraft itself, could be of interest to the alien civilization. Studying these technologies could lead to advancements in their own technology, or at the very least, a better understanding of our technological capabilities.

The NASA scientists were acutely aware of the importance of the messages and images sent back by Voyager 1. They were hoping against hope to restore its functionality. Frantically, they utilized all available tools and gadgets to understand the nature and extent of the damage the craft might have sustained, although they knew that the spacecraft's power supply was gradually decreasing. They realized that it would eventually be unable to communicate with Earth. Finally, the day arrived when one of humanity's most accomplished spacecraft stopped communicating with the world.

Undaunted by the slim possibility, the team diligently employed all tools and knowledge at their disposal. They discovered that the spacecraft was still

operational but had only lost communication. The breaking news was joyously announced by Mr. Bruce Wagoner, the Voyager mission assurance manager.

This discovery provided them with the added motivation and incentive to continue their efforts to restore communication with the spacecraft. They eventually identified the fault: a tiny, worn-out chip. Over time, exposure to solar and interstellar radiation, as well as bombardment by subatomic particles, had caused the chip to malfunction, disrupting the entire communication system of Voyager 1.

Equipped with far more advanced technology than was available during the spacecraft's launch in 1977, the scientists managed to retrieve the data from the faulty chip. They then transferred this data to another chip, bypassing the faulty one and restoring communication. Additionally, they reset the craft's computer and other vital components.

Their perseverance paid off, and against all odds, Voyager 1, one of humanity's greatest achievements, began communicating once again with Earth on April 20, 2024.

With its communication restored, Voyager 1 is expected to continue its journey through interstellar space for tens of thousands of years. This stunning restoration ensures that Voyager 1 can continue its historic mission, serving as a testament to human curiosity and exploration for generations to come.

Writer is Former Press Secretary to the President, Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former MD, SRBC



Qamar Bashir

Vaccines saved at least 154 million lives

Global immunisation efforts have saved at least 154 million lives in the past 50 years, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, adding that most of those to benefit were infants. That is the equivalent of six lives saved every minute of every year of the half century, the UN health agency said.

In a study published in the Lancet, WHO gave a comprehensive analysis of the impact of 14 vaccines used under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), which celebrates its 50th anniversary next month.

Thanks to these vaccines, "a child born today is 40 percent more likely to see their fifth birthday than a child born 50 years ago", WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

"Vaccines are among the most powerful inventions in history, making once-feared diseases preventable," he said. "Smallpox has been eradicated, polio is on the brink, and with the more recent development of vaccines against diseases like malaria and cervical cancer, we are pushing back the frontiers of disease."

Infants accounted for 101 million of the lives saved through immunisation over the five decades, said the study. "Immunisation was the single greatest contribution of any health intervention to ensuring babies not only see their first birthdays but continue leading healthy lives into adulthood," WHO said.

Over 50 years, vaccines against 14 diseases — diphtheria, Haemophilus influenza type B, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, measles, meningitis A, pertussis, invasive pneumococcal disease, polio, rotavirus, rubella, tetanus, tuberculosis, and yellow fever — had directly contributed to reducing infant deaths by 40 percent, the study found. For Africa, the reduction in infant mortality was more than 50 percent, it said.

The vaccine against measles — a highly contagious disease by a virus that attacks mainly children — had the most significant impact. That jab accounted for 60 percent of the lives saved due to immunisation, according to the study.

The polio vaccine means that more than 20 million people are able to walk today who would otherwise have been paralysed.

The study also showed that when a vaccine saves a child's life, that person goes on to live an average of 66 years of full health on average — with a total of 10.2 billion full health years gained over the five decades. "Vaccines cause adults," Tedros said.

WHO stressed that the gains in childhood survival showed the importance of protecting progress on immunisation.

It highlighted accelerating efforts to reach 67 million children who missed at least one vaccination during the Covid pandemic. The UN health agency, along with the UN children's agency Unicef, the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, on Wednesday launched a joint campaign called "Humanly Possible".

It is aimed at scaling up vaccination programmes around the world.



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Ashraf Al-Awsat)

Reality of Mahrang Baloch's Missing Persons - I

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province in terms of area, holds paramount importance within the country due to its strategic location and abundant resources. Positioned in the southwest, Balochistan is endowed with substantial natural wealth, serves as a pivotal access point to key maritime trade routes, and plays a vital role in safeguarding national security. Recognizing Balochistan's significance is pivotal for understanding Pakistan's socio-economic landscape and broader geopolitical dynamics.

Abundant in resources like natural gas, coal, copper, gold, and various minerals, Balochistan contributes significantly to Pakistan's overall mineral wealth, presenting vast opportunities for economic expansion and industrial development. The utilization of these resources not only bolsters the national economy but also generates employment prospects for locals, propelling socio-economic advancement in the region.

Strategically positioned, Balochistan holds considerable geopolitical importance for Pakistan, sharing borders with Iran and Afghanistan. This geographical positioning makes it a crucial junction in the geopolitics of South Asia and the Middle East. Additionally, its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime passage for a substantial portion of the world's oil shipments, further underscores its strategic relevance in global energy security. Balochistan boasts an extensive coastline along the Arabian Sea, with the port city of Gwadar emerging as a pivotal maritime center. Developed in collaboration with China as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the deep-sea port of Gwadar provides unparalleled access to global trade routes, facilitating maritime commerce and strengthening Pakistan's connectivity with Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Given its borders with

volatile regions like Afghanistan and Iran, Balochistan plays a crucial role in safeguarding Pakistan's national security, acting as a buffer against external threats and bolstering the country's defense capabilities. Furthermore, the presence of insurgent groups and militant organizations in Balochistan necessitates robust counterterrorism measures to uphold internal stability and prevent cross-border infiltration.

Balochistan is home to a diverse array of ethnic and cultural communities, including the Baloch, Pashtun, Brahui, and Hazara, among others. This cultural diversity enriches Pakistan's national identity and highlights the country's pluralistic ethos. Promoting harmony between provinces and fostering inclusivity are vital for preserving Pakistan's social fabric and harnessing the potential of Balochistan's diverse populace.

Regrettably, Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, has long grappled with terrorism, insurgency, and separatist movements. Situated at the nexus of regional geopolitics, Balochistan's strategic importance, combined with its intricate socio-economic dynamics, has made it a focal point for various militant groups seeking to further their agendas through violence and intimidation.

The history of insurgency and terrorism in Balochistan dates back to the post-colonial era. The proliferation of militant groups, ranging from nationalist movements to sectarian factions and foreign-sponsored proxies, has added layers of complexity to the province's security landscape. Terrorism in Balochistan manifests in various forms, including attacks on security forces, targeted assassinations, bombings, and sabotage of infrastructure. The province has witnessed

a series of violent incidents orchestrated by separatist and anti-state groups. Additionally, sectarian violence fueled by religious extremism has led to numerous casualties, exacerbating inter-communal tensions and undermining social cohesion.

The government of Pakistan has implemented diverse counterterrorism strategies in Balochistan, encompassing military operations, development initiatives, and efforts to engage with local communities. These efforts have achieved some successes in disrupting militant networks and fostering stability in specific regions.

In the rugged and isolated terrain of Balochistan, the threat of terrorism is significant, largely orchestrated by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). Over the years, this separatist militant organization has been engaged in a violent struggle, aiming for increased autonomy or complete independence for the Baloch people. To grasp the nuances of terrorism in Balochistan, a thorough examination of the BLA's motivations, strategies, and the socio-political context in which it operates is essential. The BLA emerged in the early 2000s as a prominent militant group purportedly advocating for Baloch rights. Consisting of nationalist and separatist factions, the BLA has conducted a series of violent actions targeting Pakistani security forces, government officials, and critical infrastructure. Their methods encompass bombings, ambushes, and assassinations, all aimed at destabilizing the region and asserting their demands for independence or increased autonomy.

In the challenging terrain of Balochistan, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has left a trail of violence and fear, carrying out numerous attacks in pursuit of its separa-

tist goals. From targeted killings to large-scale bombings, the BLA's strategies have instilled fear and uncertainty in the region, leaving a profound impact on Balochistan's socio-political landscape. Examining some of the most notorious incidents orchestrated by the BLA sheds light on the group's tactics and the severe repercussions of terrorism in the province.

In one of its most infamous assaults, the BLA targeted a convoy of Chinese engineers working on a significant infrastructure project in the Kharan district in 2006. This ambush resulted in the deaths of several engineers and security personnel, highlighting the group's opposition to projects like the Gwadar port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The incident not only resulted in loss of lives but also strained diplomatic ties between Pakistan and China, raising concerns about the security of foreign investments in Balochistan.

Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, has frequently borne the brunt of BLA violence. In 2008, a series of coordinated bombings rocked the city, targeting government buildings and security installations, resulting in numerous casualties and injuries. Similarly, in 2010, a suicide bombing aimed at a police station in Quetta claimed several officers and civilians, further escalating tensions in the volatile region.

In a symbolic strike, the BLA targeted the historic Ziarat Residency, the former residence of Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in 2013. This iconic building, representing national heritage, was set ablaze by BLA militants, causing extensive damage and sending shockwaves across the country. This attack underscored the group's disregard for historical landmarks and cultural heritage in their pursuit of separatism.

To be continued

Blue economy and termination of foreign policy

Foreign policy is not confined to cultural or religious linkages; it is the era of development, where every state seeks to build linkages with others for mutual growth. Modern diplomacy is built upon this foundation. After exploring the new concept of the blue economy, a question arises regarding its impact on foreign policy, particularly for Pakistan. Pakistan, a country connected to the deep Indo-Pacific sea, sees neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh reaping substantial benefits from the ocean industry. However, Pakistan's ocean industry has yet to deliver the expected output. It's believed that focusing on this sector could create one million more jobs and boost the GDP, aligning with domestic interests. Beyond these domestic benefits, the blue economy offers Pakistan a new avenue for global collaboration and cooperation. Nations already invested in ocean industries could provide Pakistan with investment, expertise, and modern technology. This could elevate Pakistan's global and regional standing, particularly in the eyes of countries like China and India, which are actively involved in ocean-related endeavors. Furthermore, tapping into the ocean industry could enhance ties between Pakistan and African countries. By exchanging delegations consisting of experts, labor, and diplomats, Pakistan could bolster its global image and invest in countries prioritizing this industry. This could open up numerous trade opportunities for Pakistan. In conclusion, it's crucial to consider both the micro and macro benefits of the ocean industry. By leveraging this sector domestically and internationally, Pakistan can carve out a new role on the global stage.



Abdul Basit Alvi



M Azam Tariq

After battle with Republicans, Biden to sign Ukraine aid package

Biden's administration preparing \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden will sign a bill into law on Wednesday that provides billions of dollars of new aid to Ukraine for its war with Russia, a bipartisan victory for the president as he seeks re-election and a boost to allies who have looked to Washington to support Kiev.

Biden, a Democrat who is expected to face Republican former President Donald Trump, a Ukraine aid skeptic, in the November election, has pressed lawmakers for six months to approve more funding for Ukraine, which has been fighting a full-scale Russian invasion for more than two years.

Despite bipartisan support, a proposed package of aid idled amid opposition mostly from Republicans closely tied to Trump. That ended when the Republican-controlled House of Representatives abruptly changed course and approved four bills that

included funding for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and other US partners in the Indo-Pacific on Saturday.

Biden and House Speaker Mike Johnson held intense talks about Ukraine in February and the president has both pleaded with Republicans to back the package and scolded them for not doing so. Johnson, who faces calls by some right-leaning Republicans to oust him for his turnaround on aid, met with Trump in Florida earlier this month; the former president said Johnson was "doing a really good job."

The US Senate followed the House on Tuesday evening, passing a sweeping bill that provides \$61 billion in aid to the country, which has suffered setbacks in the war that supporters blame on the delay in getting the additional US funding.

"Congress has passed my legislation to strengthen our national security

and send a message to the world about the power of American leadership; we stand resolutely for democracy and freedom, and against tyranny and oppression," Biden said in a statement after the Senate vote on Tuesday. He said he would sign the bill on Wednesday. Heather Conley, an expert on European affairs, said the victory for US allies and for Biden was tempered by effects that the delay has had for Kiev on the battlefield.

"This is a strong message of American leadership at a time of enormous instability, but the delay created cracks in that credibility," said Conley, president of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. "As we start rolling into the election, that credibility will continue to be under close scrutiny."

Biden has argued that he helped restore U. S. credibility on the world stage after Trump's tumultuous 4-year



tenure, in part by strengthening the NATO alliance and providing a united

front against Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump has argued for an "America First" policy and has threatened to let NATO allies fend for themselves if they do not increase their defense spending.

Biden's administration is already preparing a \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine, the first to be sourced from the bill, two U. S. officials told Reuters. Republicans who backed the aid package said it was not a vote for Biden but a reflection of their party's values.

"Peace through strength. That's our tradition," Senator Dan Sullivan, a Republican from Alaska, said in a Senate speech. "To my Republican colleagues and friends in the Senate, our tradition is much more serious. It's prouder. And I will tell you this: It's much more supported by the American people. Peace through strength, not American retreat." Reuters/Agencies

For better US-China ties Blinken starts visit

US Secretary of State to meet business leaders before talks in Beijing with FM Wang Yi and likely meeting President Xi

SHANGHAI: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Shanghai on Wednesday with US-China ties on a steady footing, but with a daunting array of unresolved issues threatening the stability of relations between the global rivals.

Blinken will meet with business leaders before heading to Beijing for talks on Friday with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and a likely meeting with President Xi Jinping.

Blinken's visit is the latest high-level contact between the two nations that, along with working groups on issues from global trade to military communication, have tempered the public acrimony that drove relations to historic lows early last year.

But Washington and Beijing have made little headway on curbing China's supply of chemicals used to make fentanyl, Taiwan remains a flashpoint, and strains are intensifying over China's backing of Russia in its war in Ukraine.

While significant progress is unlikely during the visit, both countries want "open lines of communication to avoid awkward scenarios," said Alfred Wu, associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore.

Blinken will press China to stop its firms from retooling and resupplying Russia's defence industrial base. Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, just days after agreeing a "no limits" partnership with Beijing, and



US Secretary of State Blinken and US Ambassador to China Burns walk through the Yu Gardens in Shanghai, China, April 24, 2024. Photo: Reuters

while China has steered clear of providing arms, US officials warn Chinese companies are sending dual-use technology that helps Russia's war effort.

Without providing details, a senior State Department official briefing reporters on Friday said Washington was prepared to "take steps" against Chinese firms it believes are damaging US and European security.

The United States has preliminarily discussed putting sanctions on Chinese banks over the country's support for Russia, but officials told Reuters they

do not yet have a plan to do so.

Washington has so far stopped short of sanctioning major Chinese banks - long deemed by analysts as a "nuclear" option - because of the effects it could have across the global economy and on US-China relations.

A Chinese foreign ministry official quoted by state news agency Xinhua on Tuesday said relations "have shown a trend of stopping decline and stabilising," since Biden and Xi met in San Francisco in November.

But the official criticised what they

called Washington's "stubborn strategy of containing China, and its erroneous words and deeds of interfering in China's internal affairs, tarnishing China's image and undermining China's interests."

The visit also comes after the US Congress moved ahead this weekend with a bill that includes new funding for Taiwan and less than a month before the democratically governed island inaugurates a new president, Lai Ching-te, who, like his predecessor, rejects China's claim to the island.

The senior State Department official said parties should "avoid taking provocative actions that may raise tensions, and demonstrate restraint" ahead of the inauguration. "That will be our message going forward," the official added.

An effort to force China's ByteDance to sell the social media app TikTok or face a ban in the US is also gaining steam in Congress, a sign of the growing appetite in Washington to confront Beijing on economic issues.

Blinken is also expected to raise human rights, including China's treatment of Muslims in its western Xinjiang region.

Other US officials have met or called their Chinese counterparts recently as part of the broader US effort to keep lines of communication open.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was in Beijing and the southern factory hub

Sydney bishop stabbing

SYDNEY: An Australian counter terrorism team arrested seven teenagers on Wednesday linked to a boy charged with a religiously-motivated terror attack on a Sydney bishop and questioned another five people.

Police said a team of more than 400 police and security personnel were involved in the operation, which arrested associates of a 16-year-old boy charged with a terrorism offence for the knifing of Assyrian Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel during a live-streamed church service on April 15.

Police said they took the teens into custody because they posed an "unacceptable risk" to society. They will allege the teens believed in a religiously motivated violent extremist ideology. A further five people are being questioned by police.

"I can assure the community there is no ongoing threat to the community, and the action we have taken today has mitigated any risk of future or further harm," said New South Wales state Police Deputy Commissioner David Hudson at a news conference following the arrests. Police said in a statement that the operation was ongoing.

Coming only days after a deadly mass stabbing in Bondi, the attack on Emmanuel and fears of further attacks or reprisals against the city's Muslim community have put the normally peaceful Sydney on edge. Gun and knife crime is rare in the city, one of the world's safest.

The Joint Counter Terrorism Team (JTT) operation, which involved 13 raids in Sydney and the regional town of Goulburn, was a combined effort between state and federal police as well as the domestic intelligence agency.

A significant amount of electronic material was seized in the raids, police said in a statement.

Australia's top domestic spy chief on Tuesday asked technology companies to give it access to user messages in limited circumstances so it could fight extremists. Reuters



Iran ready to forge stronger ties with Sri Lanka, Raisi says

COLOMBO: Iran is ready to strengthen ties with Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, its president, Ebrahim Raisi, said on Wednesday, during a short visit to the island nation, the first by an Iranian president in 16 years.

The two countries are set to sign five pacts, or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on the visit, only the second since one in April 2008 by Iran's then president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Opening a \$514-million hydro power project, Raisi pledged to support development projects in the Indian Ocean island by providing technical and engineering services.

"We stand fully ready to further expand bilateral relations with all Asian countries, our neighbouring countries, and sovereign and independent states," Raisi said.

Sri Lanka is a sovereign, independent country that has aligned policies with Iran, enabling co-operation to create a shining future for both nations, he added.

Iran agreed to build the project in 2010 but funds dried up after it released \$50 million, as US sanctions imposed later that year on the Middle East nation made it hard to transfer money, forcing Sri Lanka to fund the rest.

The project was also held up because of the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental concerns and protests from villagers.

The project will add 120MW to the national grid, while supplying water to 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres) of farmland and drinking water to thousands of families in three districts, the office of Sri Lanka's president said in a statement.

"What is common with us we should strengthen," President Ranil Wickremesinghe said at the event. "We are all countries that belong to the south at a time when the south wants to establish its own identity and its own independence." Agencies

Gaza protests grow at US colleges, thousands demonstrate in Brooklyn

NEW YORK: Protests against Israel filled streets in Brooklyn and escalated at universities across the United States, some of which included Jewish Passover Seders, as demonstrators demanded an end to civilian casualties in Gaza.

The growing protests follow mass arrests of demonstrators at some East Coast universities in recent days and show a deepening dissatisfaction in the United States, historically Israel's most important ally, with the course of the war with Hamas.

Pro-Palestinian protests have followed President Joe Biden, a self-declared "Zionist," for months. At universities, protests have recently grown to encampments that draw students and faculty of various backgrounds, including of Jewish and Muslim faiths, that



host teach-ins, interfaith prayers, and musical performances.

A large Brooklyn street protest reached a standoff on Tuesday when New York police began to arrest people over disorderly conduct, restraining those who refused to move with zip ties.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations criticized the use of police force to stifle dissent, saying it under-

mined academic freedom.

"So does defaming and endangering Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian... students based on suspiciously inflammatory remarks that a few unidentified, masked individuals have made outside of campus," Afaf Nasher, executive director of CAIR in New York, said in a statement.

Critics of the protests, including prominent Republican members of the U. S. Congress, have stepped up accusations of antisemitism and harassment by at least some protesters. Civil rights advocates, including the ACLU, have raised free speech concerns over the arrests.

There have been heated exchanges of words and insults between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli demonstra-

tors, particularly in the public streets around Columbia, leading congressional Republicans on Tuesday to demand that Biden do more to protect Jewish students.

Several campus protesters Reuters spoke to attributed the off-campus incidents to rogue provocateurs who are trying to hijack the protests' message.

"There are no universities left in Gaza. So we chose to reclaim our university for the people of Palestine," said Soph Askanase, a Jewish Columbia student who was arrested and suspended for protesting. "Antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism, in particular racism against Arabs and Palestinians, are all cut from the same cloth."

Xi calls on Chongqing to write its chapter in Chinese modernization

CHONGQING: Chinese President Xi Jinping has called on southwest China's Chongqing Municipality to further deepen reform and opening-up across the board, and write its own chapter in advancing Chinese modernization.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks during an inspection tour in Chongqing.

Chongqing should strive to promote high-quality development, and build itself into a key strategic fulcrum for the development of China's western region in the new era and a comprehensive hub for inland opening-up, Xi said.

While inspecting the Chongqing International Logistics

Hub Park Monday afternoon, Xi said that the logistics sector makes up the arteries and veins of the real economy. He stressed that constructing the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor will help promote the high-level opening-up of China's western and inland regions.

Xi then visited a container station, where he highlighted the importance of logistics in driving the development of the western region.

After hearing a report on the construction of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle, Xi urged Chongqing to focus on sci-tech innovation and vigorously promote the high-quality development of the manufacturing sector.

Visiting an old residential community where renovation began in early 2022, Xi learned

about the renovation and neighborhood services, and talked with residents dining in the community canteen, saying the renovation of aging communities should preserve historical memories and meanwhile solve problems that concern residents.

People's well-being is of utmost importance in Chinese modernization, and all the work of the CPC and the government is intended to ensure that people live happier lives, Xi said, urging Party committees and governments at all levels to invest more in improving people's livelihood to enhance their sense of fulfillment, happiness and security.

Inspecting a digital urban operations and governance center Tuesday morning, Xi stressed efforts to ensure scientific planning and development of big data platforms and

network systems, and improved coordination to leverage digital technologies to empower and modernize urban governance.

He called for improved pre-planning, precise management and swift response in handling various incidents to ensure cities operate safely and in an orderly fashion.

On Wednesday morning, Xi listened to work briefing from the CPC municipal committee and the municipal government, and affirmed Chongqing's achievements on all fronts.

He urged Chongqing to strive to build a modernized industrial system with advanced manufacturing as its backbone, transform and upgrade key technologies in the manufacturing sector and promote large-scale equipment renewals.

Efforts should go toward



accelerating the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, and toward fostering emerging and strategic industries with international competitiveness, he said.

Xi also called on Chongqing to redouble its efforts to make breakthroughs in key technolo-

gies, promote the deep integration of technological and industrial innovation, and develop new quality productive forces.

He stressed pushing forward the development of the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle to become a key engine of the country's high-quality devel-

opment and a new driver of growth.

The city should boost green development, and build a strong ecological shield in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, he said.

Efforts should be made to foster a batch of state-owned enterprises with strong core competitiveness, bolster the development of the private economy, and stimulate the vitality of business entities under various forms of ownership, Xi said.

Chongqing should integrate actively into the building of a unified national market, serve major national strategies, and play a bigger role in the interconnected development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, he said. Xinhua

Bull & Bears
PSX 100-Share
Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index	
Current	Prev. Close
72,051.89	71,359.40
Day's High	Day's Low
72,414.32	71,467.01
Index Value	Change
15,826,554,117	+692.49
Percentage	Time
+0.97%	24 Apr, 2024 5:00 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index	
Index Value	Change
8,040.38	-4.43
Percentage	Time
-0.055%	24 Apr, 4:35 pm GMT+1

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average	
Index Value	Change
38,392.37	-111.32
Percentage	Time
-0.29%	24 Apr, 1:16 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average	
Index Value	Change
38,460.08	+907.92
Percentage	Time
+2.42%	24 Apr, 3:15 pm GMT+

Open Market Forex Rates		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	181	182.8
Bahrain Dinar	740.81	748.81
Canadian Dollar	201	203.2
China Yuan	38.45	38.85
Danish Krone	39.93	40.33
Euro	294	297
Hong Kong Dollar	35.55	35.9
Indian Rupee	3.34	3.45
Japanese Yen	1.86	1.94
Kuwaiti Dinar	903.61	912.61
Malaysian Ringgit	58.28	58.88
New Zealand \$	164.22	166.22
Norwegians Krone	25.46	25.76
Omani Riyal	723.48	731.48
Qatari Riyal	76.52	77.22
Saudi Riyal	73.3	74
Singapore Dollar	204.5	206.5
Swedish Korona	25.72	26.02
Swiss Franc	305.43	307.93
Thai Bhat	7.51	7.66
U.A.E Dirham	75	75.8
UK Pound Sterling	342.55	346
US Dollar	277.6	280.35

Decision to end tax amnesty schemes is correct: Mian Zahid Hussain

PPA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that the business community supports the Prime Minister's interest in improving tax administration and relevant laws.

He said that PM Shahbaz Sharif's efforts to raise tax income are commendable as it is necessary to save the country facing pressing economic issues.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that a correct decision has been made to end tax amnesty schemes, which have served no purpose for decades.

Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's interest in supervising tax reforms is commendable.

He added that the PM is working day and

night to increase the tax revenue, which is necessary for the current situation to put the country back on track.

The business leader said that the Prime Minister is rightly concerned about billions of rupees being stuck in tax disputes. The government's decision to end tax amnesty schemes is also correct, which was the long-standing desire of the lenders.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the country's economy has been destroyed, and it is no longer possible to restore it through traditional measures, so it is necessary to resort to non-traditional measures to increase the resources.

For this, the tax base should be increased, and instead of burdening the public, the burden should be placed on the wealthy classes.

Mian Zahid Hussain said some elements deliberately keep billions of rupees in tax matters hanging with the bureaucracy and courts. Still, steps are being taken to stop this process, which is in the country's interests.



Strict action is needed against the black sheep who delay tax matters worth trillions of rupees for their gains.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the share of tax in Pakistan's economy is nine percent. At the same time, it is seventeen percent in

the neighboring country India. India has far surpassed Pakistan in the economic field, one of the reasons being that its revenue is almost double that of Pakistan.

If this can happen in India, why not in Pakistan, he said, adding that the Finance Minister has revealed that foreign exchange reserves will increase to ten billion dollars by June while PIA will be sold by July, which is encouraging.

After PIA, all the failed should be sold. A complete ban should be imposed on creating new departments because there are dozens of central and provincial departments where officers and staff receive salaries and benefits for doing nothing.

He noted that due to the government's efforts, international organizations' confidence has been restored, and investors' trust has also been restored.

Inflation is coming down while the rupee is stabilizing. Overall, conditions are improving, and things are expected to improve considerably within a year.

Price hike

ISLAMABAD: A vegetable and fruit seller arranging different items for attracting customers at Chak Shahzad in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Raja Farid

SECP, IFSB Malaysia organizes Workshop on Islamic Capital Markets

PPA

ISLAMABAD: A three-day capacity-building workshop, hosted by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) in collaboration with the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) Malaysia, on Islamic capital markets begins in Islamabad.

Officials from the SECP, SBP, and capital market infrastructure institutions (CMIIs) of the Ministry of Finance and Competition Commission have attended the first-ever session organized exclusively for regulatory and supervisory bodies.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Mr. Mujtaba Ahmad Lodhi, Commissioner SECP highlighted the role and potential of Islamic capital markets for fostering sustainable development and inclusive growth. Further, Lodhi called upon participants to leverage innovative Islamic capital market tools for resource mobilization and infrastructure development. Mr. Lodhi also highlighted the immense opportunities available to further deepen

and broaden Islamic capital markets in Pakistan and beyond. He reiterated his full support for the development of Islamic capital markets in Pakistan.

The workshop is aimed at enhancing the capacity of regulatory and supervisory authorities for developing and regulating the Islamic capital market in light of international standards and principles formulated by the IFSB Malaysia as a global standard-setting body.

IFSB Malaysia's esteemed trainers, Muhammad Arif and Cindhi Cintokwati, are jointly conducting the workshop, covering the core principles, market deepening strategies, financial inclusion, innovation regulation, and emerging challenges in regulating the Islamic capital market.

It is expected that the workshop will equip the officers responsible for the development of the Islamic capital market in Pakistan with the required skills, thereby leading to the harmonization of regulatory interventions and the promotion of the Islamic capital market.

Palestinian Ambassador visits ICCI

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Palestine Ahmed Jawad Amin Rabei has expressed immense gratitude to Pakistan government people and the business community for encompassing resolute support to the cause of an independent State of Palestine.

He said that Israeli actions in Gaza have created a history of atrocities which have embarrassed the entire humanity urging the international community to take concrete and immediate steps for the resolution of the Palestine issue.

The Palestinian Ambassador expressed these views while speaking at Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry during his meeting with its President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari on Wednesday.

The envoy went on to say that he is well aware of the sentiments of the Pakistani nation for the Palestinian brothers and sisters and the way the Pakistan government is raising voice for the rights of the Palestinians and condemning the Israeli atrocities in Gaza. He also expressed his gratitude to the ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari for his whole-hearted support to the cause.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the entire Pakistani nation stands united on the issue of Palestine and our hearts beat with the Palestinian people. He said that the genocide of the innocent Palestinians is not acceptable at all and stressed that the world



powers especially the United Nations play its role in stopping Israeli brutalities. He said that Pakistan supports the right of self-determination and establishment of a secure & sovereign Palestinian state to end this conflict. He assured that the business community of Pakistan is always ready to extend all possible support to the Palestinian brothers and sisters to mitigate their sufferings. He added that Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority will arrange the transportation of daily use items for the Palestinian families.

Vice President Islamabad Cham-

ber of Commerce and Industry in his welcome address introduced the office bearers and executive members with the guest. Secretary General United Business Group Zafar Bakhtawari said that the entire Pakistani nation feels the pain and sufferings of Palestinian brothers with the hope that the day is not far away when Palestinians will get liberation from the Israeli occupation and we will be able to offer prayers in Al-Aqsa mosque. Those who expressed their views on the occasion include Mr. Ashfaq Chheena, Parveen Khan, Javaid Iqbal and Ashfaq Chhattah. Khalid Chaudhry, Assad Haider, Malik Maqsood, Waseem Chaudhry and others were also present.

MCB posts Profit Before Tax of Rs. 32.5 billion (+41%) for Q1-2024

PPA

LAHORE: The Board of Directors of MCB Bank Limited (MCB) in its meeting under the Chairmanship of Mian Mohammad Mansha, on April 24, 2024, reviewed the performance of the Bank and approved the condensed interim financial statements for the first quarter ended March 31, 2024. The Board of Directors has declared first interim cash dividend of Rs. 9.0 per share i.e. 90% for the quarter ended March 31, 2024.

Through focused efforts of the Bank's management in maintaining no-cost deposits base and optimizing its earning assets mix, MCB's Profit Before Tax (PBT) for the first quarter of 2024 increased to Rs 32.5 billion with an impressive growth of 41%. Profit After Tax (PAT) posted a growth of 27% to reach Rs. 16.6 billion; translating into Earning Per Share (EPS) of Rs. 13.97 compared to an EPS of Rs. 11.02 reported in the corresponding period last year.

On the back of strong volumetric growth in average current deposits (+13% on a YoY basis) and timely repositioning within the asset book, net interest income for 1Q'24 increased by 27% over corresponding period last year.

Non-markup income increased to Rs. 9.1 billion (+54%) against Rs. 5.9 billion in the corresponding period last year with major contributions coming in from fee commission income of Rs. 6.1 billion (+46%), income from dealing in foreign currency of Rs. 1.9 billion (+97%) and dividend income of Rs. 1.0 billion (+55%).

Improving customer and interbank flows, diversification of revenue streams through continuous enrichment of service suite, investments towards digital transformation and an unrelenting focus on upholding high standards of service delivery supplemented a broad-based growth in income from fee commission; with trade and guarantee related business income growing by 100%, cards related income by 48%, branch banking customer fees by 17% and income from home remittance by 55%.

Threat of US sanctions on Iran trade condemned

PPA

ISLAMABAD: Murtaza Mughal, President of Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW), on Wednesday, condemned the US threat to impose sanctions on Pakistan in case of trade with Iran, terming it interference in internal matters.

Pakistan should make decisions according to its interests and ignore what is in the interest of the US, it said.

There is no other choice for Pakistan but to purchase gas from Iran or face a fine of twenty billion dollars, it added.

In a statement issued here today, Dr Murtaza Mughal said that the threat of US sanctions should not be taken very seriously as dozens of countries from the American block

are already trading with Iran. The US has no objection to dozens of countries doing trade with Iran, but when it comes to Pakistan, it start issuing threats which are condemnable, he said.

Dr Murtaza Mughal said that the American double standard adopted towards Pakistan is no longer acceptable as it is highly damaging to the economy.

He said that Pakistan's Afghan policy was not compatible with American interests, but it was continued for decades. Similarly, defence cooperation with China does not go down well with the Americans, but it continues successfully.

He added that the CPEC was also unacceptable to the US and its allies, but it is being finalised quickly. In many cases, decisions have been

made in the country's interest against the American will, and importing gas from Iran should also be such a decision.

Gas purchase from Iran is critically vital for Pakistan's economy, and we have no other option as refusal to buy gas will result in a fine of 20 billion dollars, which Pakistan can not pay, he underlined.

Dr. Mughal said that there is no doubt that America is a significant country. It is one of the largest trade partners, export destinations and among the largest investors in Pakistan.

Pakistan's exports and remittances also depend on the countries included in the American camp, and the international institutions that lend to Pakistan also make decisions under the influence of the United States.



He said that despite this, Pakistan should continue trying to achieve its interests because we cannot make every policy according to American intentions.

If the friction between Ameri-

ca and China increases and America asks Pakistan to withdraw from defence cooperation with China, stop CPEC, and stop building dams with Chinese collaboration, will this demand also be accepted? he questioned.

He was all praise for the recent visit of the Iranian President to Pakistan, during which trade was at the top of the agenda, and he expressed his goal to see yearly trade reach \$10 billion.

He said that the imposition of sanctions and the absence of appropriate banking channels constitute a significant barrier to expanding bilateral commerce between the two countries.

Expanding the number of border markets can deliver socioeconomic opportunities to communities on both sides.

ICC Rankings

Shaheen clinches title of top-rated T20I bowler

Shaheen went up by two notches to 17th spot among T20I bowlers

LAHORE: Shaheen Shah Afridi, Pakistan's most formidable pacer, has become the country's highest-rated T20I bowler as per the latest rankings update by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday — once again proving to be the true inspiration to all aspiring cricketers out there.

Shaheen went up by two notches to 17th spot among T20I bowlers.

"Shaheen rises two spots to 17th overall for T20I bowlers on the back of his strong start to Pakistan's ongoing T20I series at home against New Zealand, where the 24-year-old is the leading wicket-taker for the series through the first three matches," the ICC said in a press release.

"The pacer took the only wicket in the opening match of the series that was ruined by rain and his haul of 3/13 in Pakistan's decisive seven-wicket



triumph over the Kiwis in the second game of the series has led to the rise up the rankings and past teammate and fellow quick Haris Rauf in 22nd place." The number one spot belongs to

England's Adil Rashid, while New Zealand's Ish Sodhi also gained five spots to reach 18th following three wickets for New Zealand in the series against Pakistan.

Suryakumar Yadav of India sits at the top of the T20I rankings for batters, with New Zealand's Tim Seifert and Mark Chapman also making gains.

"Opener Tim Seifert rises three places to 24th, while teammate Mark Chapman is the big improver following his unbeaten half-century and Player of the Match heroics in the third game of the series in Pakistan," the ICC stated.

"Chapman smashed 87* from just 42 deliveries in a standout individual performance with the bat and was duly rewarded by making a 12-place jump to 33rd overall as a result of his innings that included a quartet of massive sixes."

Pakistan captain Babar Azam has dropped one place to fifth on the T20I rankings for batters. Meanwhile, Mohammad Rizwan is still in third place. Agencies

Women's Hockey test match

Karri Somerville (C) of Australia vies with Yuan Meng (R) of China during a Women's Hockey test match between Australia and China in Perth, Australia, April 24, 2024.



Photo: Xinhua

Uganda's women badminton team shifts focus to Uber Cup in China



KAMPALA: Uganda's women's badminton team has promised to make a good impression and perform well when they take part in the 2024 Uber Cup to take place in China.

Uganda will be making their maiden appearance at the 2024 Thomas & Uber Cup slated for April 28th to May 5th in Chengdu, China. The Ugandan team is placed in Group C together with Japan, Indonesia and Hong Kong, China.

Simon Mugabi, the Chief Executive Officer of the Uganda Badminton Association (UBA) told Xinhua before he traveled to China on Tuesday night that the team is motivated to impress in Chengdu.

"This will be a very good experience for our young women's team who also performed well at the African Games in Ghana that ended in March. It is very good to go and get that big exposure with the top players at the Uber Cup," explained Mugabi.

He further explained that although the four women players have failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics after featuring in tournaments in Spain, France and Slovenia, they put up good performances in their pursuit of points to make the qualification grade.

Husinah Kobugabe who won a silver medal in the women's singles at the African Games told Xinhua that they are not going to China just to participate, but to compete against the best players in the world. "We are not intimidated in any way because we have been facing some of these top players in other tournaments," added Kobugabe.

Gladys Mbabazi, Fadilah Shamika and Tracy Naluwoza are the other players who will make up Uganda's team.

It will be Uganda's first time to appear in the Uber Cup after South Africa who had initially qualified for the African continent withdrew. Xinhua

Leicester thrash Southampton to close on Premier League return

Abdul Fatawu scores hat-trick as Foxes move to within one win of promotion

LEICESTER: Abdul Fatawu scored a hat-trick as Leicester thrashed Southampton 5-0 to move to the brink of promotion back to the Premier League on Tuesday.

Wilfred Ndidi and Jamie Vardy were also on target for the Foxes, who need just one more win from their remaining two games to guarantee a place in the Championship's top two.

A chastening defeat ends Southampton's chances of automatic promotion as they now must recover in time for the playoffs.

Leicester moved four points clear of Leeds with both sides having two matches remaining.

Third-placed Ipswich are



now five points behind the leaders but have three games still to play.

After streaking clear at the start of the season, Leicester have wobbled in recent weeks but appear to have righted the ship in time.

Victory away at Preston on Monday or home to Blackburn on the final day of the campaign will secure a much-needed return to the riches of the Premier League given the club's financial troubles.

Fatawu broke the deadlock on 25 minutes when he raced onto Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall's pass to slot home.

Ndidi doubled the home side's advantage when he headed in just after the hour mark.

Fatawu secured the points in style when he cut inside from the right and unleashed an unstoppable shot across and beyond Alex McCarthy.

Vardy showed he can still finish at 37 by clipping first-time past McCarthy with Fatawu this time the supplier.

The Ghanaian then rounded off the scoring and claimed the match ball as Vardy returned the favour with an assist nine minutes from time. AFP

PAK vs NZ

PCB provides health update on Rizwan, Irfan

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has provided an update regarding the health of wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan and all-rounder Irfan Khan, stating that the two players have been ruled out of the last two T20Is against New Zealand.

According to a statement issued on Wednesday, the PCB Medical Panel yesterday received the Radiology reports of both players and after reviewing the reports with consultation of the Pakistan team management, it has been decided to rest the two players from Thursday's and Saturday's T20Is against New Zealand.

"The two players will now work on their rehabilitation with the PCB Medical Panel at NCA," it added.

Remember, Rizwan suffered discomfort in his hamstring during the third T20I against New Zealand in Rawalpindi on Sunday.

It is the third major blow for the hosts since Azam Khan was the first player to get ruled out of the series before the first T20I. He experienced discomfort in his right knee and right calf muscle.

Azam had undergone a radiology test which confirmed that he had suffered a Grade One tear in his right calf muscle after which he was advised to rest for 10 days.

Meanwhile, wicketkeeper-batter Haseebullah was named as his replacement.

It must be noted that the remaining two T20Is of the series are on 25 and 27 April, respectively. The series is currently level at 1-1.

The series is being broadcast live on Pakistan's first sports channel Geo Super.

Pakistan squad

Babar Azam (c), Saim Ayub, Usman Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, Mohammad Amir, Abbas Afridi, Abrar Ahmed, Fakhar Zaman, Usama Mir, Zaman Khan, Haseebullah

Reserves: Mohammad Ali, Agha Salman, Sahibzada Farhan, Mohammad Wasim Jr.

New Zealand squad

Michael Bracewell (c), Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert (WK), Ish Sodhi, Tom Blundell, Zak Foulkes.

Henan playmaker Huang doubtful for Cangzhou game



BEIJING: Henan FC attacking midfielder Huang Zichang faces the possibility of sitting out Friday's Chinese Super League tie against Cangzhou Mighty Lions after he picked up a leg injury at the last game.

The 27-year-old player was stretched off at the 60th minute of Henan's 1-0 win over Qingdao Hainiu at home on Sunday.

"Huang Zichang's performance at the game was highly recognizable, and he played a crucial role in the team's attack," the Henan club wrote in a statement on Tuesday night.

"In the second half he was taken off after suffering discomfort on his posterior thigh muscle," the club said.

It remains undecided whether Huang will play on Friday when Henan FC visits Cangzhou after he was diagnosed with hamstring fasciitis, according to the Henan outfit.

As the linchpin of the Henan side, Huang has been battling with injuries since the pre-season training, the Henan club said. Xinhua

England women's cricket team captain Heather Knight 'super excited' to host Pakistan after 8 years

BIRMINGHAM:

England Women's cricket team captain Heather Knight says she is "super excited" to host the Pakistan women's team next month.



The green shirts will be visiting England after a gap of eight years for a bilateral series where they will lock horns with the home side first in three T20 internationals, followed by three One Day Internationals.

Speaking exclusively to Geo News, the 2017 cricket World Cup-winning captain, Knight said that Pakistan women have shown some good form in the recently concluded series against New Zealand and her team is not taking the matches against Pakistan lightly and is fully prepared to take on the visitors.

"I don't think it will be an easy run at all. They have just got a new captain in Nida Dar, some of the players are performing more consistently and they've had some really good results recently so it won't be easy at all. We are expecting a tough match against them and hopefully, we can bring our game and entertain the crowd," the England women's team's captain said.

Knight told Geo News that the Pakistan women's team has some really talented cricketers but for her Fatima Sana will be the one player to watch. She has played with a young Pakistani all-rounder in the FAIRBREAK cricket tournament and was very impressed, it will be exciting to play against her at home.

"Fatima is a great kid and she's got lots of energy enthusiasm, lots of passion. She is developing into a good bowler too so she is certainly the one to watch. I really get on with the girls in the Pakistan team especially with Fati (Fatima Sana) as I said and Nida is a really lovely girl too.

Norman says McIlroy welcome on LIV Tour, but denies any offer

LIV Golf boss dismissed reports of a £627m offer made to Northern Irishman to switch from the PGA Tour

ADELAIDE: LIV Golf boss Greg Norman denied Wednesday making any financial offer for Rory McIlroy to jump ship from the PGA Tour, but said he was happy to "have a conversation".

A report in Britain last week said McIlroy — a long-time critic of the upstart Saudi circuit — was poised to switch to LIV in a staggering deal worth \$850 million.

But the four-time major winner from Northern Ireland swiftly debunked the rumours in an interview with NBC's Golf Central.

"LIV never put an offer to him," Norman said when asked by AFP on the sidelines of LIV's latest stop in Adelaide.

"This is just typical white noise that gets out there in the industry." LIV has signed a slew of golf's

elite since its formation, with Spanish star Jon Rahm the last big name to make the switch last December in a move reported to be worth around \$500 million.

McIlroy has been increasingly conciliatory towards LIV professionals in recent months amid negotiations with the PGA Tour over a merger, but insisted to NBC he planned to remain on the PGA Tour "for the rest of my career."

Norman said he would always be welcome should he change his mind.

"If Rory was willing to sit down with us and have a conversation with us, would we be happy to sit down with him — 100 percent," he said.

"No different to any other player who would be interested

in coming over to play with us."

Norman revealed he recently sat down with another "top, top PGA player" to lay out the facts of what LIV represented and what it could deliver on a global basis.

"I mean I've sat down with one top, top PGA player in his house with another member of my team and walked him through the whole process," he said.

"And he was so impressed and he said, 'that's not what we're told in the locker room', and that this was really impressive.

"He made the decision and he called me up two days later and said 'I'm deciding to stay where I'm at'.

"I said, 'happy days, you made the decision on facts. The door is always open if you want to come back and have a conversation.'"

Norman was at the Augusta Masters earlier this month, primarily to "support the (LIV) boys".

After being snubbed from the official guest list last year, he bought his ticket this time and spent three days walking a golf course with the public for the first time in his life.

He admitted to being nervous about the reception he might get, but said the support from fans for LIV Golf's mission was "very, very strong".

"To see it and to hear the comments they made about what's happening to the game of golf and what LIV has brought to the game of golf, it was very, very strong for me," he said.

"It was a very powerful three days." AFP



Pak-China ties

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency, Mr. Luo Zhaohui, along with his delegation called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday.



Photo: PID

President for stronger economic, cultural ties with China

President Zardari says Pakistan considered CPEC of immense strategic importance

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday said that Pakistan and China enjoyed long-term strategic relations, which need to be further strengthened in the areas of trade, economy, agriculture, people-to-people contacts, and culture. The president, in a meeting with the visiting Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), Luo Zhaohui, who along with his delegation called on him, underlined the need for both

countries to continue to work together to take bilateral relations to new heights.

The ambassador of China in Pakistan Jiang Zaidong, the Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Dr Jahanzeb Khan, and senior officials of the Chinese and Pakistani governments attended the meeting. Reiterating Pakistan's firm commitment to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the president said that Pakistan considered CPEC of immense strategic importance and was fully committed to the timely completion of all CPEC

projects.

Highlighting the importance of Gwadar Port, he said that Gwadar Port would not only promote regional connectivity but would also make the transport of goods to China cost-effective. He also suggested to undertake joint training projects to equip human resources with skills keeping in view the Chinese demand for skilled workforce.

Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), Mr Luo Zhaohui, briefed the president about CIDCA's role

in Pakistan's socio-economic development as well as its contributions in the health and education sectors. He also underlined the need to promote tourism and agricultural cooperation between the two countries.

President Zardari expressed grief over the unfortunate terrorist attack on Chinese workers in Bisham, saying that Pakistan would make all-out efforts to provide a safe environment for the Chinese workers and investors in Pakistan. The Chairman of CIDCA said that the enemies of the two

countries wanted to harm bilateral relations but they would never succeed in their designs.

The president thanked the Government of China for its support to Pakistan and for playing a vital role in Pakistan's economic development. He also appreciated CIDCA's contributions to the rehabilitation of flood-affected people and reconstruction of schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, besides constructing housing units for lady health workers in Sindh and Balochistan.

FM seeks closer ties with UNDP for climate resilience, SDGs



Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar has expressed Pakistan's desire to enhance cooperation with the UNDP in strengthening climate resilience, adaptation, and pursuing Sustainable Development Goals and socio-economic development.

He made these remarks during a meeting with Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Development Programme, Kanni Wignaraja in Islamabad on Wednesday.

The Foreign Minister appreciated the important work carried out by the UNDP since the catastrophic floods in Pakistan in 2022, focusing on the Sustainable Development Agen-

da and climate action. He emphasized that the UN system could play a critical role in supporting developing countries in achieving SDGs and addressing the climate agenda by galvanizing international solidarity and cooperation.

The Foreign Minister further said that assistance to countries most vulnerable to climate change would enable them to rebuild from natural disasters and adapt to increasingly frequent and severe climate impacts.

Assistant Secretary-General Wignaraja thanked the Government of Pakistan for its continued cooperation and support to the UNDP in implementing various projects in Pakistan. She also appreciated Pakistan's active diplomatic engagement at the United Nations.

Hajj permits start for domestic pilgrims in Saudi Arabia



Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Arabia is set to start issuing permits for citizens and Muslim foreign residents who will perform upcoming Hajj pilgrimage, GulfNews reported Wednesday.

The permits for the domestic pilgrimage will be issued via the government platform Absher and the Saudi Ministry of Hajj's website.

In February, Saudi Arabia opened e-registration for its citizens and Muslims expatriates, who wish to perform Hajj due this year in June.

The Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj unveiled four pilgrimage packages with their prices ranging from SR4,099 to SR13,265 depending on accommodation level. The ministry also said prices of these packages can be paid in three instalments.

In the first, 20 per cent of the overall cost was to be paid until the first day of the Islamic lunar month of Ramazan that started on March 11; the second instalment stands at 40 per cent with the deadline set at the 20th of Ramazan corresponding to March 31; and the third has to be paid

by the 20th of the following Islamic month of Shawwal corresponding to April 29.

Eligible pilgrims and Hajj workers are required to get certain vaccinations. They are one dose of the updated vaccine against COVID-19 for people aged at least 18 years; anti-seasonal influenza vaccine; and inoculation against meningitis.

Some 1.8 million pilgrims from around the world last year performed Hajj in and around Makkah, marking the return of their numbers to pre-pandemic levels.

Saudi Arabia has embarked on early preparations for this year's Hajj under a new strategy for overseas pilgrims. Accordingly, no specific places would be allotted any more for countries at the holy sites. Instead, places for different countries are allocated depending on the time of finalising contracts.

The new mechanism aims at facilitating preparations for Hajj, an obligatory Islamic duty that must be carried out at least once in a lifetime by Muslims who can afford it physically and financially.

Families of May 9 detainees urge CJP to review military trials

They appeal to COAS to show 'compassion' and investigate matter

LAHORE: Families of individuals detained since the May 9 protests have urged Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa to establish a full bench to review the cases of their loved ones, many of whom have been in military custody for nearly a year.

They also appealed to the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir to show compassion and investigate the matter, emphasising that most of those held in military custody are law-abiding citizens.

During a news conference on Wednesday, families of the detainees shared their distress alongside senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Ali Muhammad Khan, Raouf Hassan, and Barrister Abuzar



Niaz.

Sidra Murtaza, whose brother was arrested on May 9 for participating in a protest, recounted his journey through various levels of custody, from police to the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC), and then to the military.

She expressed the families' hope that the Supreme Court

would provide justice but lamented that the court had yet to issue a ruling or form a full bench to hear their cases.

She also referenced a previous case involving the Army Public School (APS), where CJP Isa ruled that civilians should not be tried in military courts, a decision that led to constitutional amendments

Taimoor Majeed, whose brother was arrested on August 13 for participating in a protest outside the Corps Commander House in Lahore Cantt, shared that it took five months for them to discover his brother was in military custody. When they finally met, his brother had lost a significant amount of weight, indicating harsh conditions.

PTI leader Ali Muhammad Khan pointed out that all political parties agree that civilians should not be tried in military courts. He called on the top court to prioritise the issue and form a larger bench to hear the cases, emphasising that almost a year has passed with little or no progress.

The affected families are seeking a fair and transparent investigation, with a fair trial in civil courts, as well as the opportunity to meet their loved ones under more humane conditions.

They reiterated that while they do not expect favouritism, they demand justice for their relatives who are suffering from lengthy incarceration and uncertain legal status. Agencies

United States acknowledges Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts

Chairman Senate calls for further promoting parliamentary relations between Pakistan, US

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani Wednesday appreciated the US government for its collaboration across various sectors and emphasized the need to enhance trade links for mutual benefit. During the meeting with US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome, the chairman Senate stressed the need for increased cooperation to boost trade volume.

Both sides engaged in detailed deliberations on various aspects of the enduring friendship between Pakistan and the United States, said a news release. Ambassador Blome extended heartfelt congratulations to Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani on being elected as Chairman Senate and conveyed his best wishes for a successful tenure.

Expressing Pakistan's commitment to nurturing its long-standing friendly ties with the US, the Chairman Senate emphasized the importance of further



promoting parliamentary relations between the two nations. He underscored the pivotal role that parliamentary contacts can play in enhancing public and legislative engagement. Recognizing the significant economic partnership between the two countries, Chairman Senate Gillani highlighted the US as Pakistan's largest trading partner.

Ambassador Blome commended the new economic team of Pakistan and

expressed optimism regarding the ongoing discussions between Pakistan and the IMF. He praised the efforts of the Pakistan economic team and emphasized the potential for further economic cooperation between Pakistan and the US.

Acknowledging the positive economic indicators of Pakistan, the ambassador noted the downward trend in inflation and high dollar reserves, stating that the

IMF's positive feedback would encourage investors. He also highlighted the flourishing gaming industry in Pakistan and called for enhanced cooperation in the digital sector. Both discussed the importance of parliamentary contacts. Chairman Senate appreciated the fact that a strong Parliamentary Caucus exists in the US Congress for promotion of bilateral ties and we are in the process of reconstitution of the friendship group as a consequence of the recent Senate elections. This would help promote mutually beneficial ties and give Parliamentary diplomacy a chance to build strong people-to-people contacts. Chairman Senate underscored the challenges faced by students and businessmen in obtaining US visas and called for further streamlining the visa process.

The US Ambassador acknowledged Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and reiterated US support in combating terrorism, recognizing the significant impact of terrorism on the country.