



Russia becomes UN Security Council President

NEW YORK (News Agencies): Russia has taken the presidency of the UN Security Council despite Ukraine urging members to block the move. Each of the council's 15 members takes up the presidency for a month, on a rotating pattern. The last time Russia had the presidency, February 2022, it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It means the Security Council is being led by a country whose president is subject to an international arrest warrant for alleged war crimes. The International Criminal Court - which is not a UN institution - issued the warrant for Vladimir Putin last month. Despite Ukraine's complaints, the United States said it could not block Russia - a permanent council member - from assuming the presidency. The other permanent members of the council are the UK, US, France, and China. The role is mostly procedural, but Moscow's ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzia, told the Russian Tass news agency that he planned to oversee several debates, including one on arms control. He said he would discuss a "new world order" that, he said, was

coming to "replace the unipolar one". Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called Russia's presidency "the worst joke ever for April Fool's Day" and a "stark reminder that something is wrong with the way international security architecture is functioning". Ukraine's presidential adviser, Mykhaylo Podolyak, said the move was "another rape of international law... an entity that wages an aggressive war, violates the norms of humanitarian and criminal law, destroys the UN Charter, neglects nuclear safety, can't head the world's key security body". President Volodymyr Zelensky called last year for the Security Council to reform or "dissolve altogether", accusing it of failing to take enough action to prevent Russia's invasion. He has also called for Russia to be removed of its member status. But the US has said its hands were tied as the UN charter does not allow for the removal of a permanent member. "Unfortunately, Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council and no feasible international legal pathway exists to change that reality," White House press secretary

Karine Jean-Pierre told a news briefing this week. She added the US expects Moscow "to continue to use its seat on the council to spread disinformation" and justify its actions in Ukraine. The UN Security Council is an international body responsible for maintaining peace. Five nations are permanently represented on the Security Council. They reflect the post-war power structure that held sway when the council was formed. Members of this group work alongside 10 non-permanent member countries. Russia's presence as a permanent member on the Security Council means it can veto resolutions. To pass a Security Council vote, there need to be nine votes in favour, with none of the five permanent members voting against. In February last year Russia vetoed a resolution that intended to end the Russian invasion of Ukraine (China, India and the United Arab Emirates all abstained). In September it vetoed a resolution calling for the reversal of its illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine. Brazil, China, Gabon and India abstained.

'Catastrophic' Arkansas tornado kills 3, Illinois storm leaves 1 dead

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): A "catastrophic" tornado tore through the southern US state of Arkansas and killed three people on Friday, while severe storms further north caused the roof of an Illinois theater to collapse, leaving one dead and 28 injured, authorities said. The Arkansas tornado whipped across the state in the afternoon, causing what Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders called "widespread damage." Sanders said two people were killed in the town of Wynne in the eastern part of Arkansas, while an official in Pulaski County, which surrounds the capital Little Rock, confirmed a fatality there. "Significant damage has occurred in Central Arkansas," Sanders wrote on Twitter. Little Rock Mayor



Frank Scott Jr. said "close to 30 individuals have been transported to our local hospitals." The National Weather Service issued tornado warnings for parts of the nearby states of Tennessee, Illinois and Iowa. In the evening, calamity struck Belvidere, Illinois, when severe weather caused the roof and part of the facade of the Apollo Theater to collapse while a heavy metal band played on stage inside.

Italy blocks AI chatbot ChatGPT over data privacy failings



ROME (AFP/APP): Italy said on Friday it was temporarily blocking ChatGPT over data privacy concerns, becoming the first western country to take such action against the popular artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot. The country's Data Protection Authority said US firm OpenAI, which makes ChatGPT, had no legal basis to justify "the mass collection and storage of personal data for the purpose of 'training' the algorithms underlying the operation of the platform". ChatGPT caused a global

sensation when it was released last year for its ability to generate essays, songs, exams and even news articles from brief prompts. But critics have long fretted that it was unclear where ChatGPT and its competitors got their data or how they processed it. Universities and some education authorities have banned the chatbot over fears that students could use it to write essays or cheat in exams. And hundreds of experts and industry figures signed an open letter this week calling for a pause in the development of powerful AI systems, arguing they posed "profound risks to society and humanity". The letter was prompted by OpenAI's release earlier this month of GPT-4, a more powerful version of its chatbot, with even less transparency about its data sources.

IMF approves \$15.6 bn Ukraine loan package

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): The International Monetary Fund has approved a \$15.6 billion support package for Ukraine to assist with the conflict-hit country's economic recovery, the fund said in a statement Friday. Russia's invasion has devastated Ukraine's economy, causing activity to contract by around 30 percent last year, destroying much of its capital stock and spreading poverty, according to the IMF. The outbreak of war has rippled through the global economy, fueling global inflation

through rising wheat and oil prices. The invasion has also highlighted Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas for its energy security. Many countries were forced to seek out alternative sources of energy after the war began. The two-step program will look to stabilize the country's economic situation while the war continues, before turning to "more ambitious structural reforms" after the end of hostilities, IMF deputy managing director Gita Gopinath said in a statement.

INDIA: Dozens killed in Hindu temple disaster

NEW DELHI (News Agencies): The death toll from a fatal floor collapse at a Hindu temple in the central Indian city of Indore has reached 36, officials said on Friday. The incident occurred on Thursday when worshippers gathered inside the Beleswar Mahadev Jhulelal temple for the Ram Navami festival. A floor collapsed under the weight of dozens of people, causing them to fall into an indoor stepwell. "The major cause of deaths could be drowning because the well was 60 feet (18.3 meters) deep and there was much water in it," Ilayaraja T, a top local official, told Reuters. He said the authorities believe 80 people were at the temple when the tragedy struck, and the search for survivors continues. He added that 16 were injured. Step-

wells were a staple of Indian architecture up to the 19th century. Ornate and multi-level wells are now among the country's top tourist attractions. A survivor told local media that the collapsed floor had not been reinforced by concrete and was made only with "stone slabs and iron rods." According to the Hindustan Times, police have launched a criminal probe against two senior managers of the private trust that operates the temple, both of whom are at large. NDTV reported that local authorities wanted to demolish the well's roof in 2022 after residents claimed it had been built in violation of environmental regulations. The demolition was reportedly canceled after the trust argued that it would have "hurt religious sentiments."

Belarus ready to host Russian strategic nuclear weapons - president

MINSK (News Agencies): Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko mullied the possibility of his nation hosting Russia's strategic nuclear weapons during an annual address to parliament on Friday. His words came as Moscow announced its plans to deploy its tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. "I and [Russian

President Vladimir] Putin can decide and deploy strategic nuclear weapons here, if need be," Lukashenko told lawmakers, adding that the move would show the two nations' readiness to defend their "sovereignty and independence." "We will stop at nothing to protect our nations, our states, our people," he said.

Trump 'shocked' by indictment but 'ready to fight'



WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): Donald Trump's legal team went on the offensive on Friday following his historic indictment, vowing the former president would never seek a plea deal and was ready "to fight" all charges. The 76-year-old Trump, who is hoping to recapture the White House in 2024, chimed in with attacks on the prosecutors who brought the charges against him and even the judge expected to hear the case. "ELECTION INTERFERENCE, KANGAROO COURT!" Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social, adding that Juan Manuel Marchal, the judge who may preside over an eventual trial, "hates me." Trump is to be booked, fingerprinted and will have a mugshot taken at a Manhattan courthouse on Tuesday afternoon before appearing before a judge as the first ever American president to face criminal charges. "The president will not be put in handcuffs," said Joe Tacopina, one of Trump's attorneys, adding that he does not believe prosecutors will "allow this to become a circus."

Fifteen hurt as two Swiss trains derail in storm



LÜSCHERZ (AFP/APP): Fifteen people were injured, including at least one seriously hurt, in two separate train derailments that happened in quick succession Friday in stormy wind in northwestern Switzerland, police said. The incidents, on regional passenger rail lines, took place about 30 kilometres apart, north of the Swiss capital Bern. Three people were injured in the first, including the driver, and 12 were injured in the second, with wind speeds of 136 kilometres per hour recorded nearby.

UN offers no comment on Trump's indictment as US enters uncharted waters

NEW YORK (APP): The United Nations Friday declined any comment on the indictment of former US President Donald Trump by a Manhattan grand jury after a probe into hush money paid to adult film star Stormy Daniels, becoming the first former American president to face criminal charges even as he makes another run for the White House. "We're obviously fully aware of what's going on. It's not that you can escape it by looking at the news here. At this point, in the process, we do not have a comment," UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in response to a question at the regular noon briefing at UN Headquarters in New York. Facing criminal charges, Trump was weighing his next steps on Friday as the unprecedented turn of events in American

history drew sharply partisan responses from Democrats and Republicans and heralds a tumultuous stretch for a deeply divided nation. Trump is expected to appear before a judge in Manhattan on Tuesday. A New York judge on Friday authorized Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg to make the charges public, but it was not clear when he would do so. For nearly two weeks, Trump has been using the legal threats he confronts to raise money and rally supporters as he seeks his party's nomination to challenge Democratic President Joe Biden next year. The first U.S. president to try to overthrow an election defeat, inspiring the deadly assault on the U.S. Capitol, has signaled he will continue to campaign even as he faces charges.

Pakistan, speaking for OIC, says acts of Quran's desecration undermine inter-faith harmony, peace



GENEVA (APP): The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has, at a meeting of the Human Rights Council, called the recent acts of desecration of the Holy Quran as not just a provocation to Muslims, but a step to sabotage inter-faith harmony and peace. "This year we have witnessed at least five incidents of public desecration of the Holy Quran in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands - as the latest manifestation of racial hatred and xenophobia," Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Khalil Hashmi, said in a general debate of the

47-member Council on Friday, speaking on behalf of the OIC. "The OIC Group echoes the outrage of nearly 2 billion human beings whose faith is anchored in the message of the Quran," Ambassador Hashmi told the delegates, citing a verse from the holy book that said, "Let there be no compulsion in religion". That affirmation came over a millennia before freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression got enshrined in legal instruments. In this context, the Pakistani envoy said an unequivocal condemnation should have been the starting point of the international community's response to these acts. "Sadly," he added, "some chose to hide behind the self-serving interpretation of human rights." "Absence of preventive legal deterrence, inaction, and shying away from speaking out encourages further incitement to hatred and violence," Ambassador Hashmi said, noting that unsurprisingly more incidents have followed.

Pirates kidnap six crew from Danish ship off West Africa

COPENHAGEN (AFP/APP): Pirates who seized a Danish oil tanker off Congo last week have kidnapped six crew and abandoned ship, the French navy said on Friday. The Monjasa Reformer had 16 sailors when it was boarded by pirates on March 25. The remaining crew were rescued by a French naval ship. They said "six crew members had been kidnapped

by the pirates", the French navy said in a statement. The Liberian-flagged tanker was found on Thursday off the coast of Sao Tome and Principe in the Gulf of Guinea. It had been spotted by a drone from the French patrol boat Premier Maitre LHer, deployed as part France's anti-piracy mission CORMYMBE, the French defence ministry said.

About Khyber Mail The Khyber mail was first published in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1932. A newspaper in English by the eminent journalist Sheikh Sana Ullah. From 1932 to 1989 it has survived as leading English newspaper in the region by the sons of Sana Ullah i.e. Sheikh Zaka Ullah, Sheikh Inayat Ullah and Sheikh Saleem Ullah. The publication was shut down in 1989 due to various reasons. The current owner Rizwan Inayat son of Sheikh Inayat Ullah and grandson of Sheikh Sana Ullah, has restarted the family heritage but meeting with the requirement of the century, by giving the readers current happenings around the world with one touch anywhere any time and updating the reader to pace up with the world.



Covid infection before vaccination lowers immunity: Study

PESHAWAR (Agencies): If you had Covid infection before you took vaccination, chances are that you might have less immunity, claimed a study. Researchers at the Stanford University in the US found that the magnitude and quality of a key immune cell's response to vaccination with two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine were considerably lower in people with prior SARS-CoV-2 infection compared to people without prior infection. In addition, the level of this key immune cell that targets the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein was substantially lower in unvaccinated people with Covid-19 than in vaccinated people who had never been infected. Importantly, people who recover from SARS-CoV-2 infection and then get vaccinated are more protected than people who are unvaccinated, Medical Xpress reported. These findings, which suggest that the virus damages an important immune-cell response, were published in the journal Immunity. Led by Mark M. Davis, Professor of microbiology and immunology at Stanford's School of Medicine, the researchers designed a very sensi-

tive tool to analyse how immune cells called CD4+ T cells and CD8+ T cells respond to SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccination. These cells coordinate the immune system's response to the virus and kill other cells that have been infected, helping prevent Covid. The tool was designed to identify T cells that target any of dozens of specific regions on the virus's spike protein as well as some other viral regions. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine uses parts of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein to elicit an immune response without causing infection. The investigators studied CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell responses in blood samples from three groups of volunteers. One group had never been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine. The second group had previously been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and received two doses of the vaccine. The third group had Covid-19 and was unvaccinated. The researchers found that vaccination of people who had never been infected with SARS-CoV-2 induced robust CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell responses to

the virus' spike protein. In addition, these T cells produced multiple types of cell-signalling molecules called cytokines, which recruit other immune cells -- including antibody-producing B cells -- to fight pathogens. However, people who had been infected with SARS-CoV-2 prior to vaccination produced spike-specific CD8+ T cells at considerably lower levels -- and with less functionality -- than vaccinated people who had never been infected. Moreover, the researchers observed substantially lower levels of spike-specific CD8+ T cells in unvaccinated people with Covid than in vaccinated people who had never been infected. Overall, these findings suggest that SARS-CoV-2 infection damages the CD8+ T cell response, an effect akin to that observed in earlier studies showing long-term damage to the immune system after infection with viruses such as hepatitis C or HIV. "The new findings highlight the need to develop vaccination strategies to specifically boost antiviral CD8+ T cell responses in people previously infected with SARS-CoV-2," the researchers said.

PESHAWAR (APP): An increase in corona cases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Peshawar with 13 more cases of corona have been reported during the last 24 hours, an official of the Health Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said here Saturday. He said the number of people who have died due to Corona in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 6376 and the total number of corona cases has reached 2,25,336. However, a total of 13 people have recovered from Corona in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa with the total number has become 2,187,94, the official of the Health Department informed. The number of people who died due to coronavirus in Peshawar is 3153 with 11 new cases of corona have been reported in Peshawar and with this, the total number has become 85492. He disclosed that 619 corona tests were conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the last twenty hours with the number of active cases in the province is 166.

Increase in corona cases in KP reported

Search operation conducted in areas of Tehsil Maidan

LOWER (APP): Lower Dir Police and security forces on Friday conducted search and strike operations against outlaws and anti-social elements in various areas of Tehsil Maidan. The search operation was conducted on the directives of Re-

gional Police Officer Malakand Nasir Mehmood Satti. Teams of police and security forces raided different localities including Takhtpar, Korobagh, Ashoge, Kharga, Mastoori, Kuwari, Shako, Mano Banda, Labjok Dara, Markhane.

SSP Operations vows to catch killers of slain Sikh shopkeeper

PESHAWAR (APP): The Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Haroon Khan on Friday visited the residence of Diyal Singh, a Sikh shopkeeper who was shot dead in the jurisdiction of Rahman Baba Police Station, and met with his grieving relatives. According to police sources, Diyal Singh was attacked by unknown assailants riding a motorcycle when he was sitting in a shop. The police registered a case and launched an investigation into the killing, but no arrests have been made so far. During his meeting with the family of the deceased, SSP Haroon Khan expressed his condolences and assured

them that the police were doing everything in their power to apprehend the culprits. He said that a special team had been formed to investigate the case and that they were following multiple leads. "We are deeply saddened by the loss of Diyal Singh and we share the grief of his family and the Sikh community," SSP Khan said. "We are determined to catch the killers and bring them to justice as soon as possible." He also urged the public to come forward with any information that could help the police in their investigation and promised to provide security to the Sikh community in the area.

Minority leader urges effective security measure for minority community

PESHAWAR (APP): Minority and Human Rights Activist, Haroon Sarab Diyal while expressing concern

over the killing of a trader, here, on Saturday has urged effective security measures to prevent such incidents in future. In a press statement, Haroon Sarab Diyal condemned the killing of a trader belonging to a Sikh community. Haroon Sarab Diyal has asked for strict implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) formulated for the eradication of terrorism and anti-state elements. Haroon said a large number of minority members were working in different government and private departments, especially in the suburban areas of cities contributing to the welfare of the country. He said representation of minority community in meetings held in connection with security measures can help in bringing drastic reduction in the incidents of subversive nature.

and arms and drugs were recovered from their possession. Seized weapons and drugs include two Kalashnikovs, two rifles, one repeater, dozens of cartridges and 3,460 grams of hashish.

28 suspects arrested during search operation at Kohat

PESHAWAR (APP): City police here on Saturday arrested 28 suspects during raids conducted on hideouts in Billi Tang area. A spokesman for Kohat police said that 28 suspects were arrested

Administration conducts awareness campaign against tobacco use

PESHAWAR (APP): District Administration Peshawar here on Friday carried out an awareness campaign to inform the general public about hazards of tobacco use on human health. Assistant Commissioner, Sye-

da Zainab Naqvi led the campaign and visited various public areas with SSP Traffic, Inayat Ali and Tobacco Coordinator, Ajmal Khan. The team visited various public points including Bus Terminal Haji Camp. They distributed pamphlets among the public and highlighted the perilous effects on human health.

GOLD PRICE IN PAK

Gold Rate	24K Gold	22K Gold	21K Gold	18K Gold
Per Tola Gold	Rs. 210500	Rs. 192957	Rs. 184188	Rs. 157875
Per 10 Gram	Rs. 180500	Rs. 165457	Rs. 157938	Rs. 135375
Per Gram Gold	Rs. 18050	Rs. 16546	Rs. 15794	Rs. 13538
Per Ounce	Rs. 511700	Rs. 469055	Rs. 447738	Rs. 383775

FOREX RATES

Currency	Buying	Selling
US Dollar	283.7	286.5
China Yuan	41.16	41.56
Japanese Yen	2.25	2.3
Saudi Riyal	75.5	76.5
U.A.E Dirham	77.2	77.9
UK Pound	350.5	354
Euro	308	311
Australian Dollar	187.5	189.9
Canadian Dollar	206.5	208.7

Emergency Numbers

Organization	Phone No
Rescue 1122 HQrs	091-2264224-25
Rescue 1122 Mardan	0937-9230770
Fire Brigade Cantt:	091-9212534
Fire Brigade City	091-2566666
Police Emergency	091-9212222
Edhi Ambulance	091-2214575
Red Crescent Ambulance	091-2210836
Emergency Ambulance	091-2590846
Civil Defence, Peshawar	091-9212176
Lady Reading Hospital	091-9211430
HMC Peshawar	091-9217140-46
KTH Peshawar	091-9216340-8
Irnam Hospital	091-9216115
Mission Hospital	091-2212371
Al-Khidmat Hospital	091-2215945
Fauji Foundation Hospital	091-9212771-4
Frontier Foundation Blood Services	091-5703463
Hamza Foundation, Peshawar	091-5841632
Sui Gas, Peshawar	091-9213016
Wapda Complaint Peshawar	091-9212041
PIA, Peshawar	091-9213351
Airport Inquiry	114
Railway Inquiry	117

Hazrat Ummi Ayesha Services (Pvt) Ltd

Enr#1196/P

Hajj Package 1444 H / 2023

Approved Package # 9 by Ministry of Religious Affairs

Executive Package 20 Days/Post Hajj Madinah

22ND JUNE - 12TH JULY Inshallah 4TH ZILHAJJA - 24TH ZILHAJJA Inshallah

PACKAGE PLAN

4 Days Madinah

Pakistan-Jeddah	4TH ZIL HAJJA
Azizia	4TH- 8TH ZIL HAJJA
Hajj days	8TH- 12TH ZIL HAJJA
Azizia	12TH- 15TH ZIL HAJJA
Makkah Hotel	15TH ZIL HAJJA- 21TH ZIL HAJJA
Madinah Hotel	21TH- 24TH ZIL HAJJA
Madinah-Pakistan	24TH ZIL HAJJA

One Day Plus or Minus Possible Due To Moon Sighting or flight schedule

PACKAGE DETAILS

- Azizia building gender based sharing of 5 person (close to Mina)
- Special family room in Azizia (first come first serve basis)
- Buffet meals in Azizia on full board basis with 24 hours hot & cold drinks
- Makkah accommodation hotel standard (150meters) in Abraj Al Bait/Clock Tower half board meal
- Madina accommodation hotel standard(250 meters) in Markazia half board meal
- Maktab category B (close to Jamarat) all facilities of category B Maktab are inclusive as per the Taleemat of govt. of KSA
- Private new busses, full board in Mina & Arafat
- Hajj training and orientation programs
- Any airline with or without stopover
- Additional taxes or levies if occur are subject to be included later if any
- Rate of exchange is calculated @ Rs 77Per Riyal if rate fluctuated will be applied

DOUBLE SHARING BASIS

PKR 2,560,000 PER PERSON

INCLUDING AIRFARE

TRIPLE SHARING BASIS

PKR 2,400,000 PER PERSON

INCLUDING AIRFARE

QUAD SHARING BASIS

PKR 2,320,000 PER PERSON

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PKR Triple 80,000 Double 200,000 PER PERSON

Address: LG-524/525 Deans Trade Center Peshawar Cantt
Contact No: 091-5253086/0300-8599929

Attackers shot killed Sikh shopkeeper

PESHAWAR (APP): Unidentified armed attackers, riding a bike, on Friday killed a Sikh shopkeeper here at Dir Colony. According to police, Diyal Singh was sitting in his shop when unknown persons riding on a motorbike targeted him with a pistol and escaped from the scene. As a result, Diyal Singh died on the spot. The police reached on the spot and collected evidence while the body was shifted to the hospital. Meanwhile, a person Sher Alam opened fire at his mother and wife in Methara area here after exchanging of harsh arguments and escaped from the scene, however, both of the ladies survived by the bullet injuries.

TTP claimed Fawad as its comrade

PESHAWAR (APP): The banned Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has recognized Maulana Fawad as its comrade, said a statement of TTP spokesman issued to the media here Saturday. The TTP has confirmed that Maulana Fawad, who was killed by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Mardan, was its member. Fawad was killed a day earlier in a CTD raid at his hide out to arrest him but all of a sudden, the terrorists started firing and martyred a policeman. In a retaliatory firing by Police, terrorist Fawad was killed and now TTP declared him as member of the terrorist group TTP.

WSSP mark sanitation day in Mardan

PESHAWAR (APP): Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSP) Mardan on Saturday observed "salam sanitation day" to acknowledge the services of sanitary workers. WSSP General Manager, engineer Muhammad Khalil Akbar while addressing a function said the sanitary workers were always at the forefront in all emergency situations and their services should be acknowledged like other public service organisations. Khalil Akbar said 564 sanitation workers are deployed in fourteen union councils in Mardan city while 52 vehicles take part in sanitation activities.



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Solar Panel Indigenisation

A solar panel localisation policy is in its final stages to reduce import costs. Solar panels produced locally will be cheaper, better quality, and will help the balance of payments crisis by reducing foreign exchange. Additionally, once local industries shift focus to their production, job creation, and research into renewable sources will be encouraged. Just by advertising these local panels, awareness around the products and producing green energy will be encouraged. Tax exemption, encouragement for public-private partnerships, and renewable energy grid investments are well thought-out for producers. But this is where the problem lies—it benefits producers more than consumers. Solarisation needs consumer demand for it to be valuable and the policy should cater to this part of the problem too. Current government policies have ironically worsened the uptake of solar energy and panels by the public as they are imported and the closing of LCs has increased rates considerably. The problem with mass solarisation in the country is closely linked to the affordability crisis. Individuals have lost their purchasing power considerably and a simple system has almost doubled in the local market. While localisation of panels will reduce this, the initial investment in the system will still be too high for the common man. There is a shortage of electricity in the country and energy is becoming insecure. The solution is making solar energy accessible and affordable, and indigenous plants are definitely a step in the right direction. Discouraging imports was always on the agenda but the next steps should address the consumer end of the problem. The move to renewable sources is imperative as generation and demand constitute a considerable gap. Load shedding is already widespread and electricity consumption will increase more in times to come. Power generation practice has contributed to the mess of circular debt in the area. Going forward, energy credits and tax incentives by the Government can help the consumer. This will encourage uptake and usage by the general public.

Rule of Law and Constitution: Essential foundations for strong and lasting Pakistani Republic — By Sultan Ali Haider

In times of political turmoil, the spotlight is on the Constitution. Influential figures champion upholding the Constitution while accusing opponents of undermining it. The crucial question that arises is why the Constitution is so important, especially in the Pakistani context. The principles of the rule of law and the Constitution are indispensable for ensuring the longevity and stability of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. These principles establish a framework for governance that promotes prosperity and justice in society. The rule of law asserts that every individual and institution, including the government, is subject to the law and must act in accordance with it. Renowned philosophers, political thinkers, and lawyers have emphasized the rule of law as a fundamental component of a functioning society. Aristotle believed, "It is more proper that law should govern than any one of the citizens." The rule of law ensures that no individual or entity is above the law and provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts and disputes fairly and justly. The Constitution of Pakistan, adopted in 1973, serves as the foundation of the nation's legal system. It outlines the structure of government, the fundamental rights of citizens, and the limits on government authority. Pakistan's founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, envisioned a democratic Pakistan that embodied the essential principles of Islam while also protecting the rights of its diverse citizenry. In a broadcast talk to the people of the United States of America on February 26, 1948, he said: "The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of a democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1,300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of men, justice and fair play to everybody. We are the inheritors of these glorious traditions and are fully alive to our responsibilities and obligations as framers of the future constitution of Pakistan. In any case, Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state—to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have

many non-Muslims—Hindus, Christians, and Parsis—but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan." The rule of law and the Constitution are deeply interconnected and essential for the longevity of the Pakistani Republic. The rule of law functions as a safeguard for the Constitution, and vice versa. Adherence to the rule of law fosters trust among citizens and in the government, promotes social cohesion and harmony, ensures that the government cannot wield arbitrary power or violate citizens' rights, and creates a system of checks and balances that protects citizens from the abuse of power. Moreover, the rule of law promotes economic development and social progress by providing a stable environment for businesses and individuals to thrive. Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor highlighted the importance of these principles, stating, "The success of the American experiment in self-government is due, in no small part, to the ongoing stability of the rule of law and our fidelity to the Constitution." This observation holds true for Pakistan and other nations that aspire to create just and democratic societies. However, merely having a Constitution and laws in place is insufficient. These principles must be actively upheld and respected by all citizens, institutions, and branches of government. As Pakistan faces new challenges, it is crucial to remember the importance of adhering to the rule of law and maintaining fidelity to the Constitution. Educating citizens about the Constitution and the rule of law is essential for fostering an informed and engaged population. An independent and impartial judiciary is vital in upholding these principles, serving as a check on government power and protecting individual rights. The media plays a key role in promoting the rule of law and the Constitution by reporting on relevant issues, ensuring government accountability, and supporting an open and transparent society. Political leaders must lead by example, demonstrating their commitment to these principles and cultivating a culture of respect for the rule of law and the Constitution. Courtesy: Pakistan Today

Reforming assessments — By Faisal Bari

PUBLIC boards for intermediate and secondary education still have a poor reputation in terms of the quality of their assessments and what they measure. Despite decades of reform efforts, board examinations are still known to be too dependent on memory and rote learning, past papers and predictable patterns for the kind of questions that are asked. The practical side of assessments continues to be ignored. And there are serious concerns about grade inflation as well. As a result, performance in the board examinations has become a weak measure for the quality of education and even individual standing. One outcome of this is that parents and students who can afford it have been opting for other boards. The Cambridge 'O'/'A' Level examinations are the main alternative but high school diplomas and International Baccalaureate are options as well. These international boards/certifications have a positive reputation but they come with a significant price tag. Most children/parents cannot afford the examination fees of international boards and they also cannot afford the fees charged by schools that prepare students for such examinations. Though we have 30-odd intermediate and secondary examination boards in the country, 28 of these are public/government boards. These 28 boards, apart from the Islamabad Capital Territory Board, are geographically defined and have, more or less, monopolies in the regions they work in. Punjab has eight boards; the earliest one, the Lahore Board, was set up in 1954, while the last one to be established was the Sahiwal Board in 2012. Similarly, Sindh has six boards where the latest one, the Shaheed Benazirabad Board, was set up in 2015. Why do we have so many boards in the public sector, why are they geographically defined and given monopolies and why are they not allowed to compete with each other? The government has been unable to reform these boards through bureaucrat-

ic initiatives, so should we not allow the market to work its magic through competition? The private boards have to compete for students; why should the same pressure not be applied to the public boards? Twenty-eight boards setting examinations when Pakistan does not have many assessment experts and/or psychometricians is clearly asking for poor quality exams. If we had just one board or a few boards, we could gather experts there; with 28 boards this is not possible. When the Aga Khan Board can hold examinations in all schools affiliated with it across Pakistan, and Cambridge can do so across countries, what is the justification for having a board in each division across the country? There is none. At best, we should have administrative structures to administer assessments in each district, but examination-making and grading can and should be centralised for better control, quality and quality assurance. Though 'reforms' in examination systems and boards have been talked about for decades, progress has been slow at best. Even when the Cambridge 'O'/'A' Level system has lost much of its lustre and is now thought to have been 'figured out' by local schools and teachers, Pakistani boards have been unable to catch up. There is still a significant difference, in reality, in the quality of examinations, curriculum and books, and the difference is even larger in terms of perceptions of quality. One way forward might be to allow the domestic boards to compete with each other beyond their currently mandated geographical boundaries. Let the Lahore Board court schools and/or students in Shaheed Benazirabad or any other place in Pakistan, and vice versa. The government should allow public and private schools (if they are not already allowed to) to register with the board of their choice. This competition, if properly incentivized, could provide the needed vigour to the boards. Another way forward might be to

encourage more private boards. We have only two private domestic boards. The Aga Khan Board is the more active one in this space. But, given the size of the country and the large youth population, there is space for more boards in terms of the number of students. There is definitely space for more boards on the quality spectrum as well. Between the more expensive international boards and many local public boards, there is a wide gulf in terms of pricing and quality. Federal and provincial governments should think about encouraging some universities to set up boards of their own. Many universities are already administering entry tests to students, and some of them might be willing and able to make the investments needed to set up boards. These boards should have no subsidy, should not be given any monopoly rights and should not have any state funding. But they should be provided with a level playing field where there is no advantage to the government boards in terms of having school and/or individual student registrations of either private or public sector schools. Millions of students appear for high school examinations in Pakistan every year. We know most of them do not have access to quality Matriculation and Intermediate-level assessments. And the government, despite decades of reform efforts, has been unable to reform assessments substantially. International examinations are expensive, and mean a foreign exchange outflow — they are also going to get more expensive. Our children deserve better. It is time to carry out some structural reforms. We should allow more competition in and between boards, public and private, and we should encourage more private players to set up examination boards. If we have competition — even one or two more players entering the field — the pace of reforms is likely to become faster. The sluggish boards too will have to improve or they will face extinction. Courtesy: DAWN

Leveraging agriculture — By Saad ur Rehman Saadi

PAKISTAN is facing a daunting challenge with one-third of its youths unemployed, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to tackle this issue. Despite the high unemployment rate prevalent in the country, the agricultural sector presents a viable opportunity for young unemployed graduates to explore. However, there are significant obstacles to attract young graduates to the agricultural industry, including social stigma, lack of encouragement from the higher education system, and a decline in the labour force in rural areas due to non-farm employment. Transforming the agricultural industry can provide a sustainable source of livelihood and generate up to 5 million jobs in Pakistan in the years to come. To address these challenges, academic institutions should offer courses that link theoretical knowledge with practical applications of agricultural innovation and development. By teaching students to become job creators rather than job seekers, institutions of higher education can help reduce the unemployment rate in Pakistan. Relevant fields such as economics, business studies, engineering, and

information technology can be linked to agricultural production to create a more diversified and robust workforce. Curriculum reviews can ensure that the courses offered align with the needs of the economy and prepare students for the challenges of the job market. Advocacy efforts should also be undertaken to encourage students to explore agricultural entrepreneurship. A few days ago, there was a social media buzz that the caretaker Punjab government had granted a substantial amount of land to the Pakistan Army, in partnership with private sector investors, for a "Corporate Agriculture Farming" project. This project offers a unique opportunity for unemployed agriculture graduates to work as farm managers, technical advisors, and project managers. The army can effectively utilize their knowledge and business ideas, providing them with a platform to grow and showcase their skills. The army, in conjunction with established farmers and entrepreneurs, could offer internships to young agriculture graduates, allowing them to gain contextual knowledge and hands-on experience in problem-solving

skills, which could help address the issue of youth unemployment in the country and contribute significantly to the development and growth of the agricultural sector in Pakistan. Engaging young graduates in the tenure reform process and creating innovation hubs that connect the youth to investors and promote innovative agricultural practices are crucial for youth participation in agribusiness. By nurturing a more dynamic and skilled workforce in the agricultural industry, Pakistan can take a significant step towards reducing its unemployment rates and fostering a more sustainable future. The challenge lies in making the agricultural sector and its up and downstream activities competitive through innovation, public investment in supportive rural public goods and services, and secondary town development, which is critical in achieving the twin goals of eradicating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. It is time for Pakistan to take a proactive approach towards empowering the youth and creating an agricultural sector that is both competitive and sustainable. Courtesy: Pakistan Observer

Letters to the Editor

Save forests, save generations
Forests are crucial to the survival of life on Earth, as they act as the lungs of the planet by providing oxygen for all living beings. Unfortunately, the Amazon rainforest has experienced significant deforestation, resulting in the loss of countless trees and wildlife species. According to a recent report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), nearly one-third of the Ama-

zon has been impacted by human disturbances, with over 2 million square kilometers of forest lost since 1985. Shockingly, 98% of deforestation in the Amazon is illegal. It is estimated that \$190 million will be required to restore the lost portions of the Amazon between 2019 and 2022. The Amazon rainforest is critical in preventing over one billion tonnes of carbon emissions annually, and it is home to

more than 10% of the world's plant and animal species, as well as over 400 indigenous communities. It is imperative that every climate activist works towards preserving the forests, as they play a vital role in our survival on Earth. It is the responsibility of each individual to take action to protect our forests.
- Zainab Ali Ahmed
- Turbat

Nadeem briefs Council Generals about Turkiye relief activities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Khubaib Foundation Nadeem Ahmed Khan called on Council General of Pakistan in Manchester Tariq Wazir and Council General of Turkiye Seyfi Onur Sayin in London on Saturday. The chairman briefed the Council General about ongoing relief activities of Khubaib Foundation in Turkiye, said a press release received here.

Mr. Seyfi Onur thanked the chairman and lauded Khubaib Foundation for its humanitarian work especially for earthquake affectees of Turkiye and Syria. During the meeting with Tariq Wazir discussed to mobilize overseas Pakistanis to work together to support underprivileged families across Pakistan as well. Tariq Wazir appreciated Khubaib Foundation for its humanitar-

ian efforts and assured of his complete support for this noble cause. The Khubaib Foundation is striving to provide relief and assistance to deserve families across the country during the holy month of Ramzan. Aimed at ensuring that no one goes hungry in this blessed month we are providing ration to widows and orphans who are struggling to make ends meet.

Sohail Ali posted as Addl Secretary Incharge Information Division

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sohail Ali Khan, a BS-21 officer of Information Group was posted as Additional Secretary (Incharge), Information and Broadcasting Division with immediate effect. According to a notification of the Establishment Division on Friday, the officer was presently posted

as Additional Secretary, Information and Broadcasting Division. While Shahera Shahid, a BS-22 officer of Information Group, presently posted as Secretary Information and Broadcasting Division was transferred and directed to report to the Establishment Division with immediate effect.

Balochistan Cabinet form body on non-payment of dues by PPL

QUETTA (APP): The Balochistan cabinet on Friday formed a committee to take up the issues of non-payment of dues by Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) and extension in the Sui Gas lease agreement with the Federal Government. The decision to the effect was taken in a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudous Bizenjo. The committee comprising provincial minis-

ters Syed Ehsan Shah and Zamrak Khan Achakzai Advisor Nawabzada Ghulam Khan Bugti and Parliamentary Secretary Energy Mir Umar Khan Jamali will meet the federal government and PPL officials. The cabinet expressed its reservations on the non-payment of dues by the PPL and decided to use all means as per Constitution and law to recover the outstanding amount.

Punjab cabinet approves increase of free flour beneficiaries

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi presided over 12th Provincial Cabinet Meeting at CM Office on Friday which decided to add more families in the Prime Minister Pakistan and Punjab government's free flour scheme. According to the decision of Punjab Cabinet, registered families will also be given free flour. The Punjab Cabinet granted approval to include registered families in the free flour scheme in the NADRA while registered 15.8 million families are already being provided free flour in the Benazir Income Support Programme. Caretaker CM Mohsin Naqvi directed the Provincial Ministers and Secretaries to continue visiting free flour distribution centres. He remarked that the efforts of Provincial Ministers and Secretaries to ensure provision of free flour are praiseworthy. Mohsin Naqvi urged them to continue visiting free flour distribution centres with the same diligence and spirit, adding that making such visits has brought a significant improvement in the arrangements made for the citizens at the flour distribution centres. The Punjab Cabinet granted approval to purchase 3 lac metric tonnes additional wheat from PASSCO. The Punjab Cabinet granted approval to constitute a commission to investigate murder attacks allegations alleged on behalf of Imran Khan. Approval was granted during the meeting to make amendment in the Sugar Factories Control Act 1950. The Punjab Cabinet grant-

ed approval to appoint Transaction Adviser with regard to handing over electricity distribution companies to the concerned province. Approval was granted to denotify appointments made on political grounds in the Livestock & Dairy Development department. Approval was granted during the meeting to denotify political appointments in the Board of Directors of Punjab Social Security Health Management Company. Approval was granted during the meeting to make amendments in the Punjab Medium Term Financial Framework (Budget Strategy) Rules 2023 and Punjab Undesirable Cooperative Society Act 1993. The Cabinet decided to grant the right to appeal to the other Authority besides the Secretary against conviction on grabbing property of the Board. Approval was granted to change Ehsaas Ration Riyayat Programme into Free Flour Distribution Programme. Funds have been endorsed afresh to complete development schemes in the Schools Education department in the districts of Sheikhpura, Toba Tek Singh and Chiniot. Approval was granted about audit reports of the accounts of Punjab government for the financial year 2017-2018, 2018-2019-2020, 2020-2021. Endorsement was made to the decisions of earlier meetings of Cabinet Standing Committee for Finance & Development. Provincial Ministers, Advisers, Chief Secretary, Inspector General of Police and concerned officials attended the meeting.

APHC urges world to play role in settling lingering Kashmir dispute according to UN resolutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): The incarcerated All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Chairman Masarrat Aalam Butt has said that India had been subjecting the Kashmiris to the worst state terrorism for over seven decades for demanding their inalienable right to self-determination. In his message from New Delhi's infamous Tihar Jail, Masarrat Aalam Butt said the Indian troops have martyred over 96,000 Kashmiris and tortured hundreds of thousands others since 1989 alone but failed to intimidate them into submission. He said that it was due to the unprecedented sacrifices of these martyrs

that the Kashmir dispute has become the center of attention at the global level. The APHC Chairman urged the international community to take cognizance of the Indian brutalities and play an effective role in settling the lingering Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions and Kashmiris' aspirations. Meanwhile, Indian troops launched massive cordon and search operations in different areas of Srinagar, Shopian, Pulwama, Islamabad, Kupwara, Baramulla, Bandipore, Kathua and Jammu districts of the occupied territory, subjecting the residents to severe harassment and intimidation.

LHC allows bakeries to operate till 1am

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday allowed bakeries to operate till 1am, during Ramadan. Justice Shahid Karim passed the orders while hearing identical petitions, filed by one Hareem Farooq and others. During the proceedings, the court observed that underpasses were being made instead of remodeling the roads. These underpasses were not helping solve problems, remarked the court. The court directed the authorities concerned for submitting a report

in this regard. The court also insisted that it was mandatory to enhance the capacity of the traffic police and they should be provided cameras and other equipment. The court also ordered for appointment of environmental ambassador an sought names from the Water and Environmental Commission on the next date of hearing. The court also ordered Lahore Development Authority (LDA) to impose fine on persons involved in making illegal parking stands around Emporium Mall.

Prices of petrol, diesel to remain unchanged for next fortnight

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government on Friday decided to keep the existing prices of petrol and High-Speed Diesel (HSD) unchanged for the next 15 days to facilitate the masses in the country, particularly to provide relief to lower-income people. According to the statement issued here by the Finance Division, these prices would be applicable from April 1, 2023, and would remain in force till April 15, 2023. The price of diesel will remain unchanged at the current level and it would be available at the existing price of Rs 293.00 per litre. Meanwhile, the petrol will be sold at the existing price of Rs 272.00 per litre. However, the government extended the relief by reducing Rs 10 in the purchase of kerosene oil and light diesel oil. The new price of kerosene oil is Rs 180.29 per litre and light diesel oil Rs 174.68 per litre.

11 killed, 998 injured in 963 accidents in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): At least 11 people were killed while 998 injured in 963 road traffic accidents in Punjab during last 24 hours. Out of the total injured, 541 people were seriously injured who were shifted to different hospitals, whereas, 457 minor injured victims were treated at the incident site by rescue medical teams, said a spokesman for Rescue 1122 here on Friday. The analysis showed that 485 drivers, 36 underage drivers, 126 pedestrians, and 398 passengers were among the victims of these road traffic crashes. The statistics showed that 255 accidents were reported in Lahore which affected 253 persons placing the provincial capital at top of the list followed by 78 in Faisalabad with 86 victims and at third Gujranwala 60 with 56 victims. As many as, 834 motorcycles, 79 rickshaws, 69 cars, 25 vans, seven buses, 22 trucks and 99 other vehicles and slow-moving carts were involved in the traffic accidents.

Over 17 million children immunized in first phase of Polio drive

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government has successfully completed the first phase of polio vaccination campaign to immunize more than 17.41 million children under the age of five years in Sindh and Punjab. The five-day vaccination campaign was held in two phases due to the concurring activities of the seventh national census. In the first phase, over 17.41 million children under the age of five in 13 districts of Punjab and 16 districts of Sindh and Islamabad were vaccinated from March 13 to 17. The second phase will be held from April 03 to 07 - during the second week of Ramazan - to vaccinate more than 4.12 million children in 12 districts of Balochistan and 26 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the seven endemic districts in the southern region of the province. Federal Minister for Health Abdul Qadir Patel urged parents and caregivers to ensure that their children receive the life-saving polio vaccine so that they remain protected from poliovirus, which has been found circulating in environmental samples. "The presence of wild polio in the environment shows that the virus is circulating in our communities and posing a serious risk to our children," said Abdul Qadir Patel, the minister. "During Ramazan, population movements can increase the risk of further spread, therefore, it is critical that parents and caregivers vaccinate their children in this and every campaign," the minister said. "We have specifically designed this March campaign to reach areas where population movement is not just frequent but also expected during Ramazan and Eid festival," said Dr Shahzad Baig, National Emergency Operations Center.

Sindh University receives over Rs. 11.2m from provincial govt under scholarship programme

HYDERABAD (APP): The Student Financial Aid Office (SFAO), University of Sindh Jamshoro has received an amount of over Rs. 11.2 million from Sindh government under "Need Cum Merit" Scholarship Programme for deserving and needy students of the Varsity. The scholarship programme is aimed at providing financial assistance to the students who are unable to afford their educational expenses due to financial constraints, the University's spokesman told here Saturday. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Siddique Kalthoro has expressed his gratitude to the Sindh Ministry of Zakat and Ushr for its generous contribution in terms of scholarship programme for the needy students. He also thanked the ministry for recognizing the efforts being made by the University's Student Fi-

ancial Aid Office and said that the scholarship programme would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the Student Financial Aid Office, led by its director Prof. Dr. Mushtaque Ali Jariko. The Vice Chancellor also eulogized the untiring efforts of Dr. Jariko in ensuring the scholarship programme and providing the required documents including Fund Utilization Reports and invoices to the ministry and other bodies. The amount provided by the provincial ministry actually showcased the trust level of the ministry in the transparent system of University of Sindh, he said and hoped that other ministries and donor agencies will continue extending their monetary cooperation with the University for the academic benefit of the poor students enrolled on the campus.

Welfare of LWMC workers among top priorities of company'

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) CEO Babar Sahib Din on Friday said that LWMC was committed for the welfare of its employees as workers were the real asset and their welfare was among the priorities of the company. He said this during the social security card distribution ceremony at Children workshop facilitation center. The department distributed more than 6000 social security card among workers as per the directions of CEO LWMC and more than 12000 social security card would be distributed in phases. Babar Sahib Din said, "LWMC workers are our real heroes and cleanliness of Lahore is only possible due to their untiring efforts." LWMC was working on the health and welfare of its workers as the health of the workers participating in the cleaning could not be ignored in any case, he added. He said that for the facilitation of workers "Sahu-

lat Markaz" at South, Children and Thokar workshop had already been established. Workers could reach their nearest facilitation center in case of any issue related to salary or leaves. He further briefed that apart from the resolution of day to day issues LWMC had also taken a major step to facilitate its workers by covering their health insurance through social security cards. He said that social security card would provide financial and medical facilities to the workers and their families, free checkup and medicines would be available to social security card holders in case of illness. In case of hospitalization and injury financial assistance would be provided and lifetime medical facilities would be available to disabled workers and their families, he added. He further said that support for children's marriage, support for burial would also be available through social security card.

Darawar Ittehad delegation meet IGP Sindh

KARACHI (APP): A three-member delegation of Pakistan Darawar Ittehad (Hindu Scheduled Caste Alliance) called on Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh Ghulam Nabi Memon at the Central Police Office (CPO) here on Friday. The delegation was led by Shiva Kohli and discussed various matters, according to the spokesman

for Sindh Police. The DIGP (South) and AIGP (Operations Sindh) and the In-charge District Intelligence Branch (DIB) (South) were also present on the occasion. IGP Sindh directed the DIGP South to address the issues discussed by the delegation and appointed the In-charge of DIB South as the focal person in this regard.

Governor approves summaries for important university postings

LAHORE (APP): Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman has approved various summaries related to the universities as chancellor. Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman has nominated Prof. Dr. Khalid Mahmood, Dean, Faculty of Information and Media Studies as Pro Vice Chancellor of Punjab University for 3 years or till his superannuation, whichever is earlier. The Governor assigned the additional charge of Vice Chancellor of Thal University Bhakkar to Dr Qaiser Abbas, Vice Chancellor of Sargodha University for a period of six months or appointment of a regular incumbent, whichever is earlier. He has assigned additional charge of the post of Treasurer to Mutee-ur Rehman, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, University of Mianwa-

li, for a period of three months or till appointment of a regular incumbent to the post, whichever is earlier. Balighur Rehman also directed the administrative department and the university to complete the process of appointment of a regular incumbent to the post of Treasurer within the period of additional charge. He assigned the additional charge of the post of Treasurer, Emerson University, Multan to Dr. Abdul Mueed, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, for a period of six months or the arrival of a permanent incumbent, whichever is earlier. Along with this, Governor Punjab also directed the Higher Education Department to initiate the recruitment process for selection of regular incumbent to the post of Treasurer during this additional charge period as per law and service statutes.

PTDC organises 2-week training programme for tour guides

ISLAMABAD (APP): A two-week training workshop organized by the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) to improve the knowledge and skills of tour guides about tourist destinations, tour group management, communication skills, and professional handling of all the aspects of tours, customer service and operational best practices, concluded here on Friday. About 24 trainees from different parts of Pakistan participated in the First National Tour Guide Training Programme, which commenced on March 18 in collaboration with the Department of Tourist Services (DTS), Sustainable Tourism Foundation Pakistan (STFP), College of Tourism and Hotel Management (COTHM), Pakistan Association of Tour Operators (PATO) and Legend Hotels, a news release said.

International and national trainers and experts of the tourism industry conducted the training. Certificates were distributed among the trainees at the successful conclusion of the training. Speaking on the occasion, PTDC Managing Director Aftab ur Rehman Rana congratulated the participants on completing the training programme. He said there was a shortage of trained tour guides in Pakistan, and to fill that gap, the PTDC had launched a National Tour Guides Trainin Programme. Under the initiative, some 1,000 tour guides from all over Pakistan would be trained in one year, and for the purpose, the PTDC would organize a series of tour guides training workshops in all the provincial capitals in collaboration with provincial tourism departments and the private sector.

SC rejects request for formation of full court bench to hear KPPunjab polls case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court (SC) on Friday rejected the request of Attorney General of Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan seeking the top court to constitute a full court bench to hear the case with regard to the delay in elections of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. A three-member bench of the top court headed by Justice Umar Ata Bandial and comprising Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan and Justice Munib Akhtar heard the petition of PTI against the decision of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for postponing the polls in two provinces. Earlier in a fresh development, a four-member bench of the top court was dissolved after Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail recused himself from the case. After this, the CJP constituted a new three-member bench and a supplementary cause list was issued. At the outset of hearing, Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) Chairman Executive Council Hasan Pasha arrived at court rostrum and prayed to form a full court bench to decide the matter. He requested the bench to hold a full court meeting if the full court bench couldn't be constituted. The CJP remarked that the court would hear him later. He also observed that some people had been "criticizing the judges", adding that the court would also view this matter. Meanwhile, the attorney general said that there was a need to decrease political tension in the coun-

try as it would reduce with the passage of time. The chief justice remarked that this court had always preferred to hold the supremacy of the Constitution. He remarked that the assembly had a term of five years but the "head of the house has the authority to dissolve it". The CJP reminded that the 90-day time period was going to end in the month of April after the dissolution of two provincial assemblies. The president himself had to announce the date of the elections in Punjab, adding that the ECP had not briefed the president on why it was not announcing the date. The chief justice remarked that the court was not sitting here to create difficulties, adding that there was the question before it related to the postponement of elections till October 8. The CJP said that the court could hold a break in the proceedings for some days if the government and opposition sit together to find a way out of this quagmire, otherwise the court would play its constitutional role. Justice Bandial said that citing terrorism incidents in the pretext to delay the polls was not enough as the issue was continuously persisting since 1990s. The AGP said that the first point is the dissenting note of Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, the second was the clarification of the ratio of the judgment of March 1, and the third point was on which ground the verdict was made. The chief justice remarked that who

had stated that two members of the bench had separated from it, adding that instead the matter was sent to his office for re-constitution of the bench. He could change all the judges of the bench if he wanted, the CJP observed. The chief justice said that the matter regarding freezing of hearing would be discussed internally by the judges and the matter would be addressed soon. The CJP said that the judges were even not able to respond to the criticism, he said. Justice Umar Ata Bandial said that he thought about all judges while constituting a nine-member bench. Referring to the suo motu proceedings on elections in KP and Punjab, the CJP observed that he constituted the bench as he found Justice Athar Minallah coherent with the constitution. He also went on to laud the constitutional expertise of Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Munib Akhtar and Justice Ijaz ul Ahsan. The chief justice remarked that the judges were being criticized on the basis of hearsay. He remarked that the top court stands united and agree on several points. He remarked that no one was noticing how the judiciary and judges were being targeted and how judges were being criticized on the basis of alleged audiotapes. Meanwhile, the court summoned the secretary of interior and secretary of finance and adjourned the case till Monday.

Bilawal, Chairman IPO discuss ways to protect intellectual property

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan Ambassador Farukh Amil called on Minister of Foreign Affairs Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, here on Friday. They discussed ways to strengthen

the intellectual property ecosystem in Pakistan, the necessity of accession to international intellectual property treaties for economic empowerment, and the creation of opportunities for Pakistan's youth.

NA body on education issues summons VC IUB

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training has decided to issue summons of Vice Chancellor, Islamia University Bahawalpur (IUB), for ensuring his attendance in the next meeting. The directions were made during the 38th meeting of the Standing Committee held here under the Chairmanship of Makhdoom Syed Sami-ul-Hassan Gilani, MNA. Prof. Dr. Athar Mahboob, VC (IUB), was required to attend the meeting (in person) to present report of last Syndicate meeting of IUB but he remained absent and even did not bother to obtain prior permission of the Committee. The Registrar, IUB, informed the Committee that the VC was preoccupied in some other engagement thus did not attend the meeting. The Committee held that the attitude of the VC had always remained non-serious towards the business of the Committee in the past which leads to the breach of the Committee, therefore unanimously decided to issue summons of the VC (IUB) to ensure his attendance in the next meeting. Dr. Niaz Ahmed Akhtar, Vice Chancellor, Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad, briefed the Committee on the backdrop of the precarious law and order situation amid violent clash between the student groups leading towards closure of the University on February 27, 2023. He held that the ethnic councils were fomenting the spirit of sub-nationalism and jeopardizing the University's peaceful academic environment. An FIR was registered at the Secretariat's Police Station against the unfortunate eventuality while all the hostels were got vacated, he added. The Committee, after listening to the VC and students' representatives, held that there should be no compromise on discipline but the VC; playing his parental role, should hold meetings with the affected students for amicable settlement of the issues as well as restoration of academic activities and submit a report to the Committee within fifteen days. Prof. Dr. Shabbar Atiq, Vice Chancellor, University of Gujrat (UOG), briefed the Committee about the history, faculties, departments, research and development, international ranking, students' strength, allied facilities, etc., of the University. He held that the enrollment ratio of male and female students was 38% and 62% respective-

ly which shows parents' trust at the administration. Moreover, according to Times Higher Education Ranking of 2022-23, the UOG was amongst 1001 to 1200 all over the globe, 43rd in Pakistan and 13th in Punjab. While appreciating the VC, the Committee pointed out that there were reports of some administrative lacunas in the University. Quoting an example, the Committee inquired about the fate of a long outstanding inquiry against Abdul Rasheed, an employee of the University, referred by Governor Punjab to the administration of the University. The VC, in response, informed that the matter was duly placed in the last Syndicate meeting on March 21, 2023, and the same will be finalized in near future. The Committee directed the VC to update it about the outcome of the Syndicate's decision in the next meeting. On the issue of "The Global Institute", the Committee appointed a Sub-Committee under the Convener-ship of Ch. Muhammad Hamid Hameed, MNA, along-with Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Ms. Kiran Imran Dar and Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, MNAs as its Members. The Sub-Committee will look into all the issues of the students of the Institute, recommend ways and means for their redressal and submit a report to the Standing Committee in fifteen days. The Committee also considered (i) "The National Skills University (amendment) Bill, 2023" (Government Bill), (ii) "The NFC-Institute of Engineering and Technology Multan (Amendment) Bill, 2023" (Government Bill) and (iii) "The Kalam Bibi International Women Institute Banu Bill, 2023" (Government Bill) and recommended that the same may be passed by the National Assembly. Whereas, the Committee disposed of the matter referred to it by the Honorable Speaker concerning non-registration of Bachelor of Engineering Degree of Sheraz Waqas Soomro, student of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology by Pakistan Engineering Council. The meeting was attended by MNAs; Nisar Ahmed Cheema, Ch. Hamid Hameed, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Ms. Kiran Imran Dar, Dr. Samina Matloob, Ms. Zahra Wadood Fatemi, Ms. Mussarat Rafiq Mahesar, Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro and Mrs. Farukh Khan besides senior officers of Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, HEC and other Departments/Organizations.

Ministry turns down decision of receiving Hajj applications on weekend

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony on Friday turned down its decision of receiving Hajj applications on Saturday and Sunday (April 1, 2). The ministry had withdrawn its letter written to the State Bank of Pakistan for collecting the Hajj applications and dues, said the spokesperson of ministry Muhammad Umar Butt in a talk to APP. He said the banks would not collect Hajj applications on the holidays; however, those intending pilgrims would be entertained who had visited the banks for the submission of Hajj applications and dues on this day. The ministry upheld its decision to continue the Sponsorship Hajj Scheme till April 7, he maintained. He said the decision to extend the last date of receiving Hajj

applications under Sponsorship Hajj Scheme was taken as overseas Pakistanis were facing difficulties in remitting the funds from abroad. Umar Butt urged the Pakistani expatriates to send funds in the dollar account of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony through telegraphic transfer or wire transfer. The applicant or close relative should contact the nearest bank for verification and processing of remitted funds, he added. He made it clear that the Sponsorship Hajj Scheme applicants would be declared successful without balloting process. He advised the Hajj applicants to contact the designated banks for further information and process adding that the receipt of regular Hajj scheme's applications was closed today.

DGI&P reduces passport backlog to 0.3 million

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Directorate General of Immigration & Passports (DGI&P) on Friday announced that it has successfully reduced a backlog of 0.6 million pending issuance of passports to 0.3 million. The backlog was cleared by expanding production capacity and increasing staff duty hours, the DGI&P said in a statement. The directorate explained that the extraordinary rush and high volume of passport applications in the past weeks led to an emergency situation, as the number of passport applications exceeded the production capacity. The monthly number of passport applications, which typically hovers around 0.4 million, had increased to about 0.7 million in the last three months. Initially, there was a backlog of around 0.6 million passports, but the DGI&P has taken steps to reduce this backlog by increasing productivity and duty timings. "With the same efforts and enthusiasm, we will soon be able to clear all the backlog in minimum time. We apologize for any inconvenience caused to the general public due to these unusual and unexpected circumstances," the DGI&P said.

CJ Justice Akram calls on AJK President

MIRPUR (APP): Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Justice Raja Saeed Akram called on the President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry in the federal metropolis on Friday, the AJK President's office said. They discussed in detail the issues of mutual concern.

Irrigation department floats tender for rehabilitation of Karo Gungro Outfall Drain

HYDERABAD (APP): The Sindh Irrigation Department has floated the tender for the rehabilitation of Karo Gungro Outfall Drain and its allied structures at the cost of over Rs 920 million. The tenders floated on Friday, have set a deadline of 18 months for completing the project in the jurisdiction of the Sujawal district. The project has been divided into two components. The first part of the project concerns the rehabilitation of the drain from Reduced Distance (RD) 0 to 64 at the cost of Rs359.65 million. The second phase, which started from RD64 and ended at RD128, would be completed at a budget of Rs 560.775 million. The project's third component included the construction of the Executive Engineer's office in Sujawal district at the cost of Rs52.744 million. The last date for submission of applications against the tenders is April 19 which can be extended to another deadline of May 3. The tenders will be opened on the same day.

Chief NADRA inaugurates dedicated helpline for transgender

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) Tariq Malik has inaugurated a dedicated helpline with transgender attendants while a number of other initiatives have also been launched by the authority to enhance registration and maximize facilitation for the transgender community. While celebrating the Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) as a special day for processing of transgender persons, he said sensitization training for NADRA personnel was also conducted by Regional Head Offices (RHOs) across the country to strengthen their abilities for providing information and support on obtaining identity documents to members of the transgender community. He said the most unique feature of the dedicated helpline is the deployment of transgender employees of NADRA to answer the calls, said a news release. "We want to provide a supportive and welcoming environment for transgender persons so that they are able to obtain their identity documents and access the services they need to thrive," he said. Malik said NADRA wanted members of the transgender community to know that the authority supports them and is committed to providing the services they need to assimilate into society. "I hope that this dedicated helpline will go a long way in ensuring that they can claim their rightful place and are able to register and derive dividends from government

schemes", Tariq Malik added. This acknowledgement serves to increase visibility and awareness of the issues faced by the transgender community and looks to promote their rights internationally. The Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) is celebrated annually on March 31 to highlight the contributions and struggles of transgender persons around the world. NADRA declared March 31 as a special day for registering transgender persons. The RHOs of NADRA engaged with local organizations for mobilizing transgender persons to register themselves at NADRA Registration Centres and at locally deployed Mobile Registration Vans. A series of Sensitization Sessions will be conducted in all the regions successively throughout this year. In addition to the helpline, NADRA has launched a number of other initiatives for the transgender community, including but not limited to free of cost first Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC), the provision of jobs to transgender persons in NADRA, and recognition of a "guru" for registration of transgender persons. Chairman NADRA has led a nationwide registration/ awareness campaign since 2021 themed "Trans Rights are Human Rights," while 39 Sensitization/ Training Sessions have already been conducted for NADRA staff. The authority has also nominated Focal Persons for the facilitation of transgender persons at all its centres across Pakistan.

OGRA slashes LPG prices by Rs 48 per kg

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) slashed the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by Rs 49 to Rs 229 per kilogram for the month of April 2023. According to a notification issued by OGRA on Friday, the above prices will be effective from April 1. Following this, the price of 11.8 kg domestic LPG cylinder has decreased by Rs 576 for the whole month of April. In the monthly review, OGRA announced to cut Rs 278 to Rs 229 per kg price and the new domestic cylinder of 11.8 kg price

has also reduced from Rs 3,278 to Rs 2,702. Maximum LPG consumer price has been decreased by Rs 48,775 per MT from Rs 277,774 to Rs 228,999 per MT. Similarly, the maximum producer price with 18% GST decreased by Rs 576 from Rs 2,790 to Rs 2,214. The notification said LPG prices will be regulated with a maximum price at all levels of the supply chain. However, it added, producers, marketing companies and distributors may sell below the maximum price determined from time to time.

Begum Alvi stresses upon greater awareness about ASD,

Islamabad (Staff Report): First Lady Begum Samina Alvi on Saturday stressed upon greater awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to create greater understanding, encourage parents to seek early intervention therapies and ensure greater integration of persons with autism in society. "Despite the prevalence of disabilities in our society, individuals with disabilities face many barriers to inclusion and participa-

tion. They may face discrimination, stigma, and lack of access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, and employment," the first lady was addressing a seminar on the occasion of World Autism day at Shifa International Hospital. She said that it was their collective responsibility to work towards breaking down societal barriers for the individuals with disabilities by promoting their greater inclusion in all sectors of society.

Musk defends paid Twitter as blue tick ultimatum looms

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): Elon Musk on Friday defended his controversial pay model for Twitter, claiming that any social media platform that didn't follow suit would fail because they would be swarmed by bots. Musk made his prediction on the eve of Twitter's April 1 ultimatum that verified accounts with the cherished blue tick that had not forked over cash would lose it. "The fundamental challenge here is that it's (easy) to create literally 10,000 or 100,000 fake Twitter accounts using just one computer at home and with modern AI (artificial



intelligence)," Musk told a question and answer session on Twitter. "That's the reason for really pressing hard on verified where the verified requires a number from a reputable phone carrier and a credit card," Musk said. "My

prediction is that any so-called social media network that doesn't do this will fail," Musk added. The change in system puts pressure on companies, journalists and celebrities who used Twitter as their main channel of communication and relied on the blue tick for credibility. And it also raises the specter of imposters and jokesters paying for an officially verified, but totally fake account. In the US, the subscription plan, known as Twitter Blue, costs \$8 a month or \$84 a year, or \$11 a month if bought through Apple's app store.

Dar hopeful for Pakistan to attain status of 20th largest economy



ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar on Friday, here, said that Pakistan has the full potential to be included in the twentieth largest economy of the world, and the role of the business community for that matter was instrumental. The minister said this while addressing the oath-taking ceremony of the Islamabad Industrial Association (IIA), also recalling that there was a time when the world was declaring Pakistan as an emerging economy. He further said that in 2016, Pakistan was among the 24 largest economies in the world, but regretted that today the country was dragged at 47th position. The minister said that the negotiations between the government and the IMF were going well and it was expected to get positive news in this regard in the near future. He also expressed his confidence on the business community and hoped that they would play their part in improving the economy. The minister blamed the former govern-

ment of PTI for bringing the economy into shambles prevalent today. Ishaq Dar said the government would take suggestions from the business community on the upcoming budget. He stressed that manpower exports, remittances, and foreign reserves had to be increased to restore the economy. On this occasion, the newly elected president of the Islamabad Industrial Association (IIA) Ahmed Waheed said that the formation of an industrial park was very important for industrial development in Islamabad. Ahmed Waheed said that there was an economic crisis in the country at present, but by resolving LCs and other issues, the government could move towards economic stability. He said that the business community should feel that the government was seriously committed to industrialization in the country. On this occasion, the President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari once again raised the demand for an industrial park in Islamabad and said that this was a long-standing demand of the businessmen of Islamabad. Representative of Pakistan Federation Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) Sohail Malik also gave suggestions for the improvement of the country's economy.

US expands access to EV subsidies in proposed rules



WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): US officials proposed Friday guidelines that widen access to electric vehicle subsidies, bringing relief to countries like Japan and potentially the EU amid their fears of being excluded from Washington's spending bonanza. President Joe Biden's ambitious climate action plan, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), funnels some \$370 billion into subsidies for America's energy transition, including tax breaks for US-made electric vehicles (EVs) and batteries. Guidelines released Friday by the Treasury Department spell out requirements that EV batteries have to meet for vehicles to qualify for a full \$7,500 consumer tax credit. While the IRA stipulates that a percentage of critical minerals in the battery must be sourced from America or countries it has free-trade pacts with -- initially leaving Japan and the European Union in the cold -- Friday's announcement signals room for maneuver. The rule "could include newly negotiated critical minerals agreements," said the Treasury Department in a statement. It added that 21 countries, Japan among them, are included. The confirmation comes days after the United States and Japan unveiled a deal on critical minerals trade to reinforce supply chains in a sector dominated by China. The EU and US are currently in talks for a similar pact as the transatlantic partners seek a way to end their spat over Washington's subsidy plans.

Huawei releases 2022 Annual Report



ISLAMABAD (APP): Huawei reported steady operations throughout 2022, having generated USD 92.37 billion in revenue and USD 5.12 billion in net profits. It was disclosed in the Huawei 2022 Annual Report, released in Shenzhen, China on Friday, a press release received here said. According to the report, Huawei continued to strengthen investment in R&D, with an annual expenditure of USD 23.22 billion in 2022, representing 25.1% of the company's annual revenue and bringing its total R&D expenditure over the past 10 years to more than USD 140.55 billion. "In 2022, a challenging external environment and non-market factors continued to take a toll on Huawei's operations," said Eric Xu, Huawei's Rotating Chairman, at the company's annual report press conference. "In the midst of this storm, we kept racing ahead, doing everything in our power to maintain business continuity and serve our customers. We also went to great lengths to grow the harvest -- generating a steady stream of revenue to sustain our survival and lay the groundwork for future development." Also present at the event was Sabrina Meng, Huawei's CFO. She noted, "Despite substantial pressure in 2022, our overall business results were in line with forecast. At the end of 2022, our liability ratio was 58.9% and our net cash balance was USD25.35 billion. In addition, our balance of total assets reached 0.14 trillion USD, largely composed of current assets such as cash, short-term investments, and operating assets.

Stocks advance as inflation slows



NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Stocks advanced Friday as data showed inflation slowing in the eurozone and the United States, and a British economy performing slightly better than thought. With the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank raising interest rates to tame inflation, markets were eagerly waiting for the latest inflation data to see if monetary policymakers have room to pause hikes given recent turmoil in the banking sector. The eurozone's annual inflation rate slowed sharply to

6.9 percent in March from 8.5 percent in February, beating expectations as energy prices eased, the EU's statistics agency said. In the United States, the PCE Price Index, the Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation, showed inflation slowed to an annual rate of 5.0 percent in February from 5.3 percent. Wall Street indices jumped more than one percent, while Europe's main equity indices also closed the day higher. Investors have also been encouraged by the latest developments in the banking industry turmoil, with the industry apparently having stabilized after three US banks failed earlier this month. "We had a major test of the US financial system," said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments. "It bent but didn't break." Sarhan said the market's ability to rally at this juncture is "very bullish."

Swiss watchmakers counting the clock until Chinese tourists return

GENEVA (AFP/APP): Switzerland's major luxury watch brands are cautiously optimistic that Chinese tourists will boost sales this year, if they return to Europe in large numbers after the easing of domestic Covid restrictions. Exports to China, a key market for watchmakers, contracted by 13.6 percent in 2022 due to Beijing's zero-Covid policy and the surge in infections when it was lifted at the end of the year. However, exports began to rebound in February -- up 8.2 percent year-on-year, according to the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry. "China will regain a positive dynamic," the federation's president Jean-Daniel Pasche, told AFP at the industry's annual Watches and Wonders trade fair in Geneva, where 48 brands such as a Rolex, Cartier and Patek Philippe were showing off their latest creations. With China reopening, many financial analysts have sharply raised



their growth forecasts for the luxury sector as a whole in 2023. During Covid lockdowns, Chinese consumers built up significant savings, with HSBC analysts pointing to estimates of 6.6 trillion yuan (\$960 billion) in excess savings accumulated over the past three years. Morgan Stanley analysts expect Chinese consumer spending on luxury goods to increase by 20 percent in 2023. According to the US investment bank's estimates, luxury goods lovers in China made up about 60 percent of the sector's growth between 2000 and 2019.

US stocks rally in final session of buoyant Q1



NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks rallied Friday, concluding a winning first quarter on a positive note on signs of moderating inflation and receding fear over bank industry instability. The Dow Jones Industrial Average finished up 1.3 percent at 33,274.15. The broad-based S&P 500 gained 1.4 percent to 4,109.31, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index jumped 1.7 percent to 12,221.91. The annual personal consumption expenditures index (PCE) slowed to 5 percent in February from 5.3 percent a month earlier. The benchmark is closely watched by the Federal Reserve, which has been battling rising

consumer prices for more than a year. While the decline in headline inflation is positive news for the Fed, it shows pricing pressures remain elevated well above the US central bank's long-term target of two percent. Still, the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note retreated, suggesting investors see lower odds for more Fed interest rate hikes. Investors have also been encouraged by the latest developments in the banking industry turmoil, with the industry apparently having stabilized after three US banks failed earlier this month. "We had a major test of the US financial system," said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments. "It bent but didn't break." Sarhan said the market's ability to rally at this juncture is "very bullish." All three major indices posted gains for the quarter, although the Dow's quarterly gain amounted to less than 0.4 percent. The S&P 500 rose around seven percent, while the Nasdaq jumped 16.8 percent.

Eurozone and US inflation slow, bringing respite to policymakers

BRUSSELS (AFP/APP): Eurozone inflation slowed sharply in March while US price increases eased last month as well, official data showed Friday, offering some relief to policymakers. The data released on both sides of the Atlantic will provide central banks some respite as they carefully balance taming inflation with interest rate rises, against the risks that more hikes could hurt their banking sectors. Consumer prices rose by 6.9 percent on an annual basis in February, according to the European Union's statistics agency. It is the lowest rate recorded in a year, and a lower figure than analysts expected as well. But the eurozone's core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, edged up to 5.7 percent in March from 5.6 percent a month earlier. In the US, the Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation slowed in February



also, according to Commerce Department data released Friday. The annual personal consumption expenditures price index (PCE) slowed to 5 percent in February from 5.3 percent a month earlier, with increases recorded in the cost of food, energy and goods. But core PCE, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, only slowed slightly to log an annual increase of 4.6 percent in February, down from 4.7 percent in January. In a statement released Friday, US President Joe Biden said: "We are making progress in the fight against inflation."

Canada clears C\$20 bln Rogers-Shaw deal with tough conditions

OTTAWA (Agencies): Canada on Friday approved Rogers Communications Inc's C\$20 billion (\$14.8 billion) buyout of Shaw Communications after securing binding commitments to pay financial penalties if it failed to create new jobs and invest to expand its network. The

final nod from Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Francois-Philippe Champagne capped two years of antitrust uncertainty and paves the way for the creation of Canada's No. 2 telecoms firm in a market with some of the highest wireless bills in the world.

UK recession risks linger despite brighter growth data



LONDON (AFP/APP): The UK economy performed slightly better than thought in the final quarter of last year, revised data showed Friday, but analysts warned of recession risks as inflation remains sky high. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the economy grew 0.1 percent in the October-December period after an initial estimate showing flat output. Either way, the UK narrowly avoided falling into recession at the end of 2022 despite a cost-of-living crisis. "The economy performed a little more strongly... than previously estimated, with later

data showing telecommunications, construction and manufacturing all faring better than initially thought," noted ONS director of economic statistics, Darren Morgan. He added that households saved more in the last quarter, with finances boosted by government support to pay sky-high energy bills. "Meanwhile, the UK's balance of payments deficit with the rest of the world narrowed, driven by increased foreign earnings by UK companies, particularly in the energy sector," he added. Oil and gas prices soared last year as supplies tightened following the invasion of Ukraine by key energy producer Russia. That largely contributed to inflation soaring worldwide in 2022, with UK consumer prices reaching a four-decade high above 11 percent. After dipping at the end of last year and start of 2023, British inflation rose back to 10.4 percent in February.

Britain to join trans-Pacific trade pact

LONDON/TOKYO (Agencies): Britain on Friday said it had struck a deal to join an 11-country trans-Pacific trade pact which includes Japan and Australia as it looks to deepen ties in the region and build its global trade links after leaving the European Union. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Britain had agreed to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), in a move his office said was the biggest trade deal since Brexit. "Joining the CPTPP trade bloc puts the UK at the centre of a dynamic and growing group of Pacific economies," Sunak said in a statement, adding the deal demonstrated "the real economic benefits of our post-Brexit freedoms." Britain has been looking to build global trade ties following its departure from the EU in 2020 and has looked to pivot toward geographically distant but fast-growing economies. It is deepening its ties in the Indo-Pacific as its foreign policy framework casts China as an "epoch defining challenge". Other members of CPTPP are Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Britain is the first new member to join the group. Membership will supplement existing bilateral Free Trade Agreements



(FTAs) Britain has with most of the member countries, and gives businesses extra options over the terms they can trade under. The overall impact of the trade deal is set to be modest. Britain said the deal, which will cut tariffs on cars, spirits and dairy products, would boost the economy by 1.8 billion pounds (\$2.2 billion) each year in the long-run - a figure that could rise as more countries join the pact. "The Pacific Rim is forecast to grow twice as fast as Europe, so UK businesses should be thinking about their regional presence," said Sally Jones, trade policy and strategy partner at EY. "The CPTPP makes that much easier, and the CPTPP will only get bigger as more countries look to join." Britain has agreed new post-Brexit trade deals with Australia and New Zealand, and agreed an FTA with Japan in 2020. It is also in talks with Canada and Mexico over new FTAs, after it rolled over previous EU trade deals at the end of 2020.

Saka must learn to deal with growing expectations, says Arteta

LONDON (Agencies): Arsenal's in-form winger Bukayo Saka must learn to deal with growing expectations and attention, manager Mikel Arteta said, jokingly adding that he had a "stick ready" in case the hype gets to the youngster's head. Saka, who came through Arsenal's youth ranks, has been in top form for the London club this season with 12 goals and 10 assists in the Premier League as they lead the points table. The 21-year-old



also stole the limelight for England during the international break, scoring a goal and setting up another in their

2-0 victory over Ukraine in the Euro 2024 qualifying Group C at Wembley. "He's going to have to deal with expectations of the media, with attention on the pitch," Arteta told reporters yesterday, a day before Arsenal host Leeds United. "When you want to fulfil a role like the one he has at the moment, you need to be capable of doing that. So don't read too much, don't listen too much, just focus on what you have to do every day. That's it."

Scheffler, McIlroy seek history as LIV-PGA feud hits Masters



AUGUSTA (Agencies): Top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler and world No 2 Rory McIlroy will chase historic triumphs at next week's 87th Masters while the PGA Tour-LIV Golf feud makes its debut at Augusta National. Scheffler will try to join Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Nick Faldo as the only back-to-back Masters winners. "I have a couple things to work on before Augusta, but definitely plenty of confidence going in," Scheffler

said. Scheffler, who has won the Players Championship and Phoenix Open this year, seeks the first Masters repeat since Woods in 2002. "I'm not going to think of myself as the defending champion," he said. "I'm just going to go out there like I usually do, try and execute shots and play good solid rounds of golf." Four-time Major winner McIlroy, who has not captured a Major since the 2014 PGA Championship, tries to complete a career Grand Slam by taking a green jacket. "Everything feels in really good order," McIlroy said. "Just work on some things I know I'll need and just make sure I'm ready and rested." McIlroy, who won at Dubai in January, has confidence he can join Woods, Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Gene Sarazen with the career Slam.

Sinner defeats Alcaraz to set up Miami final with Medvedev

MIAMI GARDENS (Agencies): Italy's Jannik Sinner ended Carlos Alcaraz's hopes of the "Sunshine Double" and his reign as world No 1, triumphing 6-7(4/7), 6-4, 6-2 in their Miami Open semifinal today. Sinner will meet Russian Daniil Medvedev in Monday's final while Alcaraz will lose his No 1 ranking to Novak Djokovic. Medvedev reached his fifth straight ATP Tour final with a 7-6(7/5), 3-6, 6-3 win over fellow Russian Karen Khachanov. The



disappointment for the 19-year-old Alcaraz, the defending champion in Miami and coming off a title at Indian Wells, will be tinged with frustration

after he struggled in the third set with leg cramps. It had been an enthralling and entertaining power-hitting performance from both men in the first set, won by the Spaniard after a tie-break, but an inspired Sinner fought back in the second. Sinner broke in the first game and although Alcaraz broke back to make it 2-2, the 21-year-old Italian sensed his moment was arriving and showed confidence in his powerful groundstrokes.

Klopp vows to spend after Liverpool's 'anomaly' season

LIVERPOOL (Agencies): Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said the Reds will spend in the transfer window to improve on a disappointing season but hit back at criticism of the club behind the scenes. Klopp's men came close to winning an unprecedented quadruple last season as they lifted the FA Cup and League Cup before falling just short to Manchester City in the Premier League and losing the Champions League final 1-0 to



Real Madrid. But Liverpool's hopes of winning silverware this season are already over. Eliminated early in the domestic cups and at the last 16 of the Champions League, they travel to

Manchester City today 27 points adrift of leaders Arsenal down in sixth. A top four finish is all that Klopp's side can now salvage from the campaign, but he said criticism of the club's medical and physical preparation was misplaced despite the role injuries to key players have played in a difficult season. "(This season is) an anomaly but I would prefer we were still in the Champions League spot," said Klopp yesterday.

Verstappen takes pole for Red Bull at Australian GP

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Max Verstappen took pole position for Red Bull at the Formula One Australian Grand Prix today after teammate Sergio Perez came crashing back to earth with a brake failure that left him last on the grid. Mercedes driver George Russell joins Verstappen on the front row for tomorrow's race at Albert Park after qualifying second ahead of teammate Lewis Hamilton. Verstappen saved his best for late, roaring around the lakeside circuit in 1:16.732s, over two-tenths of a sec-



ond quicker than Russell. "I think the last run was very good," Verstappen said, celebrating his first pole at Albert Park. "It all worked out in Q3."

Hamilton was thrilled Mercedes had bridged the pace to Red Bull, who won both the opening races in the Middle East. "I'm so happy with this," he said. "I'm really proud of the team - to be up on the two front rows is a dream for us. "To be this close to Red Bull is incredible." Perez, who endured a nightmare final practice earlier today, locked up braking into turn three during his first out lap in the opening session and beached himself in gravel, bringing his qualifying to a quick end.

Joshua ready to sacrifice to extend career

LONDON (Agencies): Anthony Joshua admitted on Friday that he "plateaued" after becoming world heavyweight champion as the British boxer aims to get his career back on track against Jermaine Franklin on Saturday in London. Retirement talk has followed the former Olympic champion since consecutive losses to Oleksandr Usyk, the last of which came in August. The fight with Franklin at the O2 Arena will be Joshua's first



without a world title on the line since 2015. But he believes he has found another level after basing himself in Dallas over the winter with new trainer Derrick James to help him return

to his best. "I got to a certain level but I plateaued there and I now realise that if I want to achieve again, I've got to go to another level," said Joshua after weighing in at a career-high 18st 3lbs (116 kg) on Friday. "I've just found out that what I thought was good enough, wasn't and sacrifice is not a bad thing because throughout this struggle I've had to take myself through I've actually found potentially better than what I had before."

Wrong to push players into being activists, says Subban

TORONTO (Agencies): All National Hockey League players do not need to be activists and do not have to wear a rainbow jersey or hat to support the LGBTQ+ community, former Norris trophy-winning defenseman PK Subban said on Friday. NHL Pride Night events have been under an unwelcome spotlight in recent months as some teams and a handful of players have objected to participating for reasons that include religious beliefs. One of the NHL's few Black players, the 33-year-old Subban was an activist and



philanthropist who donated millions to charitable efforts throughout a 13-year career with the Montreal Canadiens, Nashville Predators and New Jersey Devils. But the All-Star defenseman

made it clear that while he is comfortable speaking out, not everyone needs to stand on a soapbox to validate their support of a cause. "We cannot push everyone to be an activist, we need to be very careful," Canadian Subban told Reuters. "I feel people pick and choose what they want to talk about and I don't like it when we put the onus on athletes to be activists. "They don't need to be activists. "I'm not saying it is right or wrong to wear the (Pride) jersey, we have just got to be very careful how we push players to do things."

'He could've lost his life': Fury FC chief Eric Garcia calls for regulatory accountability after horrific end to fight

TEXAS (Agencies): Eric Garcia has seen a lot in his 14 years as a fight promoter. There have been issues with early stoppages and bad scorecards, sure. But what Garcia saw at his own event, Fury FC 76 in San Antonio, was on a different level. Referee Frank Collazo is a regular for events in southern parts of Texas, Garcia said. Up until Friday, Garcia said everything was as it should be. "I've really never had an issue with him," Garcia recently told MMA Junkie. "I've never had a problem with him. He's a super nice guy. He's easy to talk to. He's normally in there doing his job." However, as Garcia watched his main-event title fight Friday play out between Edgar Chairez and Gianni Vazquez, that was not the case. Garcia said he was just



as stunned as anyone with the officiating (or lack thereof) from Collazo, who acted in a way that UFC president Dana White referred to as something that "doesn't get any worse than that." Vazquez was choked unconscious with a triangle, but Collazo did not stop the fight. Chairez continued to squeeze, but eventually switched to an armbar. Vazquez laid there motionless for several moments before waking up with his arm torqued, and he eventually tapped, at which point a stoppage

finally came. "From where I was sitting, it looked like (Vazquez) started to go out," Garcia said. "I could see him moving a little bit, so I'm like, 'Maybe he's not out.' Then you kind of see him collapse. You know he's out. So now I'm like, 'OK, what's going on?' I've got Brandon Moreno sitting behind me. I've got Sean Shelby sitting behind me. (Manager) Jason House is sitting behind me. I've got my ring announcer right next to me. I've got my matchmaker Rich Burmaster on the camera stand shooting pictures. "I stand up and I start screaming, like, 'Hey, the fight is over. It's over. Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop the fight.' Nothing. Brandon is screaming. Rich is on the camera stand screaming saying, 'Hey, it's over, stop it,' trying to get Frank's attention."

Wimbledon drops ban on Russians, lets them play as neutrals

LONDON (Agencies): Russian and Belarusian players will be able to compete at Wimbledon as neutral athletes after the All England Club on Friday reversed its ban from last year. The players must sign declarations of neutrality and comply with "appropriate conditions," including not expressing support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "This was an incredibly difficult decision, not taken lightly or without a great deal of consideration for those who will be impacted," All England Club chairman Ian Hewitt said in a statement. The players cannot receive funding from the Russian or Belarusian states, including sponsorship from companies operated or controlled by the states. Australian Open champion Aryna Sa-



balenka of Belarus and Russian players Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev are among the players who can return. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba condemned the reversal as "immoral." "Has Russia ceased its aggression or atrocities? No, it's just that Wimbledon decided to accommodate two accomplices in crime. I call on the UK government to deny visas to their players," Kuleba wrote on Twitter.

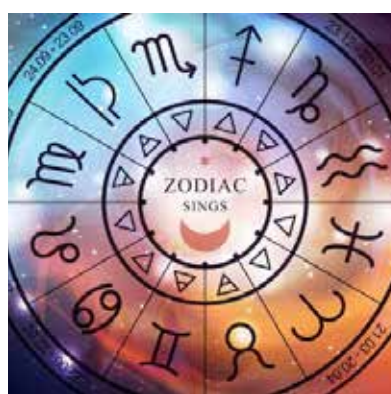
Medvedev, Kvitova win in semis at Miami Open



MIAMI GARDENS (Agencies): Daniil Medvedev hasn't won a title in the United States since capturing the 2021 US Open, when he turned away Novak Djokovic's bid for a calendar-year Grand Slam. Now the Miami Open's No. 4 seed is one victory from a fresh American title, beating fellow Russian Karen Khachanov 7-6(5), 3-6, 6-3 in the semifinals Friday, the same day Wim-

bledon announced Russians will be allowed back — with conditions. The other men's semifinal is Friday night between Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner. If Alcaraz wins, it'll set up a rematch of the Indian Wells final; Alcaraz beat Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 on March 19. Also Friday, No. 15 seed Petra Kvitova beat unseeded Sorana Cirstea 7-5, 6-3 in the second women's semifinal. Kvitova will face the red-hot Elena Rybakina in the final. Medvedev has won 23 of his last 24 matches — the lone loss to now-world No. 1 Alcaraz — and is in his fifth straight final. Medvedev has been friends with the 14th-seeded Khachanov since childhood, and they're each fierce baseliners, with one rally lasting 31 shots.

DAILY HOROSCOPE: APRIL 2, 2023



should do much better!

- **VIRGO**: Make sure that you're ready to keep moving today. It's great to rest on your achievements, but you need to build on this one while the time is still ripe. Things can get even better for you!
- **LIBRA**: You're so meticulous today that you could slow things down considerably, but that's not such a bad thing in the long run. See if you can spot any little mistakes that could creep into your work.
- **SCORPIO**: You and your friends are working together to do something cool, and you feel absolutely great about the collaboration. In fact, you might decide to formalize the arrangement to do more of the same.
- **SAGITTARIUS**: The odds are stacked against you today, but not for long! Try to maintain the status quo and keep from asking for special favors until tomorrow at the earliest and you should do just fine.
- **CAPRICORN**: Communication is easier than ever today, so write that long-lost friend or say hello to a relative you haven't heard from in a while. You might learn something that changes your outlook.
- **ACQUARIUS**: Not everyone is on your side today, but that has never stopped you before! You need to make sure that you're fully informed. Once that's settled, you should know more or less how to proceed.
- **PISCES**: Take care to strengthen your primary relationships today even if they don't seem all that bad off. You can always surprise a friend or family member with a gift or just a kind word.

It's a general reading which may differ from person to person because of time date and year.

- **ARIES**: Though you want to make a lot of progress today, you may be hampered by coworkers or family members. Don't lash out at them, because they can't help operating with the energy levels they've got.
- **TAURUS**: Today is all about new growth. You are focusing on what's blossoming rather than old growth. Cultivate anything that seems like it has potential and prune away the rest.
- **GEMINI**: If you've got a to-do list, now is the time to clear off as much as you possibly can. You're a machine when it comes to tasks and errands, and you'll feel great with a blank slate ahead of you.
- **CANCER**: Your attention to detail is sharp now, so it's a great time to drill down into big projects and see if you can improve them in small ways that add up. You should be able to save money and time.
- **LEO**: It's a great time for self-reflection, but not so much for parties or big meetings. If you need to engage socially, try to make the setting more intimate and quiet and you

After contentious US visit, Taiwan's president arrives in C.America

GUATEMALA CITY (AFP/APP): Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen arrived in Guatemala Friday on a visit to shore up ties with dwindling allies following a trip to the United States that angered China. Tsai's visit to Guatemala and its Central American neighbor Belize comes after Honduras became the latest country to cut diplomatic ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing. The president had stopped in New York on the way, and on her return trip has announced plans to meet House Speaker Kevin McCarthy



in California. Tsai arrived in Guatemala on Friday afternoon, where she was received with military honors and met by Foreign Minister Mario Bucaro. She will later hold talks with her counterpart Alejandro Giammattei, whose government had declared Taiwan "the only and true China." The president will visit the majestic Mayan ruins of Tikal in the north of the country on Saturday and the new Chimaltenango hospital in the west, built with a \$22 million donation from Taipei, on Sunday. Then she will travel to Belize, where she is scheduled to meet Prime Minister John Briceno on Monday before departing the next day. On her way back to Taiwan, Tsai plans to stop in Los Angeles, where McCarthy has said he will meet her.

Biden tells Russia to release US reporter



WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): President Joe Biden on Friday called for Russia to release Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is being held on espionage charges, while rebuffing a call from the paper's editorial board to expel Russian journalists from the United States. Asked by White House reporters what his message was to Russia regarding Gershkovich, a US citizen, Biden said: "Let him go." The Wall Street Journal's board of opinion editors called in a piece published Thursday afternoon for the expulsion of Russia's ambassador to the United States, as well as "all Russian journalists working here," describing the move as "the minimum to expect." "The timing of the arrest looks like a calculated provocation to embarrass the US and intimidate the foreign press still working in Russia," it added.

Eight found dead crossing into US from Canada



MONTREAL (AFP/APP): Eight people including two children were found dead in a marsh near the Canada-US border after trying to cross illegally into the United States, police said Friday. Their bodies were discovered near a capsized boat belonging to a missing man from the Akwesasne Mohawk community, officials reported. "A total of eight bodies have now been recovered from the waters," local police chief Shawn Dulude told a press conference. An initial six people from two families -- one of Romanian descent with Canadian passports, the other from India -- were discovered late Thursday, including one child under the age of three. Two more people were reported found at the Friday press conference by Dulude, an infant "Canadian citizen of Romanian descent, and one adult female believed to be an Indian national."

Migrants treated 'like criminals' in Mexican immigration centers



CIUDAD JUÁREZ (AFP): Luisa Jimenez thought she was visiting an office to regularize her stay in Mexico, but instead she found herself detained in an immigration center similar to the one where dozens of migrants perished in a fire. "It's a holding cell, a detention center, like we're criminals," the Venezuelan migrant told AFP in Ciudad Juarez, where 39 people died and 27 were injured in the blaze that began on Monday. Jimenez said the facility where she was held was in Tuxtla Gutierrez in the southern state of Chiapas. She was taken there with the promise that she would be given a permit to remain in Mexico while seeking asylum in the United States.

Battle in Colombia over river-wrecking gold 'dragons'

EL BAGRE (AFP/APP): The giant skeletons of burnt and dismantled gold dredgers litter the rivers of northwest Colombia, where the government is waging a full-out war on illegal mining. Nicknamed "dragons" by locals, the massive machines used to suck gold from riverbeds are blamed for destroying the environment and financing organized crime. But their dismantling in a massive army operation has been met with hostility by communities who depend on mining for their daily survival. Around El Bagre in the

gold-rich Bajo Cauca region, a protest by miners that started early this month has been marked by acts of vandalism the government blamed on the Gulf Clan drug cartel for instigating. But Luis Manuel Campo, 32, one of the miners, insisted to AFP that "we have nothing to do with criminal groups." Campo co-owns a dredger with three other people. "We are not hiding. We just want the persecution to stop," he said. "We want to be formally recognized as miners so that we can work in peace, without stigma."

Andrew Tate to move from jail to house arrest: Romania court



BUCHAREST (AFP/APP): A Romanian court on Friday ordered that controversial influencer Andrew Tate and his brother be moved from jail to house arrest while they are investigated for alleged human trafficking and rape. Tate, a British-American former kickboxer with millions of online followers, along with his younger brother and two Romanian women, are under investigation for allegedly "forming an organised

criminal group, human trafficking and rape". Tate, 36, and his brother Tristan, 34, were arrested in late December, and have been held in pre-trial detention ever since, which was again extended last week. However, an appeals court "rejected the prosecution's proposal to extend the pre-trial detention" and ordered the pair be placed "under house arrest", according to a court ruling, which was seen by AFP. The brothers -- who deny all charges brought against them -- were expected to be released later Friday. Media thronged the entrance to the prison where they are being held. Arriving there, one of their lawyers, Eugen Vidineac, said he had not been informed of the details of the court's decision.

Blinken affirms Israel ties, warns on peace after Netanyahu spat

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday pledged enduring ties with Israel but warned against inflaming tensions with the Palestinians, following a rare public spat between the allies. President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters Tuesday, called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to step back from a bid to weaken the judiciary that has set off massive protests. Netanyahu, who at least temporarily froze the push faced with a general strike, responded that he would not bow to foreign pressure but took a more conciliatory tone when he participated in a democracy summit called by Biden. In the highest level contact since the exchange, Blinken called Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and "reaffirmed the im-



portance of the enduring US-Israel bilateral relationship," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said. Blinken also discussed Iran, seen by Netanyahu as a paramount threat, and renewed US support for a Palestinian state -- an idea rejected by much of Netanyahu's hard-right government. The top US diplomat "emphasized the importance of refraining from unilateral actions that exacerbate tensions," Patel said in a statement.

Tourists among four killed in Norway avalanches: police

OSLO (AFP/APP): Four people, including foreign tourists, were killed Friday as multiple avalanches hit Norway's far north, including one which swept a house and a barn into the sea, police said. According to police, a group of tourists were caught in an avalanche in the Kvalvikdalen valley in Norway's far north on Friday afternoon. "There were five people of foreign origin that were on an outing in the area. We can confirm that one person is deceased," Morten Pettersen, a spokesman for the police, told journalists. Pettersen added two others were hurt, one critically and one with "moderate injuries."

The others were unharmed. Pettersen said authorities were working on identifying the victim and contacting consular services to inform their next of kin. Dan-Havard Johnsen, mayor of the Lyngen municipality, told AFP that the group was from Italy. But it had not been confirmed whether the deceased was Italian. About half an hour after the first report, police received notice of another avalanche on the nearby island of Reinoya "where a house and a barn were caught in the snow mass and carried into the sea," Pettersen said, adding that two people had been confirmed dead.

US Air Force drops Lockheed hypersonic missile after failed tests

WASHINGTON (News Agencies): The U.S. Air Force isn't going to buy the hypersonic AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon after the prototyping phase ends, following problems during testing, the service's acquisition chief told lawmakers Wednesday. But the service will still finish the ARRW program's last two all-up round test flights to collect data to help with future hypersonic programs, Andrew Hunter told the House Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee in written tes-

timony. "While the Air Force does not currently intend to pursue follow-on procurement of ARRW once the prototyping program concludes, there is inherent benefit to completing the all-up round test flights to garner the learning and test data that will help inform future hypersonic programs," Hunter wrote. Hunter sounded the death knell for Lockheed Martin's ARRW program a day after Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said in another hearing that a March test had failed.

The pianist who's been playing for more than 100 years

PARIS (AFP/APP): Colette Maze has been playing piano for more than a century, and is still drawing thousands of fans on social media. Born in June 1914, before the outbreak of World War I and when one of her favourite composers, Claude Debussy, was still alive, the French pianist practices four hours a day and is about to release her seventh album, "108 Years of Piano". From her apartment overlooking the Seine river in Paris, Maze moves cautiously between the three pianos in her living room, but retains a youthful enthusiasm. "Me? I'm young," she says with a smile. "Age is not something I'm interested in. There are people who are forever young, amazed by everything, and then there are people who don't care about anything and never loved anything, even their man -- can you imagine?" she adds.



- 'Piano is my life' - Maze was a piano teacher for much of her life, and it was only after turning 100 that she started building a significant fanbase -- through her Facebook page. Many are inspired by her continuing good health and refusal to give up the traditional French pleasures of wine, cheese and chocolate. "She gives people strength -- that's why she has such crazy success," said her son, journalist Fabrice Maze, adding with pride that she is one of the few people over 100 releasing albums.

NGOs slam missed chance to prevent seabed mining



United Nations (AFP/APP): Ocean advocates warned on Friday that the door may fly open for undersea mining in the near future in the absence of solid environmental rules that more and more nations demand. As two weeks of negotiations concluded Friday over possible environmental rules restricting large-scale mining of the seabed, NGOs voiced fear that industry may soon be given the green light. Several nations called for a moratorium on such mining at the International Seabed Authority (ISA) council meeting. "The first thing to highlight is that the political atmosphere has shifted quite radically since that time last year," Emma Wilson of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition told AFP. "There wasn't a single state at that point that had stood up and said no to mining." But as the two-week meeting wrapped up, she remained "very worried" the door could be opened to mining applications later this year. The Jamaica-based ISA, established under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, has authority over the ocean floors outside of its 167 member states' Exclusive Economic Zones, which extend up to 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from coastlines.

Safety coordinator on Baldwin film given suspended sentence



LOS ANGELES (AFP/APP): The safety coordinator on the Alec Baldwin film "Rust" was convicted Friday of unsafe handling of a firearm and sentenced to six months' probation for his part in the fatal on-set shooting of its cinematographer. The verdict was the result of a plea deal and means Dave Halls, who was also assistant director of the low-budget Western, becomes the first conviction over the accident, for which Baldwin faces manslaughter charges. Halls handed Baldwin the loaded gun in October 2021 which ultimately discharged, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and wounding the film's director, Joel Souza. Under the plea agreement, 63-year-old Halls will serve no jail time, but must complete six months of unsupervised probation. Halls had told Baldwin the gun was "cold" -- industry speak for safe. According to court filings, the film's armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed loaded the gun and handed it to Halls, who then checked the firearm to ensure that the bullets were "dummy" rounds -- meaning they held no gunpowder. Prosecutor Kari Morrissey, during the hearing Friday, described Halls as the "last line of defense" on the set, saying he failed to "check every round that was in the gun to confirm that it was a dummy round."

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