



## Pakistan and Iran Pledge to Boost Cooperation Across Various Sectors

ISLAMABAD (Khyber Mail): Pakistan and Iran have pledged to bolster their bilateral trade to ten billion dollars over the next five years. This agreement was reached during a meeting between Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan and Iranian President Dr. Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi in Islamabad. The meeting was attended by ministers and senior officials from both nations. Raisi — who is currently on a three-day visit to Pakistan — made the remarks during a joint press conference alongside Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after the two held a meeting in Islamabad. The visit is the first of its kind by any head of state after the February 8 general elections. The leaders discussed a broad spectrum of bilateral relations and shared perspectives on significant regional and global developments. They reaffirmed their commitment to expanding cooperation in diverse areas, including



trade, energy, connectivity, culture, and people-to-people contacts. Both leaders agreed to collaborate on developing joint strategies to address common challenges, including the threat of terrorism. During the meeting, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif expressed strong condemnation of the indiscriminate use of force by Israeli authorities in Gaza over the past seven months.

They reiterated the call for international efforts towards an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, lifting of the siege, and providing humanitarian relief to the people of Gaza. Prime Minister Sharif praised the Iranian leadership, particularly Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for Iran's unwavering and principled support for the Kashmiri people and their legitimate rights.

## Desert Flag 9: UAE launches military exercise with 10-nation participation

Abu Dhabi (Agencies): The United Arab Emirates (UAE) said that it has started a three-week joint military exercise named Desert Flag 9, with participation from 10 countries, local UAE media reports. According to the report, the participating countries include Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United States, South Korea, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. "Air forces from brotherly and friendly nations have arrived in the UAE's territory to start the multinational joint exercise, Desert Flag 9, for the year 2024," the UAE Ministry of Defence said in a statement. The report said



the military drill, as per the Ministry, aims to enhance combat efficiency and readiness, as well as facilitate the exchange of military expertise through various scenarios over the course of three weeks.

## Russian and Chinese Naval Commanders Sign Rescue-at-Sea Cooperation Pact

MOSCOW (Agencies): Top naval commanders from Russia and China have signed a pact that will enhance cooperation during search-and-rescue missions at sea. The pact was signed in the Chinese port city of Qingdao. Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Alexander Moiseyev, and Commander of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy, Hu Zhongming, signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation during rescue at sea. The commanders emphasized the need to advance cooperation between the fleets of the two countries to uphold security and stability in the global ocean. Admiral Moiseyev



arrived in Qingdao to participate in the 19th Western Pacific Naval Symposium, a biennial meeting of top naval officials from China and abroad. The pact marks a significant step in Russia-China naval cooperation and could have implications for maritime security and stability in the region.

## Indian Air Force's Jaguar Fighters to be Equipped with Advanced Missiles

NEW DELHI (Agencies): The Indian Air Force (IAF) is planning a significant upgrade to its fleet of Sepecat Jaguar deep penetration strike aircraft, which were originally introduced in the 1970s. The IAF is the only air force in the world still operating these fighters, and it has revitalized them with a major upgrade that includes new attack and

navigation avionics. The IAF is now looking to integrate New Generation Close Combat missiles into these fighter jets. It has sought proposals from industry players to modify and re-equip two aircraft with these new-generation missiles, which will be integrated with the aircraft's new Display Attack Ranging Inertial Navigation-III (DARIN-III) avionics

and helmet-mounted display. The missiles identified for this purpose are the Advance Short Range Air-To-Air Missile (ASRAAM) developed by European firm MBDA. The IAF tender also calls for the inclusion of a Helmet Mounted Display System (HMDS) to improve the pilot's situational awareness and targeting capabilities.

## Tesla cuts prices in major markets as sales fall



NEW YORK (Agencies): Tesla has cut its prices again in a number of major markets - including the US, China and Germany - as the electric car giant run by multi-billionaire Elon Musk faces falling sales. The move comes after it reported a sharp fall in its global vehicle deliveries in the first three months of this year. A price war has been intensifying between electric vehicle (EV) makers, with particularly fierce competition coming from Chinese firms. Tesla is due to report financial results for the first quarter of 2024 after the US market close on Tuesday. In a post on social media platform X, formerly Twitter, Mr Musk said: "Tesla prices must change frequently in order to match production with demand." In China, the firm cut the starting price of the revamped Model 3 in China by 14,000 yuan (£1,562) to 231,900 yuan. Prices of the Model Y, Model X and Model S vehicles in the US were reduced by \$2,000 (£1,616) on Friday. There were also price cuts in many other countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, according Reuters, the news agency. BBC News has contacted Tesla for comment. The company triggered an EV price war over a year ago when it aggressively cut prices at the expense of profit margins. The firm has been slow to refresh its ageing models while rivals in China, such as BYD and Nio, have been rolling out cheaper models. Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi also launched its first EV last month. Last week, Tesla announced plans to lay off more than 10% of its global workforce.

## Israeli Intelligence Chief Steps Down Following Unsuccessful Prevention of Hamas Attack

TEL AVIV (Agencies): Aharon Haliva, the head of the Israeli Directorate of Military Intelligence, announced his resignation on Monday. The decision came in the wake of the department's inability to thwart the Hamas attack that took place on October 7, 2023, as reported by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Haliva requested to step down from his position in consultation with the Chief of the General Staff, Herzi Halevi. This decision was a result of his leadership responsibility for the events that transpired on October 7, as stated by the IDF. On the aforementioned date, Hamas initiated a large-scale rocket attack against Israel, breaching the border and targeting both civilian neighborhoods and military bases. The attack resulted in the death of nearly 1,200 people in Israel, with around 240 others being abducted. In response, Israel launched retaliatory strikes, imposed a complete blockade of Gaza, and began a ground incursion



into the Palestinian enclave with the objective of eliminating Hamas fighters and rescuing the hostages. Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip have reportedly led to over 34,000 deaths so far, according to local authorities. On November 24, Qatar mediated a temporary truce between Israel and Hamas, which involved the exchange of some prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended multiple times but expired on December 1.

## Tens of thousands evacuated from massive China floods

BEIJING (Agencies): Authorities have evacuated 110,000 people from their homes in Guangdong, as days of heavy rain caused massive flooding in China's most populous province. Four people have died so far, while 10 have gone missing, according to state media. Footage on state media and online show large swathes of land inundated by the floods and rescuers ferrying people on lifeboats in waist-deep water. Several major rivers have burst their banks, and authorities are closely monitoring "dangerously high" water levels. They had warned that the level of a river in northern Guangdong could hit a "once in 100 years" peak on Monday morning, though this had yet to materialise by noon. Much of Guangdong is part of the low-lying Pearl River



delta, which is prone to floods due to the rise in sea levels and storm surges. The delta is a major manufacturing base in China and one of the country's most densely-populated regions, with Guangdong alone home to around 127 million people. Provincial capital Guangzhou as well as smaller cities Shaoguan and Heyuan were among the worst hit. Across the province about 1.16 million households lost power over the weekend, but 80% had their electricity restored by Sunday night.

## US 101st Airborne Division and French Special Forces Deployed in Ukraine Amid Rising Tensions

Odesa (Agencies): In a startling revelation, leaked information has confirmed the presence of Western special forces, including troops from the US and France, operating clandestinely within Ukraine. The UK reportedly leads in troop numbers, with significant contributions from Latvia, France, the US, and the Netherlands. Recent developments indicate a heightened Western military presence in the region, with reports emerging of US troops from the renowned 101st Airborne Division and French Special Forces openly operating in Odesa, Ukraine. These troops are said to have crossed the border from Romania, signaling a significant shift in the dynamics of the conflict. The situation in Ukraine's Odesa region has further escalated with missile strikes causing casualties. Odesa, a vital port city, has long been a strategic target for Russian aggression, underscoring the gravity of the ongoing conflict. In response to escalating tensions, French President Emmanuel Macron has de-



clared readiness to deploy troops to Ukraine should Russia advance towards key cities like Kyiv or Odesa. However, there remains no official commitment from NATO regarding the deployment of allied forces in Ukraine. The revelation of Western special forces operating within Ukraine is likely to exacerbate tensions with Moscow, which has consistently framed its actions as a response not only to Ukraine but also to perceived NATO encroachment. The situation continues to evolve rapidly, with the international community closely monitoring developments in the region.

**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.

## CM's aide for focusing on practical vocational trainings

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Special Assistant to Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Technical education and Industry and Industry Abdul Karim Tordhair has emphasized government vocational and technical training centers to focus on practical vocational training. During his visit to Gadoon Swabi, Government Technical and Vocational Center he also directed the management to take measures for the increasing self-reliance of the technical institutions so that these training centers could be used for commercial production. He directed the college management to work on ideas that would generate income for the institution and also emerge as an active and quality

training center. Earlier, he inspected the labs and various sections of the Government Technical and Vocational Center and was briefed about the technical skill training being provided to the students in various departments especially in the fields of plumbing, electricity, computer software, automobile, and other trades.

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## CM emphasizes completion of tourism-related projects, activities on emergency basis

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism Culture, and Archeology, Zahid Chanzeb has stressed on the urgent completion of tourism activities and projects to achieve 100 percent set goals for the development of tourism. He indicated that the government would evaluate the performance of the departments based on the achievement of the targets and would release funds as per the performance, adding that the institutions with perform would be strongly encouraged and funded. He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting of Kaghan Development Authority (KDA) at Pakhtunkhwa, said a press release issued here Monday. The Tourism Adviser is-

sued clear instructions to the KDA to take concrete steps to develop tourism in the area and provide more facilities to tourists. He said that the development strategy should include provision of quality services in hotels and restaurants, washrooms and drinking water to tourists at the spots as well as on the sides of the highways at a suitable distance. He said that the owners of the local hotels and restaurants should be asked to manage the facilities on road side. He said the provincial government and the Department of Tourism and Culture were committed to promoting tourism on a solid basis throughout the province and working on a five-year comprehensive plan to make the tours of the visitors mem-

orable, pleasant and healthy by all respects. Director General KDA Muhammad Shabbir informed the Tourism Adviser about the progress and details of Mansehra to Lake Saif-ul-Muluk hotel management, facilities for tourists on highways and other schemes related to tourism. The officials of the KDA also shed light on the functioning of the organization and its performance for promotion of tourism in the region. Zahid Chanzeb was also briefed about progress on opening of Mansehra - Naran to Jhalkat (MNJ) road and told that this road was closed in winter due to extreme weather conditions, however KDA in collaboration with the National Highway Authority was working early opening of the road.

## Rescue 1122 recovers four children, man alive from rubbles of BHU roof

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The teams of Rescue 1122 here on Monday pulled out four children and a man alive from rubble of the roof of a temporarily built hospital (BHU) for Afghan refugees in Badhabair area. According to the spokesman of Rescue-1122, the roof of BHU

which was affected due to recent widespread rains in the province, caved in all of a sudden and buried the children and a person standing underneath. He said that all the children and the man were recovered safely and shifted to Lady Reading Hospital after the first aid treatment.

## Independent candidate Mubarak Zeb wins PK 22 Bajaur-IV

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Independent candidate Mubarak Zeb Khan clinched PK 22 Bajaur-IV defeating Ebad Khan of Jumate Islami Pakistan who secured

10,477 votes during by election held on Sunday. According to results issued by the returning officer, the voters turned out remained 28.24 percent.

## Funeral prayer of martyr cop offered

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The funeral prayer of martyred police official Aminullah Afridi, who embraced martyrdom in an attack by by unknown militants in Sultan Khel Esar Pahar area of Tehsil Landi Kotal, district Khyber, offered on Monday at the ground of Landi Kotal, Tehsil Compound Jirga Hall. Wing Commander 107, Lt Col Zainul Abidin, SP Inves-

tigation Kamal Hussain, Tehsildar Malik Taimur Afridi, Chairman Shah Khalid Shinwari, Maulana Shoaib Qadri, DSP Circle Malik Mazhar Afridi and other police officials and relatives of the martyr attended the funeral prayer. On the occasion, the police contingent presented salute to the martyr and dispatched the coffin to native town with official protocol.

## Minister visits DHQ Hospital Kohat on citizen complaint

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate made a surprise visit to the District Headquarter Hospital KDA Kohat on Sunday evening on the complaint of a resident of Bahadur Kot and discussed the issue with the Medical Superintendent (MS) of the Hospital. He directed the MS to take immediate action against the doctor who treated the patient in a private hospital instead of a Government Hospital. It is to be mentioned here that a 7-year-old boy of Bahadur Kot village in the constituency of the minister had died as a result of aerial firing while his cousin was injured. The injured was brought to DHQ Hospital for treatment but the doctor on duty instead of treating him at the government hospital,

referred him to a private hospital. Speaking to the media on this occasion, Aftab Afridi said that he will not allow anyone to do injustice with the people and such elements will be made a deterrent example for others. He said the government will ensure justice to the affected people. He asked the people to strictly refrain from aerial firing on the event as sometimes it proved fatal for others. He further asked the citizens to submit their complaints in writing to the high-ups so that they have no excuse for their defense. Aftab Afridi assured that the KP government will give an ideal system of check and balance to the people and they will feel it themselves. He also warned the government functionaries to mend their ways otherwise be ready for strict action.

## KP moves SC on reserve seats oath taking issue

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on Monday decided to approach the Supreme Court over the issue of oath taking on the reserved seats in the provincial assembly. Provincial Minister, Meena Khan told media that the provincial cabinet has approved the step through a circulated summary. The session of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly will not be called till the judgment of the Su-

preme Court in this regard, he said. He said that it was possible that an application challenging the decision of the Peshawar High Court would be filed in the Supreme Court today. It merits to mention here that the Peshawar High Court had directed the Chief Minister and KP cabinet to call the session of the provincial assembly within 14 days for administering oath to the members elected on reserved seats.

## WHO delegation meets CM for cooperation in health sector

PESHAWAR (Agencies): The delegation of the World Health Organization (WHO), led by the country's head, Dr Luo Dapeng, called on Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Monday to discuss cooperation in the health sector. Provincial Health Minister Qasim Ali Shah and other relevant officials were also present in the meeting. During meeting, they discussed programs being implemented in the province with the collaboration of the WHO. The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation and collaboration between the provincial government and the WHO. The CM said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government appreciates the partnership

with the WHO. He lauded the role of WHO in the health sector, particularly in eradicating the polio virus. The CM stated that the provincial government will provide all possible support to make the polio eradication program successful. He emphasized that Primary focus is to strengthen the healthcare sector in the provincial areas, adding that a public awareness program has also been initiated to prevent various diseases. The CM mentioned that an action plan has been prepared to prevent the spread of dengue during the current season. He further stated that provincial government will encourage collaboration and cooperation with donor agen-

cies in these sectors. He highlighted that Universal Health Coverage program by the WHO in Charsadda district is commendable and stressed the need to expand this program to other districts. Dr. Luo Dapeng stated that WHO is working in various sectors of public health in the province in collaboration with the provincial government. He appreciated the KP government's role in implementing public health programs. He also appreciated the KP government's leadership role in the WHO Polio eradication program. Dr Luo Dapeng assured all possible support to implement the provincial government's vision in the health sector.

## PESCO notifies power suspension for Peshawar, Nowshera

PESHAWAR (Agencies): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Monday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Warsak HydroElectrica Power Station on 24th April from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Peshawar Cantt, Wapda House, Warsak, Regi Model Town, Jamrud, Dalazak, Shahibagh, Peshawar Fort, Sakhi Chashma grid connected feeders will face

inconvenience. Likewise, its said that power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar University Grid Station on 23rd and 25th April from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of University Campus, Canal Town, Malakandher, Engineering, Regi, Taj Abad, Taj Abad 2, Agriculture, Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Ghrib Abad, Rahatabad 1, CMB and Abdara feeders will face inconvenience. The power sup-

ply will remain suspended from Rehman Baba Grid Station on 23rd and 25th April from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of Kachori, Shalozai, Safdar Abad, Khanmust, New Hazar Khwani, Surizai, Phandu Baba, Urmar 2, Hazar Khwani, Yakatoot, New Chairman Daftar, Jameel Colony, Ring Road, Beri Bagh, Rashid Ghari, Surizai, Akhon Abad, Ring Road 2, SIDB feeders will face inconvenience.



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## Iran's President Visits Pakistan: A Step Towards Regional Stability

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's ongoing visit to Pakistan is a significant event that has caught the attention of the world. This visit, the first by any head of state to Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, is a clear indication of the importance both nations place on their relationship. The visit has been filled with discussions on regional and bilateral relations. The Iranian president has also visited Lahore, Pakistan's cultural hub, further emphasizing the importance of cultural and people-to-people ties between the two nations. However, the international community, particularly the United States, has reacted to Raisi's visit. The American foreign department's spokesperson has expressed concerns over the potential implications of Pakistan-Iran trade agreements. The spokesperson emphasized the risk of sanctions for those considering trade deals with Iran. This reaction highlights the complex geopolitical dynamics at play and the challenges that both Iran and Pakistan face in navigating their bilateral relations. Despite the pressure, Pakistan and Iran have shown a commitment to bolstering their economic ties. They have expressed confidence that the volume of annual trade will reach \$5 billion, stressing increased Pakistani investments in Iran. However, the US State Department's spokesperson has cautioned against potential trade agreements between Pakistan and Iran, citing the risk of sanctions. As Raisi's visit draws to a close, the focus will likely shift to the aftermath of this significant event. How Pakistan navigates its relationship with Iran while managing its ties with the US and its allies will be crucial. The delicate balancing act that Pakistan must maintain in its foreign policy is becoming increasingly evident. In conclusion, the ongoing visit of Iran's President to Pakistan is a significant step towards strengthening bilateral ties and fostering regional stability. However, it also brings to light the intricate geopolitical dynamics and pressures that both nations must navigate. The international community would do well to support initiatives that promote peace and stability in the region, rather than exacerbating tensions through threats of sanctions.

## Shahbaz versus Israeli pilots — By Ibn-e Taha

Israeli commander of Air Force Ezer Wiseman who later served as Defense Minister and President of Israel wrote about Pakistani Pilot Noor Khan (Later Commander-in-Chief of PAF) in his autobiography, "I was glad he was a Pakistani pilot and not an Egyptian". Pakistan Air Force enjoys the honor of shooting down Israeli pilots while flying shoulder to shoulder with Arab brethren during the wars of 1967 and 1973-74. Flight Lieutenant (Fit Lt) Saif-ul-Azam shot four Israel Air Force (IAF) aircraft, Fit Lt Hatif (Later Vice Chief of the Air Staff) shot an Israeli F-4 Phantom and Fit Lt Abdus Sattar Alvi shot an Israeli Mirage III on 26 April, 1974. Interestingly, none of the Pakistani pilots could be shot by Israelis, showing the supremacy of Pakistani pilots over Israelis. Abdus Sattar Alvi retired as an Air Commodore and lives peacefully in Pakistan. It was a great honor to spend a pleasant evening with him. Alvi recalled that at the start of Arab-Israel war in 1973 Ramadan every Muslim was concerned. Flight Lieutenant Abdus Sattar Alvi was amongst the batch of PAF pilots who volunteered to be in ranks with Syrian brothers. Alvi recalled the Peshawar-Karachi-Baghdad round flight to Syria. The journey ended up in Damascus. The Pakistani pilots immediately got currency (being acquainted) to Mig 21 aircraft in use with the Syrian Air Force. The Pakistani pilots were deployed at the Alpha detachment of No 67 Squadron, commanded by Squadron leader Arif Manzoor senior most Pakistani pilot.

Immediate challenges for the Pakistani eagles were:

- Pakistani pilots had no experience flying Syrian Mig-21
- They could not read the Russian language and signs encrypted on these aircraft
- Operating surfaces and climate were new to them, making it difficult to breathe, operate, and acclimatize.
- Operations, Air Defence, and airman-ship procedures were different
- Syrians could hardly speak English and explain to Pakistani pilots
- Israelis had planted jamming systems near the Syrian border and not only could jam but also listen to Pakistani pilots' communication.

Pakistani Shahbaz immediately adapted to a new place, new environment, new airspace, tactics, and a new enemy. They also learned various operating procedures in Air Defense Alerts (ADA), Air Tactics, Air Defense, and Combat Air Patrol (CAP) at the Dumayr Air Force base. Making them fearless and chivalric. Pakistani formation of eight aircraft selected their call sign "Shahbaz". Sattar remembered Israel Air Force was constantly engaged in hostilities inclusive of radio jamming for aircraft flown from Syrian side. Pakistani contingent had pledged not to be shot by the intruder Israelis, though survival in a radar-jammed environment was the biggest threat. Pakistani detachments initially tried to communicate their aerial transmission in Urdu to have better communication between them. By April, 1974 war appeared to be diminishing, when suddenly on April 26, 1974 air raid sirens were blown at the air base. PAF pilots rushed for an ADA mission on the available Mig-21s. True to their commitment, all of them were airborne within minutes. The ADA sortie from Dumayr base to Sidon was flown without any visible intruders. Mig 21 aircraft had a limited flying time of 30 minutes which

had almost exhausted. These eagles started heading back to Dumayr base for landing. Suddenly Pakistani air defence controller Sqn Ldr Saleem Metla reported two Foe aircraft approaching from the southern side (Israel). The intruder enemy aircraft started jamming the communication of the PAF pilots. Sattar saw two Israeli F-4 Phantoms head-on but did not seem interested in an aerial engagement. Sattar Alvi was positioned last in this Shahbaz formation of eight Mig 21s. Just after the sight of these Phantoms Sattar Alvi saw the formation of two aircraft heading towards them. He immediately recognized them as Mirage III and recalled lessons taught by his instructors in Pakistan that Mirage cannot match a Mig-21 in a close dogfight. A rush of blood forced him to engage this Mirage leaving his other 7 formation partners. He reduced his speed to zero and by the time he could adjust one of the Israeli Mirages overshot him, leaving Sattar to face a second Israeli Mirage aircraft. Sqn Ldr Arif Manzoor the leader was concerned about the safety of Sattar Alvi and gave constant radio calls to ask about his location. Upon hearing no reply, it was assumed Sattar Alvi was in trouble. Sattar Alvi stated that in the fighter flying business, you can judge the mental state of the opponent pilot if you are alert. When the second Israeli Mirage saw a Syrian Mig challenging an Israeli. Sattar could instantly judge the opponent's surprise "How the hell on earth a Syrian challenge an Israeli". Sattar said it was a one-on-one match, either he could have shot me or I would have won the duel. Fear of being short on fuel did not deter him from a possible ejection in case of consuming all the fuel. The first Israeli Mirage, which had overshot him, turned in the air and aimed for Sattar, who did not take time to launch a K-13 missile against the second opponent right ahead of him. Till the opponent could recover from the shock, Sattar Alvi proved a victory for him. Myth of Israeli air force being non-invincible was shattered in the air by a Pakistani pilot. The entire episode took 1-2 minutes. Israeli pilot captain Lutz of No 5 Air wing based at Hatzor ejected and was taken prisoner. On seeing the plight of his duo's complement, the first Mirage fled the battlefield. Sattar Alvi proudly announced the kill in the air. Hearing the news of the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft, radio communication went vibrant both in the air and ground. He recalled his fuel warning lights were on and could barely manage to return on a few fuel drops left in the fuel tank. Syrian brothers were overjoyed and sweets were distributed in Syria. Schools were also closed for one day to mark the occasion. Sattar was honored with the title of real brother. Sattar and Arif Manzoor were decorated with Syria's highest decoration award of gallantry i.e. Wisam-e-Faris and Wisam-e-Shujaat respectively. Govt of Pakistan also decorated both of these pilots with a gallantry award of Sitar-e-Jurat. Sattar Alvi later retired as an Air Commodore. The narration of Sattar Alvi was completed, but left us concluding PAF is alive to threats both within and outside. At a recent function, Sattar Alvi presented the flying coverall of the Israeli pilot Capt. Lutz (he shot on 26 April 1974) to Chief of the Air Staff as a war trophy for PAF. The said coverall will be placed at the PAF Museum at PAF base Faisal. People say the chivalric actions of PAF in the Arab-Israel war opened doors for PAF pilots in the Middle East which are still open today.

## Pearls of wisdom in languages: World English Language

Day & Shakespeare — By Salahuddin Choudhry

For ages & eras, languages came about from peoples and places of sorts both independently and needs-based cross-fertilization of diverse and even disparate customs, traditions & values. These in turn found and advanced orally and in black & white by writers of various interests & backgrounds led gradually to language-dependent literature of different kinds & forms. Human civilization since time immemorial has been cognizant of and accordingly served time & efforts in developing the needed medium of communication which resulted in words & phrases founded on personal & sound-based signs used by animate objects – in particular human beings – culminating into a language of expression. Today, as languages throughout the world developed in shapes & formats, we see an unlimited world of languages alongside literatures enriched by their unabated and definitive inculcation through human cultural pursuits giving identity to each one of them, recognized and esteemed the world over. No wonder, in this respect, one sees with awe and values all languages & literatures in man's modern world. And, here, the United Nations fortunately ensures valued continuity & development of these modes of human expression as prevalent and as required to preserve and promote any of them from going extinct. The English Language Day, founded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2010, is traditionally observed to celebrate multilingualism and cultural diversity as well as to promote equal use of all six official languages throughout the Organization. The English Language Day was established to commemorate birth anniversary (23rd April, 1564) of the most famous and celebrated worldwide English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare, who died on the same date in 1616. This Day aims to entertain and inform people and for increasing awareness and respect about the history, culture and achievements associated with each of the six working languages among the UN community. The day often features book-reading events, English quizzes, poetry and literature exchanges, and other activities that promote the English language. William Shakespeare is considered by many to be the father of modern English Literature. It is not just his popularity and influence on modern writers that allows for this title to be attributed to him but because of the massive contributions he made to the development of the English language. Shakespeare's 154 sonnets are marked by recurring themes and variable beauty with the transcendent power of love and art. Today, over 400 years later, his plays are performed and read more often and in more nations than ever before. The Tamil language of South Asia is recognized as the oldest language in the world and it is the oldest language of the Dravidian family. This language had a presence even around 5,000 years ago. According to a survey, 1863 newspapers are published in Tamil language every day. Surprisingly, another very old Sanskrit-based language of South Asia – that is Bengali – spoken by the majority people of Pakistan (then Eastern Wing), received recognition from the UN in the context of a four-year-long movement since 1948 to achieve officialdom of the Bengali language. The 21st Feb. (1952) declared by the world body as International Mother Language Day is a worldwide annual observance to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and to promote multilingualism. The other old language that is English was founded in the year 450 when German tribes spoke a similar language. The language of that time is referred as Old English. Even native English speakers find it diffi-



cult to understand that, as it has a lot of differences to what we consider as the English Language. The current English language that we speak is referred as Modern English. It is originated in the year 1800. Modern English has more words, which was founded to name new technologies during the time of the industrial revolution. A Germanic language that began to develop during the 5th and 6th centuries when Anglo-Saxons settled in Britain, early English is also influenced by French, Latin, and many other languages. These influences were so profound that that modern English could be regarded as a Latinized, Frenchified dialect of Old German (an over-simplification, of course) to which it bears some resemblance. The Germanic roots of English are evident in the many words that are virtually the same in both modern tongues. The Latin influence on English gave the developing language a richer vocabulary, and, since the monasteries were centers of literacy and learning, today the learned among us tend to use a lot of words with Latin roots, while the less educated speak "plain" (Anglo-Saxon derived) English. The sciences and fine arts employ a great deal of terminology that comes from the language of the Church, in which all learned discourse was conducted (both words come from Latin). The French nobility brought with them many words to English language; French is widely regarded in English speaking countries as the language of refinement and high culture. From fine cuisine to what's in vogue (both words French in origin), this strong French influence is evident today. The closest major language to English is Dutch. With 23 million native speakers, and an additional 5 million who speak it as a second language, Dutch is the 3rd most-widely spoken Germanic language in the world after English and German. When the British Empire spread English around the globe, its language had already taken its modern form, and dialects spoken in America, Canada, and Australia are all variants of "the king's English" comprehensible to all native Anglophones. Our modern language was born and raised in England. That's why it's called English. While English is the most spoken language in the world, it is the native tongue for only one-quarter of those who speak it. Or more impressively, for three-quarters of those who speak English, it is at least their second language if not a third or fourth. The father of English Language & Literature is Geoffrey Chaucer, who was born in London sometime between 1340 and 1344. He was an English author, poet, philosopher, bureaucrat (courtier), and a diplomat. Of English language ownership, no one owns English; there is no single standard for it, though American and British English are the main dialects in the world today; they are both very influential in different spheres but the future of World English will be largely determined by people who speak it as a second language. The English language is far from perfect. With so many words that mean the same thing, or phrases and sayings that make no literal sense. Weirdly, two people with English as a second language can communicate information easier and more accurately than two English people. Billions

of people study English around the world, making it the third most widespread native language, and many are enrolled in an English speaking course as an adult or from a young age. Though apparently difficult, it has been one of the most simple languages, especially in the Common-wealth countries. Unlike other languages, English is somewhat easy to learn as it has no cases, no gender, no word agreement, and arguably has a simple grammar system. English speakers sometimes have difficulties when learning Portuguese because they are not used to words having genders. English is easy because it's much easier to spell than most languages, and none of the grammatical rules have any exceptions. Thirdly, it only has easy sounds for foreigners to pronounce unlike difficult languages like Spanish, which has such strange tongue twisting sounds. Unlike other languages, English has no cases, no gender, no word agreement, and arguably has a simple grammar system. English speakers sometimes have difficulties when learning Portuguese because they are not used to words having genders. The English language is beautiful because it has many languages combined into it. German, Norse, French, and Latin are just a few. The way it is spoken nowadays, probably turns some people off. The beauty of the English language lies in its simplicity. Try saying "I love you" in any other language and you will see the difference. More than a formal expression, it cloaks a certain warmth and sincerity vital to make it reflect the delicate inner closeness you cherish in a relationship. English is an Easy Language. English is the Language of International Communication. Although English is not the most spoken language in the world, it is the official language in 53 countries and is spoken as a first language by around 400 million people worldwide. But that's not all, it is also the most common second language in the world. English as a language in Pakistan has been almost a natural phenomenon after it became independent from two-centuries of British rule and continued to be used and practiced by the Govt. and people. Alongside national language Urdu, as a matter of convenience, English was declared to be the official language of the country and remained a major medium of communication and as second language in the educational institutions at the federal level and in all the provinces. English is a major international language and in Pakistan it is spoken and understood generally in urban areas; it is not too difficult to learn and mostly found to be comfortable in fostering. The special thing about English is that people find it flexible and easy to pick up. It is a huge entity of vocabulary and is constantly absorbing new words, whilst at the same time seeping into foreign languages. English contains over 750,000 words and there are hundreds of words adopted from Urdu language and other dialects of Pakistan as well. Most people in Pakistan cite good reasons for the popularity of the English language, such as that it is "not too difficult to learn" or that it evolves with our changing times. Despite debates & controversies over preponderance and usage of English vis-à-vis Urdu and other provincial languages, English in Pakistan continues to sustain, shine and English literature wears new spectrums by the day through those who practice and believe in universality of English as a paragon.

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## Iran's President Raisi given a guard of honour at PM House

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): President of Iran Dr. Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi on Monday was given a guard of honour as he arrived here at the PM House to meet Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, along with his high-powered delegation. President Raisi landed in the federal capital earlier in the morning for a three-day official visit accompanied by his spouse and a delegation comprising

ministers and businessmen. Prime Minister Shehbaz welcomed the visiting dignitary on his arrival at the venue of the formal welcome ceremony. The national anthems of both countries were played as the Iranian president stood at the salute dais along with the prime minister. The smartly turned-out contingents of the armed forces presented a guard of honor to President Raisi. PM

Sharif and President Raisi planted a sapling at the lawns of the PM House in connection with the Earth Day. Later, both the Iranian President Raisi and Prime Minister Shehbaz introduced their respective delegations to each other before proceeding for the tete-a-tete and delegation-level talks. This marks the first visit by any head of state to Pakistan after the general elections in February 2024.

## Govt disburses Rs 33,166.64 mln for various power sector schemes so far

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The government had released an amount of Rs 33,166.64 million for various power sector NTDC/PEPCO schemes under the annual Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) so far in the current fiscal year 2023-24. According to the official data issued by the Planning Commission, the government had specified a sum of Rs 55,277.74 million for various NTDC/PEPCO projects in PSDP 2023-24. Out of the total release amount, the local component stood at Rs 29,639.13 million while the foreign aid component was Rs 25,638.61 million. A sum of Rs 19,819.75 million had been spent on various water-related projects so far. Under ongoing schemes, an amount of Rs12,000 million has been allocated for installation of 2x600 MW coal-fired power project GENCO-1 Jamshoro, Rs 2,536.471 million for interconnection of isolated Makran Network, Rs 1600 million each for 220kV Hairpur Substation, 220kV Swabi Substation, Rs 1200 million for 500kV Allama Iqbal Industrial City for 600 MW Demand of the Special Economic Zone, Rs 1,059

million for replacement of LT Bare conductor with ABC Cable in Peshawar Khyber Circle and Bannu Circle, Rs 1,439 million for 220/132 kV GIS substation Dhabiji, Rs 964 million for electrification works at different valleys of District Chitral and Rs 900 million for 220 kV Quaid-e-Azam Apparel and Business Park in the PSDP for FY 2023-24. Similarly, a sum of Rs 13,800 million has been specified for evacuation of power from Suki Kinari, Kohala, Mahal HPPs, Rs 5,667.094 million for evacuation of power from 2160 MW Dasu stage-1, 16,099.255 million for 500 kV HVDC Transmission System between Tajikistan and Pakistan (CASA-1000), Rs 3,904.500 million for 500KV Lahore North, 2,324 million for Upgradation of NTDC's Telecommunication, Rs 7,000 million for augmentation of existing 500kV and 220 kV grid stations, Rs 3000 million for power distribution enhancement investment programme-II (Advance Metering Infrastructure Project), Rs 950 million for evacuation of power from 1,224 MW wind power plants at Jhamir and others ongoing projects.

## Aror University conducts entry test for academic session 2024

SUKKUR (APP): Aror University of Art, Architecture, Design Heritage Sukkur conducted an entry test for the academic session fall 2024 Round 1. More than 484 candidates across the country appeared in the entry test in 12-degree programs including Bachelor of Architecture, BS Civil Engineering, BS Environmental Sciences, BS Fashion Design, BS Textile Design, BS Visual Arts, BS History, BS Archaeology, BS Artificial Intelligence, BS multimedia and gaming, BS ceramic design, BS tourism &

hospitality, according to a release issued here on Monday. The test was conducted at the University premises, where the university made all necessary arrangements for candidates. A dedicated area was spared for parents accompanying candidates. The test was conducted in a highly secure and controlled environment where the University took all security measures team of rescue 1122, emergency mobile health, mobile Police, and a general physician doctor to ensure the smooth conduct of the Test.

## ANF recovers 252 kg drugs in seven operations; arrests eight

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover 252 kg drugs and arrested eight accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday. He informed that 470 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a parcel booked for UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 78 kg opium and 73.2 kg hashish were recovered from an accused arrested with the help of the Motorway Police from Pindi Bhattian. 56.4 kg hashish and 15.6 kg opium were recovered from two suspects netted near Ring Road Peshawar.

1.2 kg opium and 10.8 kg hashish were recovered from the possession of a woman arrested near Sangjani Toll Plaza Islamabad. 7.2 kg hashish was recovered from three suspects on IJP Road Islamabad. 3.6 kg hashish, 1.2 kg opium and 1.4 kg heroin were recovered from the possession of an accused netted near Kala Shah Kako Motorway Toll Plaza Lahore. 4.8 kg hashish was recovered from a parcel sent to Islamabad at a courier office on Ring Road Peshawar. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

## OEC to export medical experts to Qatar

ISLAMABAD (APP):The Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) an attached department of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development would send its well-trained workforce of Pediatric and Geriatric nurses to a Qatari medical firm during the current fiscal year. According to the advertisement of OEC, Tabeeb Care Medical Services required nursing staff in the field of Pediatric and Geriatric from Pakistan, which enabled a good employment opportunity for candidates with relevant qualifications and experience. As per the requirement of a job below 40 years of age, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (16 years qualification) or post RN diploma in the nursing. It also demanded the registration of aspiring candidates from the 'Nursing Council' with a minimum of two years of experience from the registration date, specialized experience in handling pediatric patients registered general Nurse-geriatric with an age limit of below 40 years. The

employment contract would include compensation and benefits including two years renewable employment contract, accommodation and transportation, annual leave as per Qatar Labour Law, Joining, repatriation tickets, and Two-way air tickets for annual leave in every two year. Interested applicants were encouraged to apply via OEC's website <https://oec.gov.pk/>. The applicant will submit or attach the deposited Bank challan amounting to Rs. 1000/- generated at the time of online application submission. OEC is the only Government organization, Established in 1976, being the Government organization, the approved charges of OEC are nominal; URL: <https://oec.gov.pk/fee.html> one window facilitation desk (Quick attestation of documents from all relevant departments/organizations), transparency and exploitation free services. Outreach/Nationwide presence (Headquarters Islamabad & 04 Regional Offices i.e. Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar & Quetta).

## Faisal Amin of SIC wins NA-44 by-election

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (Agencies): Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) candidate Faisal Amin Khan has won the by-election on National Assembly seat NA-44 by securing 66,879. According to the unofficial result issued by the Returning Officer, his runner-up was Abdul Rasheed Khan Kundi of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian, who bagged 21,979 votes. Overall voter turnout remained at 24.5 percent. It is worth mentioning here that this national assembly seat was vacated by Ali Amin Gandapur upon after being elected as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister.

## PMLN candidate Ali Ahmed Leghari wins PP-290 by polls

DG KHAN (APP): Pakistan Muslim League N's candidate for by-polls in PP 290 Sardar Ali Ahmed Khan Leghari won the election by securing 62,484 votes. According to an unofficial notification from Returning Officer Muhammad Asad, his rival candidate Sardar Mohiuddin Khan Khosa, who was backed by PTI, got 23,670 votes. The total number of votes was 193,960 however 89,580 persons exercised their right to vote. The voter turnout remained at 46.18 percent in the by-polls.

## IRSA releases 165,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Monday released 165,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 244,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1441.48 feet and was 43.48 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 40,500 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1134.60 feet, which was 84.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 63,500 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 100,500, 56,000, 97,800 and 33,300 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 116,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 16,600 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala

## Death anniversary of comedian, actor Moin Akhtar observed



ISLAMABAD (APP): ISLAMABAD, Apr 22 (APP): Death anniversary of legendary artist, comedian, actor and host Moin Akhtar was observed on Monday. Born on December 24, 1950 in Karachi, Moin Akhtar made his television debut in 1966. He performed several roles in television stage shows, dramas, films and talk shows. His best dramas were Eid Train, Studio Dhari, Bakra Qistoon Per, Fifty-Fifty, Loose Talk and many others. He was fluent in several languages, including English, Bengali, Sindhi, Punjabi, Memon, Pashto, Gujarati and Urdu. Moin Akhtar was awarded the Pride of Performance in 1996 and Sitara-e-Imtiaz in 2011 on his outstanding performance. He passed away on April 22, 2011 in Karachi after suffering a heart attack.

## On Earth Day, PM calls for responsible use, recycling to achieve plastic-free society

ISLAMABAD (Agencies):As the international community observes the annual Earth Day on Monday, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif urged the countrymen to reaffirm their commitment to using plastic responsibly to reduce plastic waste and embrace recycling and eco-friendly alternatives. Observed annually on April 22, this year's Earth Day is being observed under the theme of "Planet vs. Plastics." "As we unite to observe this day under the theme, "Planet vs. Plastics" that calls for a 60% reduction in plastic use by 2040, let us reaffirm our commitment to use plastic responsibly to reduce plastic waste that is not only polluting our oceans, lakes, and rivers but are also making inroads into our food systems, posing a direct and serious threat to human health," the prime minister, in a message to the nation. He appealed the people for a pledge to reduce the use of single-use plastics, embrace recycling and eco-friendly alternatives, and advocate for stronger environmental policies at every level of society.

Calling Earth Day a reminder of shared responsibility towards protecting our planet – for now and for future generations, he said though Pakistan was among one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, there was little awareness about the risks of climate change threatening the development, the well-being, and economic security of the citizens. "Year after year, we are witnessing its devastating impacts – from changing seasonal weather patterns, rising temperatures, variability of monsoons and melting of glaciers in the north, further compounded with recurrent extreme weather events and natural disasters – to the slower onset events of sea level rise, warming seas and loss of ecosystems." The prime minister said that the effects of climate change had exacerbated over the years, which puts the country at an even greater economic and physical risk. Hence, we understand the urgency of taking bold and decisive steps to confront these challenges and build resilience in the face of adversity, he added.

## ICT admin arrests over 900 alms-seekers

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Islamabad Capital Territory Administration in coordination with the police has arrested more than 900 alms-seekers in a month under its campaign against the professional begging. Out of the total arrested beggars, 45 per cent of them were male, 38 per cent female, 7 per cent of minors and 10 per cent of trans genders, an official told APP on Monday. He said the teams were

constituted which was led by the relevant Assistant Commissioners and Magistrates to run the anti-begging campaign across the capital. In a recent update provided by the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Spokesman, Dr Abdullah Tabasum, it was revealed that a staggering 921 individuals engaged in begging were apprehended over the last one month, spanning from March to April.

## Khana Badosh Writers Cafe hosts study session on Guno Samtani's book

HYDERABAD (Agencies): Khana Badosh Writers Cafe in its weekly literary series hosted hold a study session on the book ' Hik Raah Hik Pathar' based on the stories of eminent writer Guno Saamtani, compiled by Madad Ali Sindhi and published by Kavita publication. Writer Madad Ali Sindhi, Sher Mehrani, Taj Joyo, Naseer Mirza and Ghulam Nabi Soomro expressed their views on the writer of book. Madad Ali Sindhi stressed the need to preserve creation of Sindhi Literature written in India and publish in Sindh. He deplored that institutions established for the uplift of Sindhi Literature and Language were not working properly and ancient manuscripts were wasting day by day. He said that preamble of Guno's book written by him narrates subject matter of stories. And depicts feelings and sentiments of person amicably.

He said that Guno had command on international literature also. Amar Sindhoo said that Guno Samtani was among those writers who born in Sindh but partition compelled them to migrate India and his stories reflects such partition. She said that writers in Sindh always narrates rural life style in their creation but Guno Saamtani has portrayed urban life in his stories. Dr. Sher Mehrani said that pain of partition could be feel in the stories of Guno Samtani while Taj Joyo said that stories of Guno clearly highlight western trends. Eminent writer Naserr Mirza Guno Samtani was born in Sindh and his soul was prevailing in Tombs of Mirs. Writer Ghulam Nabi Soomro lauded the efforts of Madad Ali Sindhi for compiling stories of Guno Samtani and termed it contribution for Sindhi literature.

## Manzoor Soomro takes charge as new SEPCO chief

SUKKUR (APP): Engineer Manzoor Hussain Soomro has taken over the charge of the office of Chief Executive Officer Sukkur Electric Supply Company after approval from the SEPCO Board of Directors. After assuming the office of the Chief Executive Officer HESCO, Engr Manzoor Hussain Soomro on Monday directed the officers and employees to make all-out efforts to control line losses in their respective jurisdictions and initiate strict legal action against power theft. The officers and employees should maintain punctuality as no negli-

gence will be tolerated in this regard, he said, and emphasized the need to adopt a customer-friendly attitude as well as activation of customer service centers so that genuine grievances of the customers could be resolved at the earliest. The SEPCO can be converted into a profitable organization with sincere efforts, hard work, dedication, and devotion, he said, and hoped that the customers would also extend their full cooperation in this regard by paying their electricity bills on time and clearing their outstanding dues at the earliest.

## Palwasha criticizes SIC's behaviour during President's address to Parliament

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Deputy Information Secretary Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Senator Palwasha Khan on Monday criticized the behavior of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) during the President's address to the Parliament. Addressing a press conference along with Senator Shahadat Awan, she condemned the disrespectful remarks towards the PPP leadership, asserting that such language would not be tolerated at any cost. "We will respond to the disrespectful remarks about our leadership in the same language," she firmly added. Palwasha Khan alleged that the opposition parties were aiming to sabotage the visit of the Iranian President to Pakistan, who had expressed support for the Palestinian

cause. "They are also sending a message to global financial institutions about the political instability," she remarked. She reiterated the Pakistan PPP unwavering solidarity with their Palestinian brethren and extended a warm welcome to the Iranian President for his support. Palwasha Khan emphasized that the right to protest is acknowledged, hooliganism and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. Speaking on the occasion, Senator Shahadat Awan also highlighting President Asif Ali Zardari's positive message delivered at the beginning of the parliamentary year. He underscored the significance of the media as a pillar of democracy and expressed optimism for the country's future.

## Murree admin forms three teams to conduct operation against illegal constructions

RAWALPINDI (APP): Murree administration on the directives of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak, have formed three teams to conduct operations against illegal constructions. According to a Commissioner's Office spokesman, Murree district administration had launched a crackdown against illegal constructions in the light of the orders of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz. Deputy Commissioner, Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi was supervising the operation, he added. Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamer Khattak had issued instructions to the district administration to form three teams to accelerate the opera-

tions against illegal constructions, he said. The administration had formed three teams that were taking strict action in accordance with the law against the rules violators, he added. Teams were conducting raids and demolishing illegal constructions under the supervision of Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue, Murree Capt. (R) Qasim Ijaz, Assistant Commissioner Murree, Capt. (R) Abdul Wahab Khan, and DFO Murree. These teams include officials from various departments who were briefed about their responsibilities. The objective of this initiative is to effectively complete the operation against illegal constructions, the spokesman informed.

## Farooq urges IOJK youth to draw inspiration from Iqbal's message of Khudi

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Jammu and Kashmir National Conference President, Farooq Abdullah, commemorated the occasion of Iqbal Day by honoring the renowned poet and philosopher, Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, affectionately known as the 'Ballad of the East.' According to Kashmir Media Service, in his tribute, Farooq hailed Allama Iqbal as a visionary figure whose poetry ignited a sense of purpose and fervor among Muslims across the Indo-Pak subcontinent. Farooq underscored Allama Iqbal's profound impact on Kashmir's struggles in the face of oppression and

tyranny. He emphasized that Iqbal's philosophy transcends time, offering solutions to a myriad of contemporary social, political, and economic challenges. Highlighting the enduring relevance of Iqbal's message of "Khudi" (selfhood) and equality, Farooq urged Kashmiri youth to draw inspiration from Iqbal's teachings to unlock their full potential. The homage paid by Farooq Abdullah to Allama Iqbal underscores the enduring legacy of the poet-philosopher and his profound influence on the cultural and intellectual landscape of Kashmir and beyond.

## Rescue 1122 tackles over 190 emergencies last week

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district's emergency service- Rescue 1122 rescued a total of 181 patients during various emergencies during the last week under the supervision of District Emergency Officer Awas Babar. According to the weekly performance report issued here on Monday, the Rescue 1122 tackled a total of 197 emergencies over the week including

134 medical, 31 road accidents, five fire eruption incidents, two building collapse and one drowning emergency. It says that the service received a total of 13009 emergency calls including 10201 fake or irrelevant calls. He said that Rescue 1122 also tackled 21 referral-related emergencies in which patients were shifted to different hospitals for medical treatment.

## Nine drug peddlers, bootleggers netted

RAWALPINDI (Agencies): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers and other lawbreakers here on Monday arrested nine accused besides recovering over two kg charras, 40 liters liquor, two liquor bottles and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Pirwadhai police held Sajid Sohail for having 1860 grams charras while Patriata police netted Khizer Mehmood for possessing 600 grams charras. Taxila police netted Rafique with 20 liters liquor and another accused namely Adeel for hav-

ing a liquor bottle. Civil Lines police arrested Tehrah and recovered five liters liquor, Abid, Faizan and Rizwan for having 10 liters and a liquor bottle. Sadiqabad police in their operation managed to net an accused namely Muhammad Abid and recovered five liters liquor. Separate cases have been registered against all accused while further investigations are underway. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi had directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against drug peddlers, bootleggers and other lawbreakers, he added.

## Sikh Yatrees bid farewell to Pakistan, express gratitude for warm hospitality

ISLAMABAD (APP): A group of Sikh Yatrees (pilgrims) bid farewell to Pakistan on Monday, departing via the Wagah border for India after attending the Baisakhi festival ceremonies. The Provincial Minister for Minorities, Ramesh Singh Arora, and officials from the Evacuee Trust Property Board were present to see them off. Before their departure, the Sikh Yatrees expressed their heartfelt appreciation for the love and warmth they received

during their visit to Pakistan, which they fondly referred to as their second home, PTV reported. They commended the government of Pakistan for making excellent arrangements to facilitate their visit, ensuring a comfortable and peaceful stay. The Sikh Yatrees' departure marked the end of a successful and spiritually enriching visit, strengthening the bonds of friendship and mutual respect between the two nations.

## Pak Army provides free eye care facility to over 1,400 patients in KP

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a humanitarian effort, the Pakistan Army organized a four-day free eye surgical camp in Mohmand district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, providing essential eye care to over 1,400 patients. The camp, held with the support of Al Shifa Eye Trust, offered free screenings, surgeries, and medication to residents of the far flung area, PTV reported on Monday. During the camp, 885 men, 544 women, and 245 children received free eye screening. A total of 754 patients were provided with free specta-

cles, and over 1,100 patients received free medication. The camp aimed to address the lack of access to quality eye care in the region, where patients often have to travel long distances for treatment. The local community expressed their gratitude to the Pakistan Army for organizing the camp, which brought much-needed medical attention to their doorstep. The initiative is part of the Pakistan Army's efforts to extend basic health facilities to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, promoting health and well-being in the region.

## Veteran journalist Syed Haider Taqi passes away

ISLAMABAD (APP): Syed Haider Taqi, a seasoned journalist and editor of Daily Jang's editorial page, passed away in Karachi on Monday after a prolonged illness. Taqi was born into a family of intellectual and literary giants. His father, Syed Muhammad Taqi, was a philosopher and for-

mer editor of Daily Jang. His uncles, Raees Amrohvi and Jaun Elia, were renowned poets and columnists, private news channel reported. Taqi's funeral prayers will be held at Defence Phase IV Imambargah Ysrah, followed by his burial at Defence Phase VIII graveyard in Karachi.

## Plastics pollution complex issue, needs stakeholder inclusive action to protect nature: Schofer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), U.S. Embassy Islamabad, Andrew Schofer on Monday said plastic pollution in the natural ecosystems of the Capital is a complex issue that demanded a stakeholder inclusive intervention to protect mother from the scourge of plastic pollution. Addressing the World Earth Day cleanup activity at the Kinara Park near Rawal Lake, organized by the U.S. Embassy, Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) and Friends of Margalla Hills National Park, the US envoy demanded enhanced mass mobilization and educa-

tion to take responsibility for protecting natural ecosystems dwindling due to increased anthropogenic activities. The Earth Day recalls mankind's efforts to recognize its responsibility towards environmental conservation and preservation. It started back in 1970 after whooping impacts of industrialization initiated to degrade land, air, water and soil on the planet to celebrate the mother earth's beauty and call for action to address threatening challenges to the environment. The theme for this year is Planet Vs Plastics as the menace of plastic pollution has casted mind-blowing impacts

on human health, ecology and marine life at large as 1-2 million tonnes of global plastic produced rests in the oceans leading to death of an estimated 100,000 or more marine mammals, turtles and one million seabirds every year. Schofer said, "Your environment is your home and it is necessary to give it back once enjoying all its resources. However, it's important to ensure and pass on awareness to masses on plastic pollution. The issue of plastics is very complex and needs government, civil society, volunteers, academia and activists response to resolve the crisis," he said.

## Farmer drowns while crossing Sindh river

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): A farmer was drowned into the river while crossing through swimming, rescuer said. The deceased was identified as Muhammad Sajjad, 35, s/o Faiz Muhammad, resident of Bait Meer Hazar tehsil Jatoi. The official spokesman quoting the eye witnesses, said the victim was crossing Sindh river in order to reach out the other bank for harvesting wheat crop grown on his agriculture land. While swimming, he couldn't control balance and so drowned. The search operation to recover the body was continued consecutively for the last three days. After moving through several kilometres into the river, it finally succeeded to fish out the body from the river water today. The corpse was handed over to the deceased family. Police of the concerned jurisdiction was informed, it was said.

## Examination centers visited at Ranwal, Tank city

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (Agencies): Additional Assistant Commissioner Tank Jamshed Alam on Monday made a surprise visit to several examination centers at Ranwal area and Tank city to ensure that Secondary school Certificate (SSC) annual examination was underway in fair and transparent manner. He inspected arrangements at the examination halls and issued strict instructions to the examination staff to prevent cheating and in this regard no negligence would be tolerated, he added. He said that surprise visits to examination halls would continue to ensure transparent conduct of the exams. It is pertinent to mention that SSC exams were currently underway under the auspices of the board of Intermediate and Secondary education (BISE), Dera amid effective arrangements to ensure transparency and fairness in conduct of exams.

## Three killed, 10 injured in Mansehra road accident

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least three people were killed while 10 others sustained injuries after a passenger van plunged into a ditch on Monday near the Patlang area of Mansehra district. As reported by a private news channel, the accident occurred due to a malfunction in the vehicle's brakes, causing the van to veer off the road and plunge into a ditch. Police and rescue teams promptly responded to the scene, and transported to a civil hospital in Balakot for medical treatment. Police sources confirmed that among the injured were women and children and condition of a few were reported critical and were subsequently transferred to King Abdullah Teaching Hospital Mansehra. The injured were promptly further investigation into the incident was underway, said the police.

## AIOU commences final exams tomorrow

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is conducting examination of Associate degree (BA, B.Com), BBA, B.Ed and BS programs from today (April 23) throughout the country which will continue till June 27. Date sheet is uploaded on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) and roll number slips are uploaded to students' CMS portals, said a press release on Monday.

## Engr Amir Maqam congratulates PML-N newly elected members on victory in by-election

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Engr Amir Muqam on Monday felicitated Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) newly elected members of National and Provincial Assemblies in the by elections. Engr Amir Muqam, who is also the president of Pakistan Muslim League-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said that the victory of the newly elected members of PML-N was reflection of trust of people, said a statement issued here. The minister

said that this victory was also an expression of the people's confidence in party leader Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz and the entire party leadership. He said that PML-N will work for the welfare of the people and provide maximum relief. The minister said that PML-N had proved in the past that our leadership has always played crucial role in the development of the country. He thanked the people for voting for PML-N candidates in the by elections.

## Finance Minister condemns firing on customs officials in DI Khan

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb has strongly condemned the incident of firing on Customs Officials in Dera Ismail Khan while performing anti-smuggling duties. According to press statement issued by the Finance Ministry, the minister expressed deep grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of two officials of Customs Department in the incident. He conveyed his heartfelt condolences and unwavering support

to families of the martyrs in these testing times. The minister also prayed for early recovery of the injured Customs officials in the incident. He said that sacrifices of these martyrs would not go in vain and expressed resolve that the smugglers will be dealt with iron hands. The minister said that Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and Pakistan Customs will continue their anti-smuggling operations for elimination of the menace of smuggling from the country.

## 173 graduates awarded degrees in IMCG G10/4 convocation

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Islamabad model college for girls Post-Graduate G10/4 during its 22nd convocation, has awarded degrees to as many as 173 graduates in departments of BS Maths BSCS, BS Zoology and ADP among 67 graduates who got Roll of honor. Moreover, six gold medals were also awarded to the top position holder students including Ayesha Taus BSCS, Sehrish BSCS, Noor Fatima BS Maths and Maham Ali in BS zoology. The BS teachers also received a certificate of appreciation for their best results including Anjam Ara, Sumaira Quaratul Ain, Saba Mudasir Sabeel-e-Haafi, Shazia Ashraf Sameen, Behjatul Mudasir, Safia Iftikhar Uzma Nazir and Asma Usmani. The convocation was

held at the college auditorium on Monday in which DG FDE Dr. Muhammad Tanvir participated as the chief guest accompanied by guests of honor Dr. Aamer Saeed Bhatti, Dean of Natural Sciences QAU and Dr. Muhammad Anees former Dean Social Sciences QAU, while Principal Prof Saadia Ibrar presided over the ceremony. Speaking on the occasion, chief guest Muahmad Tanvir said "the development of Pakistan lies in the pursuit of modern education. The students should step into practical life. Now work side by side with men and make your place in society. Half of the population of our country consists of women, in which the number of working women is negligible".

## IFL scheme continues to serve underprivileged families

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Interest-Free Loan (IFL) scheme being executed by the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) is contributing immensely to financially empowering impoverished families across the country by providing loans for small businesses, making them self-reliant. The Interest Free Loan Programme is a flagship initiative of the government designed and implemented by the PPAF and is strategically aimed at promoting financial inclusion as a means of reducing poverty by providing interest-free loans to impoverished households in more than 100 districts across Pakistan. These loans serve to empower poor households to initiate income-generating enterprises, thereby fostering economic self-sufficiency and improving their overall quality of life. IFL beneficiary, Ameeran Bibi who lives in Gharibabad, Piplan, Mianwali said, "My grandfather used to make pottery so was my father and now I make pottery at my home however we didn't have enough finances to sustain this business". "My husband is suffering from serious health issues and my son helps his father arrange pottery in the shop before going to school and take care of the business after school, allowing his father to rest", she said. "One day

I came to know about interest-free micro loans and after discussing with my husband, I applied and availed the facility. We started our business through purchasing all the raw material", Ameeran Bibi said while talking to this news agency. "Now I am able to run my household expenditure in a better way and also paid back the first loan and applied for the second loan of Rs.45,000. Through this, we improved our business further. I wish my children get educated and become skilled worker", she added. Another IFL recipient, Abdul Wadood, District Sherani, Balochistan, said, "I have benefited greatly from this programme. Initially I have received Rs. 20,000 and later Rs. 40,000. This has significantly boosted my business and I am deeply thankful to those running this scheme". "We pray for the success and continuation of this programme and may its organizers be rewarded abundantly. My shop has flourished greatly and I have benefited greatly from it and many difficulties have been reduced", he said. Another IFL recipient, Saira Bibi from Bahawalpur, who crafts exquisite jewelry pieces under her brand, S-Jewelry said, "I have received loan through the IFL Programme and started my own business and now earning up to Rs. 60,000 monthly".

## Oil Updates – prices fall more than 1% as Iran-Israel tensions ease

SINGAPORE (Agencies): Oil prices fell by more than 1 percent on Monday, as the market focus switched to fundamentals after Israel and Iran played down the risk of an escalation of hostilities following Israel's apparently small strike on Iran, according to Reuters. Brent futures fell \$1.21, or 1.4 percent, to \$86.08 a barrel by 9:55 a.m. Saudi time. The front-month US West Texas Intermediate crude contract for May, which expires on Monday, fell 97 cents, or 1.2 percent, to \$82.17 a barrel,



while the more active June contract dropped \$1.23 to \$80.99 a barrel. "Brent crude prices failed to retain their initial surge, with broad expectations that geopolitical tensions between Israel and Iran may fizzle off given Iran's tamed response," said

Yeap Jun Rong, market strategist at IG. "With that, markets continue to unwind the geopolitical risk premium tied to potential supply disruptions, which seems more unlikely at current point in time," he added. Both benchmarks spiked more than \$3 a barrel early on Friday, after explosions were heard in the Iranian city of Isfahan in what sources described as an Israeli attack. Gains were capped after Tehran played down the incident and said it did not plan to retaliate.

## PIF and stc Group strike deal to create region's premier telecom tower company

RIYADH (Agencies): A new telecommunications infrastructure firm is set to be created after Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund acquired a 51 percent stake in one of stc Group's companies. PIF will merge Telecommunication Towers Co., also known as TAWAL, with Golden Lattice Investment Company – in which the sovereign wealth fund holds a majority shareholding – into a new entity. With an estimated 30,000 mobile tower sites and projected annual revenues nearing \$1.3



billion, the new body is expected to emerge as a global telecommunication powerhouse. The combined new firm will be owned 54 percent by PIF and 43.1 percent by stc Group, with GLIC minority shareholders owning the remaining issued share capital.

Raid Ismail, head of MENA Direct Investments at PIF, hailed the accord as a monumental stride in Saudi Arabia's telecommunications narrative. He said: "By bringing together the assets of GLIC and Tawal, we will establish a consolidated platform on which the telecommunications sector can flourish and give people a better experience to best connect communities and businesses." Ismail emphasized the pivotal role of robust connectivity in propelling societal and economic growth.

## TikTok vows legal battle as US presses for app's sale or ban

WASHINGTON (Agencies): TikTok told employees it will fight in the courts if a US bill forcing a ban or divestiture of the Chinese-owned app is signed into law, as one of the world's most valuable technology businesses tries to fend off an existential crisis in its most important market. "This is an unprecedented deal worked out between the Republican Speaker and President Biden," Michael Beckerman, TikTok's head of public policy for the Americas, said in a memo to TikTok's US staff. "At the stage that the bill is signed, we will move to the courts



for a legal challenge." TikTok is at risk of losing its most lucrative market after years of struggling to assure the US government that its popular social media app isn't a threat to national security. The US House of Representatives on Saturday put legislation requiring Tik-

Tok's Chinese parent company, ByteDance Ltd, to divest its ownership stake in the app on a fast track to become law, tying it to a crucial aid package for Ukraine and Israel. The Senate is expected to vote on the bill in the coming days. President Joe Biden has said he will sign the legislation promptly. Beckerman said the divest-or-ban law is "a clear violation" of the First Amendment rights of TikTok's 170 million American users and would have "devastating consequences" for the 7 million small businesses on the short-video platform.

## EU aims to increase food exports to China despite trade tensions

SHANGHAI (Agencies): On a visit to China this week, EU Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski said his focus will be on increasing agri-food exports to the world's second largest economy and keeping food above the fray of rising tensions in China-EU trade. "In the food trade, there are no barriers for Chinese imports," Wojciechowski said in an interview in Shanghai on Monday. "My intention is to avoid as much as possible that agriculture pays the costs of the problems in other sec-



tors, which sometimes can happen," he added. The commissioner's visit, which runs until Friday, comes as China and Europe face a "slow motion train accident" as a rising tide of protectionism threatens to become a full trade war, Jens Eskelund, pres-

ident of the European Chamber in China, warned last week. Unlike sectors such as solar panels or new energy vehicles (NEVs) the European Union's agri-food sector runs an export surplus in its trade with China. Also unlike other sectors, the open trade of food remains a "very important instrument to ensure food security everywhere", which is why Western sanctions on Russia following its incursion into Ukraine were not levied on agri-food products, Wojciechowski said.

## China's rapid solar growth slows as grid struggles to keep pace

BEIJING (Agencies): China's blistering roll-out of solar capacity slowed as grids struggled to build enough power lines and backup capacity. The country installed 45.7 gigawatts of photovoltaic panels in the first three months, up more than a third from a year earlier, the National Energy Administration said in a statement on Monday. While impressive compared with other countries, the growth rate pales in comparison with the 154% surge in the same quarter of 2023. China, which still gets most of its electricity from coal, added a record 217



gigawatts of solar panels last year – more than the US has ever built. Installations are seen at as much as 220 gigawatts this year, according to forecasts from the solar industry association. That expansion will likely be driven by utility-scale projects, especially the massive renewables programme concentrated in the

country's interior deserts, according to BloombergNEF. The nation needs to ensure the new capacity has the requisite infrastructure to transmit clean power from less-populated inland areas to consumption centers. Rooftop solar, which tends to be in more urban areas and has in recent years accounted for about half of capacity growth, is also facing grid challenges. Local networks have struggled with the large amount of intermittent electricity, and have been forced to curtail their generation or allow prices to go negative during low-demand time periods.

## HK bankers face more job cuts on China slowdown, high pay

HONG KONG (Agencies): Hong Kong investment bankers could face more job cuts as the slowdown in China deals persists and employers look to trim highly compensated staff, according to Bloomberg Intelligence. An estimated 200 Hong Kong bankers lost their jobs in the past year, senior analyst Francis Chan wrote in a report published Monday. With pay for senior bank-



ers that's 40-70% higher than peers receive in Singapore, Hong Kong bankers may find their compensation becomes a "curse" as employers

cut back, Chan wrote. "More global banks may further trim workforces in the city to achieve bigger cost savings, especially during China's slowdown," Chan said. Global financial firms have been cutting investment-banking staff in Asia due to a deal drought amid deteriorating US-China relations, a crackdown on private enterprise and a property crisis.

## Gold backtracks as Middle East tensions ease following strikes

HONG KONG (Agencies): Gold edged lower as geopolitical tensions eased in the Middle East, paring haven demand, and traders looked ahead to US data that will shed light on the outlook for monetary policy. Bullion traded just below US\$2,377 an ounce after a five-week rally, the longest such streak in more than a year, during which prices hit a record. While Israel and Iran have traded strikes, raising concerns about an all-out-war in the region, Tehran has played down the impact and signifi-



cance of Israel's recent attack, and also dismissed the low success rate seen in its own assault. Beyond the Middle East, traders are focusing on US economic data. On Friday, the personal consumption expenditures price index is projected to show the

annual rate rose to 2.6% last month, from 2.5% in February. That would support the case for Federal Reserve policymakers to delay rate cuts, a scenario that would typically weigh on gold as it doesn't pay interest. Gold remains more than 15% higher so far this year, with gains supported by central-bank buying and demand from Asia, especially China. The commodity has risen despite advances in the US currency and 10-year Treasury yields, factors that would usually be a headwind.

## Musk draws Australia's wrath over Sydney attack images on X

CANBERRA (Agencies): Australia is gearing up for a showdown with Elon Musk and US social media giants over allegations they failed to move fast enough to police graphic content and misinformation during two violent attacks in Sydney over the past 10 days. Five government ministers over the past 24 hours have flagged a potential move to bring in tougher laws including a mandatory code of conduct for social media companies that operate in Australia. Musk is the owner of X, formerly Twitter, and has pushed back. Calls for a crackdown on social media companies have grown following two knife attacks in Sydney, including a terrorist attack in an Assyrian Orthodox church on April 15 and a mass stabbing in a mall, which left six people dead on April 13. As both incidents unfold-



ed, graphic content from the stabbings was posted extensively on social media platforms, while misinformation spread quickly about the identity, motives and ethnicities of the attackers. Australia has an eSafety commissioner with powers to order the removal of material from social networks, however in a public statement a spokesperson for X said that the commissioner "does not have the authority to dictate what content X's users can see globally." The company said it would "robustly challenge" the orders in court.

## Volkswagen to face investors skeptical of China turnaround plan

BEIJING (Agencies): Volkswagen AG faces an uphill battle to convince investors it can turn around its business in China. After being leapfrogged by China's BYD Co as the nation's top carmaker, Volkswagen said it'll take until 2026 to start winning back market share. That prognosis is casting a shadow over a string of key meetings this week, including investor presentations in Beijing. "We doubt that Volkswagen can convince the market that the negative trend can be halted or reversed," said UBS analyst Patrick Hummel. Volkswagen has failed to shake negative investor sentiment since model delays and software missteps prompted the company to replace then-CEO Herbert Diess with Porsche head Oliver Blume in



2022. Under Blume, the carmaker has put in place new partnerships in China, teaming up with local EV maker XPeng Inc for its EV models, and kicked off a deep overhaul to lift returns at its struggling VW brand. Investors will be looking to Blume for fresh optimism this week at Volkswagen's upcoming Capital Markets Day on April 24, dubbed China Day, followed by the auto show in Beijing. Up to now, they haven't been convinced.

## Conflicts push military spending to 'all-time high' of US\$2.4 trillion

STOCKHOLM (Agencies): Global military expenditure saw its steepest increase in over a decade in 2023, reaching an all-time high of US\$2.4 trillion as wars and rising tensions fuelled spending across the world, researchers said Monday. Military spending rose across the globe with particularly large increases in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, according to a new report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "Total military spending is at an all time high and for the first time since 2009, we saw spending increase across all five geographical regions," Nan Tian, a senior researcher at SIPRI, told AFP. Military spending rose by 6.8% in 2023, the "steepest year-on-year increase since 2009," according



to the report. "It's a reflection of the deterioration of peace and security around the world. There's really not a region in the world where things have gotten better," Tian said. The United States, China, Russia, India and Saudi Arabia were the top five spenders, respectively. The continuation of the war in Ukraine led to an increase in spending by Ukraine, Russia and "a whole host" of European countries, Tian said.

## Tesla slashes prices worldwide after US reductions

BEIJING (Agencies): Tesla has cut prices in a number of its major markets, including China and Germany, following price cuts in the US, as it grapples with falling sales and an intensifying price war for electric vehicles (EVs), especially against Chinese EVs. The price cuts come after Tesla, led by its billionaire CEO Elon Musk, reported this month that its global vehicle deliveries in the first quarter fell for the first time in nearly four years. "Tesla prices must change frequently in order to match production with demand," Musk posted on X on Sunday. Tesla, the EV market leader, ignited a price war over a year ago by aggressively cutting prices at the expense of profit margins. Tesla cut the start-



ing price of the revamped Model 3 in China by 14,000 yuan (US\$1,930) to 231,900 yuan (US\$32,000), its official website showed on Sunday. In Germany, the price of the Model 3 rear-wheel-drive was trimmed to €40,990 from €42,990, where the price had been since February. There were also price cuts in many other countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, a Tesla spokesman said.

## Blackstone makes US\$1.5bil takeover bid for troubled Hipgnosis

WASHINGTON (Agencies): US asset manager Blackstone has made a US\$1.5 billion takeover bid for UK music rights owner Hipgnosis Songs Fund, beating out rival Concord's offer. The bid, issued by Blackstone Europe LLP, proposes to acquire Hipgnosis' entire catalogue – which includes songs by Justin Bieber, Shakira, and Neil Young – at a price of US\$1.24 per share, according to the offer submitted on Saturday. Hipgnosis – co-founded in 2018 by legendary guitarist and producer Nile Rodgers and Merck Mercuriadis, the former manager of Beyonce and Elton John – manages the rights to more than



150 of the world's biggest song catalogues. But the London-listed fund, which has been plagued by concerns over asset valuations, recently slashed the value of its songs catalogue by more than a quarter to US\$1.93 billion. That came after HSF revealed in December that its first-half net losses tripled on tumbling sales.

## Ivan Rakitic: Luka Modric moving to Saudi Arabia would be 'amazing'

LONDON (Agencies): Ivan Rakitic hopes his strong brotherly bond with his former Croatia team-mate Luka Modric can persuade the timeless maestro to join him at Al-Shabab in the Saudi Pro League. Modric may be 38 but Rakitic said that his enduring class was something his fellow Real Madrid midfielder, the free-scoring tyro Jude Bellingham, could learn from. Modric's Real Madrid contract expires in the summer, and rumors of a move to Saudi Arabia have been swirling. Rakitic, eager to reunite with his former team-mate, would be delighted to help



facilitate it. "If you come to Saudi but don't come to Al-Shabab, you're going to have some problems with me," Rakitic told Arab News with a laugh when asked what he would tell Modric, whom he has said "is like a brother to me." Rakitic suffered an

injury inlets month's 4-3 home defeat to Al-Hilal and was absent from Al-Shabab's 5-0 win over Abha on Thursday, a result that sees them sit ninth in the Saudi Pro League table. The 36-year-old joined the Riyadh club from La Liga side Sevilla in January and told Arab News over Zoom that he would be thrilled to share a pitch again with Modric, with whom he played for Croatia for 12 years until his international retirement in 2019. The pair's midfield majesty helped to propel Croatia to the 2018 World Cup final, which they lost 4-2 to France.

## Mixed martial artist Paul Hughes joins Professional Fighters League

NEW YORK (Agencies): The Saudi Arabia-backed Professional Fighters League has signed Ireland's Paul Hughes (11-1) to an exclusive, multi-fight contract. "I am absolutely ecstatic to sign with the PFL. The regular season format, in my eyes, is the ultimate form of MMA competition and is for the ultimate prize of one million dollars," Hughes said, according to a press release issued Monday. "I'm ready to prove that I am the best



lightweight on the planet." The PFL's CEO Peter Murray said: "The Professional Fighters League is always go-

ing to be in the mix when it comes to the free-agency market and this was certainly the case with Paul Hughes, someone we have had our eye on for quite some time. I'm looking forward to seeing Paul continue his journey with PFL in big fights that continue to test his skills." Hughes, 27, a former Cage Warriors featherweight champion, is on a five-fight winning streak, with eight of his 11 victories coming via stoppage.

## Nelly Korda ties LPGA Tour record with 5th straight victory, wins Chevron Championship for 2nd major

THE WOODLANDS, Texas (Agencies): Nelly Korda couldn't have imagined the incredible run she's put together this season while at home recovering from a blood clot that required surgery in 2022. "Because obviously then I was just more scared for my health," she said. "Competing was kind of on the back seat. I was not thinking about competing at all. But I think all of the sad times and the health scares that I have gone through have made me who I am today." Fully healthy now, Korda is seemingly unstoppable. The world's No. 1 player hasn't lost a tournament since January, and now she's a two-



time major champion. Korda etched her name in the LPGA Tour record books Sunday, winning her record-tying fifth straight tournament with a two-stroke victory in the Chevron Championship. Korda joins Nancy Lopez (1978) and Annika Sorenstam (2004-05) as the only players to win

five consecutive LPGA events. Her previous major victory was in 2021 at the Women's PGA Championship. "It's been an amazing feeling these past couple weeks knowing that I can go on this stretch and that if I stay in my bubble and I keep golf in a sense simple and let it flow, then I can have so, so much fun out here," she said. Korda shot a 3-under 69 in the final to outlast Maja Stark of Sweden, who birdied her final two holes to shoot 69 and pull within one. Korda stayed aggressive on the par-5 18th, easily clearing the lake in front of the green and setting up an easy up-and-down birdie for a two-shot victory.

## Liverpool bounce back to keep title bid alive, Forest fume after Everton defeat

LONDON (Agencies): Liverpool got back on track after a miserable week as a 3-1 win at Fulham kept their Premier League title bid alive, while Nottingham Forest launched an astonishing rant at the officiating in their 2-0 defeat against Everton on Sunday. Jurgen Klopp's side crashed out of the Europa League quarterfinals against Atalanta on Thursday after suffering a damaging Premier League defeat at home to Crystal Palace last weekend. The Reds' hopes of giving Klopp a glorious farewell were dwindling but they climbed back into the title race with a much-needed first win in three league games. Liverpool are now in second



place, behind leaders Arsenal on goal difference and one point ahead of third placed Manchester City, who have a game in hand on their two title rivals. Next for Liverpool is the Merseyside derby at Everton on Wednesday, while Arsenal host Chelsea on Tuesday and City travel to Brighton on Thursday.

"Fulham usually cause us more problems so it was a good performance at the right moment," Klopp said. "We want to stay in that race, that's clear. Arsenal won yesterday, Manchester City will win their game in hand, so we have to win games and that's what we'll try." Klopp responded to signs of fatigue from his team in recent weeks by dropping Mohamed Salah to the bench among five changes. And Liverpool took the hint with a more cohesive display by the banks of the River Thames in west London. Trent Alexander-Arnold put Liverpool ahead in the 32nd minute with a superb free-kick that flashed into the top corner.

## Wolff, Horner clash anew over Verstappen's future

SHANGHAI (Agencies): Toto Wolff and his Red Bull counterpart Christian Horner have reignited their war of words over Max Verstappen after the Mercedes boss again hinted at poaching the three-time world champion. Verstappen's future at Red Bull was thrown into doubt last month after his father, Jos, said the team was in danger of being "torn apart" if Horner remained its principal. It came after allegations against Horner of inappropriate behaviour towards a woman colleague. He denied the claims and an internal investigation cleared him of wrongdoing. Verstappen has publicly committed his future to Red Bull,



but following the Dutchman's dominant victory at the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday, Mercedes boss Wolff stirred the pot anew. Wolff told reporters in Shanghai that "everyone is waiting to see what he (Verstappen) is going to do". "There are so many factors that play a role for a driver joining,"

said Wolff, who needs to replace seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who is leaving for Ferrari next year. "Clearly, from the most rational point of view, that's the quickest car in the hands of the quickest driver," said Wolff. "But I don't think this is the only reason you stay where you are." Earlier this season, Wolff said that he "would love" to sign the reigning world champion Verstappen if he became available. His latest comments triggered a prickly response from Horner, who said that Wolff should focus on trying to revitalise Mercedes following a poor start to the season by their high standards.

## Ruud overcomes Tsitsipas to win Barcelona Open

BARCELONA (Agencies): Casper Ruud gained sweet revenge over Stefanos Tsitsipas as he beat the Greek fifth seed 7-5, 6-3 to win the Barcelona Open on Sunday. Just seven days after Tsitsipas thumped Ruud in straight sets to win the Monte Carlo Masters, it was the Norwegian third seed who came out on top in the latest battle between the two 25-year-olds as he secured a 10th ATP title on clay. "Honestly, this has been worth the wait," Ruud said after capturing the biggest title his career, with all his previous triumphs being in ATP 250 tournaments. After seven failed attempts to win a final above the ATP 250 level, Ruud was relieved to finally get over that



hurdle. A lot of finals that I've lost have been tough, a bit disappointing, of course," he said. "Any time you reach a final, it's nonetheless a good week, so you can't be too hard on yourself but this one has been a long time coming." Ruud also halted Tsitsipas' 10-match winning streak. The Greek gained an early break but Ruud soon got into his groove

and from then on he frustrated Tsitsipas with his baseline tactics. Ruud maintained the upper hand throughout the second set, during which he did not face a break point. "In the final in Monte Carlo I was always on the back foot, too far behind, and he had too much time to control the game," said Ruud. "It was a bit of a tricky start (here), I got broken right away. So not the best start, but I managed to settle in and broke him back." The world No 6 will hope the win will boost his chances of finally winning the biggest prize in clay court tennis, following his runner-up finishes to Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic at the French Open over the past two years.

## Indonesia eliminate Jordan, join Qatar in last 8 of AFC U-23 Asian Cup

DOHA (Agencies): Indonesia on Sunday beat Jordan 4-1 at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha to reach the quarterfinals of the 2024 AFC U-23 Asian Cup. Indonesia has now secured second spot in Group A behind already-qualified hosts Qatar, who drew 0-0 against Australia on the same day at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in Al-Rayyan. The tournament, which runs until May 3, provides a pathway to the men's football competition at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. Indonesia led 2-0 at half time thanks to Marcelino Ferdinan's penalty on 23 minutes and Witan Sulaeman's strike five minutes before the break. Ferdinan made it 3-0 after 70 minutes before Jordan's



consolation nine minutes later came via an own goal from Justin Hubner. Komang Teguh ensured there would be no late drama by making it 4-1 with four minutes of the 90 left. In Monday's action, a draw against Iraq will be enough for Saudi Arabia to secure top spot in Group C, while Thailand and Tajikistan meet at Al-Janoub Stadium in Wakrah.

## 'I have nothing to hide,' says motorsport boss Mohammed Ben Sulayem

SHANGHAI (Agencies): Motorsport boss Mohammed Ben Sulayem says he has "nothing to hide" and "I play by the rules" after being cleared of accusations that he interfered with the organization of the inaugural Las Vegas Grand Prix. The president of governing body the FIA had been accused of asking officials "to find some concerns to prevent the FIA from certifying the (Las Vegas) circuit" before it hosted a grand prix for the first time in 2023, according to an internal FIA report. The UAE national, a former rally driver, was also cleared by the FIA ethics committee of influencing the results of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix last



year. "I wish it was only an accusation, but I was already convicted in the court of public opinion," Ben Sulayem told media including AFP at the Chinese Grand Prix at the weekend. "I have nothing to hide." "I'm proud of the work I've accomplished," added Ben Sulayem of his tenure since being elected FIA president in December 2021.

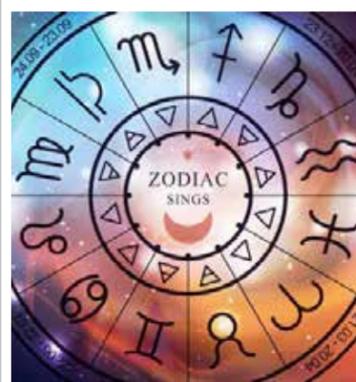
## Lillard leads short-handed Bucks over Pacers, Clippers and Celtics win playoff openers

WASHINGTON (Agencies): Damian Lillard scored all 35 of his points in the first half as the Milwaukee Bucks struck early in a 109-94 victory over Indiana in their NBA playoffs opener despite the absence of Giannis Antetokounmpo. The Bucks followed the blueprint laid out earlier Sunday by the Los Angeles Clippers and Boston Celtics, who both got off to strong starts in convincing Game 1 victories. Eastern Conference top seeds Boston raced to a 14-0 lead to set the tone for a 114-94 victory over the Miami Heat in the first game of their best-of-seven series. The Clippers, with Kawhi Leonard sidelined with knee inflammation, led wire-to-wire in a 109-07 victory over Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks, who put up just eight points in a shocking



second quarter performance. James Harden scored 28 points and handed out eight assists for the Clippers, drilling six of their 18 three-pointers. Paul George added 22 points and Ivica Zubac scored 20 points with 15 rebounds for Los Angeles, who seized control early as Dallas and NBA regular-season scoring leader Doncic struggled. The Mavs connected on just two of 21 attempts in the second quarter, putting up 30 in the first half to trail by 26 at the break.

## DAILY HOROSCOPE: APRIL 23, 2024



if they're hung up on petty concerns. You can't hide the rolling of your eyes this time!

- **VIRGO**: A little gamble isn't such a bad thing today as long as you're comfortable losing. There's no way to be sure what will happen, but the effects on your psyche of small risks could be beneficial.

- **LIBRA**: Check out some new people, places, or things today. Your urge to explore is stronger than ever! You may not hit on the great new thing everyone will be talking about next month, but you'll be happy.

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

- **ARIES**: See if you can get into something fun today. It shouldn't be that hard! You might stumble into new, cool opportunities without even trying, and as long as you stay active, it's all good!

- **TAURUS**: You're rightly skeptical of something or someone who's new to you today, but you might not be able to get your people to see that they're not as awesome as they appear to be at first glance.

- **GEMINI**: You need to buddy up with someone you trust today. The two of you can get almost anything done! Left to your own devices, you may waste time or get too distracted to focus on your work.

- **CANCER**: If it feels selfish, you're doing something right! Today's energy is completely focused inward, so it's a great time for reflection, long walks alone, or whatever it takes to reconnect with yourself.

- **LEO**: You may have a hard time tolerating certain people around the house or workplace today, especially

- **SCORPIO**: Don't think too much today. Trust your gut and see if you can follow it blindly wherever it takes you. Things are going well for you, but you sometimes need to make way for your intuition.

- **SAGITTARIUS**: Your amazing energy should help you spread good cheer wherever you go today. It's a really good time to meet new customers, friends, or potential romantic partners.

- **CAPRICORN**: Keep your eyes on the prize today. You need some structure and focus if you want to get anything important done! That isn't usually hard for you, but there may be a few distractions.

- **ACQUARIUS**: Your connections may not number in the millions, but those you do have tend to be pretty tight. Use them today to help you overcome obstacles and open new doors. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

- **PISCES**: Your opinion isn't taken as seriously as you think it should be today, but that just means you've got to roll with it and come back later when whoever it may be is ready to hear the truth.

## Apple deletes WhatsApp, Threads from China app store on orders from Beijing

Hong Kong (agencies): Apple has removed WhatsApp and Threads from its app store in China, following an order from the country's internet watchdog, which cited national security concerns. "We are obligated to follow the laws in the countries where we operate, even when we disagree," an Apple spokesperson told CNN on Friday. "The Cyberspace Administration of China ordered the removal of these apps from the China storefront based on their national security concerns. These apps remain available for download on all other storefronts where they appear." The apps, both owned by Meta,



were already blocked in China and not widely used. They could be accessed in the country only by using virtual private networks (VPNs) that can encrypt internet traffic and disguise the user's online identity. The removal of the apps by Apple represents a "further dis-

tancing between already separated tech universes" in the country and beyond, said Duncan Clark, the chairman of Beijing-based investment advisory BDA China. "It will cause inconvenience to consumers and businesses (in China) who deal with family, friends or customers overseas. Even if they use VPNs to access their existing WhatsApp apps, these over time will become obsolete and require updating," he said. Other popular Western social media apps, including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram and Messenger, are still available on Apple's China app store, according to a check by CNN.

## Google fires 28 employees for protesting Israel cloud deal



NEW YORK (Agencies): Google has fired 28 employees following a sit-down protest over the tech giant's contract to provide cloud computing and artificial intelligence services to the Israeli government. The terminations come after the group No Tech for Apartheid on Tuesday occupied Google offices in California and New York to protest the \$1.2bn contract known as Project Nimbus. Video of the demonstrations shared on social media showed police arresting employees in the office of Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian. In a statement on Thursday, Google said that physically impeding employees and preventing them from accessing company facilities was a "clear violation of our policies and completely unacceptable behaviour". "After refusing multiple requests to leave the premises, law enforcement was engaged to remove them to ensure office safety," a spokesperson said. "We have so far concluded individual investigations that resulted in the termination of employment for 28 employees, and will continue to investigate and take action as needed." Google also denied that the contract was related to weapons or intelligence services. In a blog post, Google CEO Sundar Pichai issued a veiled warning to protesting employees. "We have a culture of vibrant, open discussion that enables us to create amazing products and turn great ideas into action. That's important to preserve. But ultimately we are a workplace and our policies and expectations are clear.

## Austrian police arrest Germans visiting Hitler's birthplace



VIENNA (Agencies): Police in Upper Austria on Monday said they had arrested four Germans who were laying white roses in memory of Adolf Hitler at the house where the Nazi dictator was born. The group was visiting the border town of Braunau am Inn on the afternoon of April 20 — Hitler's birthday. Police arrested two sisters, 24 and 26 years old, as well as their 29- and 31-year-old partners. The group had been laying flowers on a window ledge at the house. One of the women was spotted by police giving a Hitler salute as the two couples posed for photos. The woman said the gesture had been intended as a joke and that she did not mean it seriously. However, police who inspected her phone found Nazi-themed chat messages and pictures being shared between the four. Police said they were reporting all four to prosecutors on suspicion of breaking an Austrian law that prohibits the symbols of Nazism. Police patrols are stepped up on April 20 each year, with special attention paid to the house in Braunau am Inn. Hitler lived at the house until he was three years old, when his family moved to the nearby Bavarian city of Passau.

## Voyager 1 is sending data back to Earth for the first time in 5 months

WASHINGTON (Agencies): For the first time in five months, NASA engineers have received decipherable data from Voyager 1 after crafting a creative solution to fix a communication problem aboard humanity's most distant spacecraft in the cosmos. Voyager 1 is currently about 15 billion miles (24 billion kilometers) away, and at 46 years old, the probe has shown multiple quirks and signs of aging in recent years. The latest issue experienced by Voyager 1 first cropped up in November 2023, when the flight data system's telemetry modulation unit began sending an indecipherable repeating pattern of code. Voyager 1's flight data system collects information from the spacecraft's science instruments and bundles it with engineering data that reflects its current health status. Mission control on Earth receives that data in bi-



nary code, or a series of ones and zeroes. But since November, Voyager 1's flight data system had been stuck in a loop. While the probe has continued to relay a steady radio signal to its mission control team on Earth over the past few months, the signal did not carry any usable data. The mission team received the first coherent data about the health and status of Voyager 1's engineering systems on April 20. While the team is still reviewing the information, everything they've seen so far suggests Voyager 1 is healthy and operating properly.

## East Africa Flood Crisis: Burundi Suffers Severe Impact

EAST AFRICA (Agencies): Burundi is grappling with a severe crisis as widespread flooding wreaks havoc across East Africa. The country has been particularly hard-hit, with hundreds of thousands of people displaced and significant damage to homes and schools. The relentless rainfall has led to a substantial rise in the water level of Lake Tanganyika, causing chaos for communities living along its shores. The rising waters have even invaded the port of Bujumbura, Burundi's economic capital, disrupting business operations. The flooding, linked to the El Niño weather phenomenon, has affected over 200,000 people since

September 2. The situation is further exacerbated by poor land-use planning that fails to consider areas at high risk of flooding. The Burundian government has called for international assistance to help deal with the aftermath of the torrential rainfall. "We are asking our development partners to combine efforts with the state of Burundi to help all people affected by these disasters," said Interior Minister Martin Niteretse. As the country braces for more rainfall predicted until May, the people of Burundi are living in difficult conditions with destroyed infrastructure, flooded fields, and impacted livelihoods.

## AI-generated child pornography threatens to overwhelm reporting system: Research



Child pornography generated by artificial intelligence (AI) could overwhelm an already inundated reporting system for online child sexual abuse material, a new report from the Stanford Internet Observatory found. The CyberTipline, which is run by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), processes and shares reports of child sexual abuse material with relevant law enforcement for further investigation. Open-source generative AI models that can be retrained to produce the material "threaten to

flood the CyberTipline and downstream law enforcement with millions of new images," according to the report. "One million unique images reported due to the AI generation of [child sexual abuse material] would be unmanageable with NCMEC's current technology and procedures," the report said. "With the capability for individuals to use AI models to create [child sexual abuse material], there is concern that reports of such content—potentially indistinguishable from real photos of children—may divert law enforcement's attention away from actual children in need of rescue," it added. Several constraints already exist on the reporting system. Only about 5 percent to 8 percent of reports to the CyberTipline result in arrests in the U.S., according to Monday's report.

## A ban on single-use plastics takes effect in Hong Kong in a bid to reduce pollution



HONG KONG (Agencies): Hong Kong has long been a major producer and consumer of great food, and a great amount of plastic and Styrofoam to go with it. That's going to change as new legislation aiming to stop the sale and distribution of Styrofoam products and single-use plastic cutlery went into effect on Monday. Under the new law, single-use cutlery such as forks, spoons, straws and plates cannot be sold or distributed for both dine-in and takeaway customers. Howev-

er, plastic food containers and cups can still be given out for takeaways. The regulation of disposable plastic tableware and other plastic products in Hong Kong aims to reduce their use at the source to cut down on pollution, Hong Kong's Environmental Protection Department said in an emailed response to The Associated Press. Restaurants were given a six-month grace period. A second phase of the ban, expected next year, will ban all single-use plastics including containers for both dine-in and takeaway. Many restaurants have already begun implementing the new measure. Kuen Fat Kitchen is a typical lunch stop for many people in Hong Kong. Even before the new law was introduced, it had already started to reduce the use of Styrofoam boxes.

## EU may suspend money-for-views TikTok feature

BRUSSELS (Agencies): The European Commission could suspend the TikTok Lite rewards programme, which pays users to spend time on the app, as soon as this Thursday. Commissioner Thierry Breton said the feature is "toxic and addictive", particularly when used by children. TikTok has until Wednesday to defend the rewards programme, or it could be suspended as early as Thursday 25 April. TikTok told the BBC it was disappointed with the decision. "We stand ready to trigger... interim measures including the suspension of the TikTok Lite reward programme," said European Commissioner Thierry Breton in a post on X, formerly Twitter. In addition, the Commission has opened formal



proceedings against the social media company to assess whether it has broken EU law. Under EU law which came into force last year, large platforms like TikTok have to produce a risk assessment before they make large changes to their products. The Commission asked for TikTok's risk assessment into the Task & Rewards programme last week, but says the social media company failed to submit it in time.

## Chinese Firms Obtain Nvidia's Top AI Chips Despite US Prohibition

BEIJING (Agencies): Despite the US broadening its ban last year to restrict China's access to advanced technology, Chinese organizations have managed to acquire Nvidia's most sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI) chips through resellers, according to a Reuters report released on Tuesday. The report revealed that ten Chinese entities, all with government connections, had procured advanced AI chips from NVIDIA Corporation. These chips were incorporated into server products manufactured by Super Micro Computer Inc, Dell Technologies Inc, and Taiwan's Gigabyte Technology. This information was gleaned from an examination of hundreds of procurement documents. These chips were obtained between

November 20 and February 28, following the US's expansion of its export restrictions against China to include Nvidia's AI chips. The updated restrictions also barred resellers and third parties from selling the chips to Chinese entities. The report did not clarify whether the resellers had acquired the chips before the enforcement of the US sanctions. It also remained uncertain whether this report might lead to increased government scrutiny of Nvidia and other tech suppliers to China. The US government had previously expressed concerns about China potentially utilizing AI for military purposes and had consequently halted the export of advanced chipmaking technology to the country.

## Asia's Climate Crisis: A Year of Weather Disasters



NEW YORK (agencies): Asia was the world's most disaster-hit region from climate and weather hazards in 2023, the United Nations reported. Floods and storms were the chief cause of casualties and economic losses. The UN's weather and climate agency noted that global temperatures hit record highs last year, with Asia warming at a particularly rapid pace. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) highlighted that the impact of heatwaves in Asia was becoming more severe, with melting glaciers threatening the region's future water security. The WMO reported that Asia was warming faster than the global average, with temperatures last year nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average. The State of the Climate in Asia 2023 report underscored the accelerating rate of key climate change indicators such as surface temperature, glacier retreat, and sea level rise. These changes are expected to have serious repercussions for societies, economies, and ecosystems in the region. The annual mean near-surface temperature over Asia in 2023 was the

second highest on record, at 0.91 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.87 C above the 1961-1990 average. Particularly high average temperatures were recorded from western Siberia to central Asia, and from eastern China to Japan. Japan experienced its hottest summer on record. In terms of precipitation, it was below normal in the Himalayas and in the Hindu Kush mountain range in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, southwest China suffered from a drought, with below-normal precipitation levels in nearly every month of the year. The High-Mountain Asia region, centered on the Tibetan Plateau, contains the largest volume of ice outside of the polar regions. Over the last several decades, most of these glaciers have been retreating, and at an accelerating rate. The WMO reported that 20 out of 22 monitored glaciers in the region showed continued mass loss last year. Last year, 79 disasters associated with water-related weather hazards were reported in Asia. Of those, more than 80 percent were floods and storms, with more than 2,000 deaths and nine million people directly affected. Floods were the leading cause of death in reported events in 2023 by a substantial margin. In conclusion, the ongoing climate crisis in Asia is a significant concern. The international community must support initiatives that promote peace and stability in the region, rather than exacerbating tensions through threats of sanctions.

## Japan loses two SH-60Ks in crash

TOKYO (Agencies): Two Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (Sikorsky) SH-60K helicopters of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) have crashed after they suffered a suspected mid-air collision during a night-time training exercise. Japan Minister of Defense Minoru Kihara said the incident occurred between 2238 and 2304 h local time on 20 April, while the helicopters were conducting an anti-submarine drill with other JMSDF units. According to Kihara, three helicopters were participating in the drill, 150 n miles east of Torishima Island, in the Izu Islands chain. "Two of the helicopters were flying in close proximity to each other and we have determined that there is a high possibility that there was a collision," Kihara said on 21 April.

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