



# Islamabad POST

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**Sehr & Iftar Timings**  
Ramadan Kareem

CITY	SEHR	IFTAR
ISLAMABAD	03:41 am	06:54 pm
FAISALABAD	03:48 am	06:50 pm
LAHORE	03:43 am	04:45 pm
KARACHI	04:30 am	07:04 pm
SARGODHA	03:48 am	06:53 pm

CITY	SEHR	IFTAR
ISLAMABAD	03:31 am	07:04 pm
FAISALABAD	03:38 am	07:00 pm
LAHORE	03:33 am	04:55 pm
KARACHI	04:20 am	07:14 pm
SARGODHA	03:38 am	07:03 pm

## GSP+ RESOLUTION

# PM Imran for contacts with the EU

PM says Finality of Prophethood laws to stay; The participants of high level meeting also said the GSP Plus trade agreement has nothing to do with blasphemy laws

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday stressed the government would not compromise on the laws pertaining to the finality of the Prophethood, sources said. It was called in response to a resolution passed by the European Parliament a few days ago, calling for a review of Pakistan's GSP Plus status. The participants, during the meeting, decided to address the reservations of the European Union. It was also unanimously decided that the protection of minorities in the country would be ensured. The participants, according to sources, said the GSP Plus trade agreement has nothing to do with blasphemy laws. Last week, the European Parliament had adopted a resolution calling for a review of the GSP Plus status granted to Pakistan, saying that it has been observed that laws (that it said were discriminatory) towards

minorities and fundamental rights, were on the rise. The resolution was presented by Renew Europe, a liberal, pro-European political group of the European Parliament. It was adopted with a majority of 681 votes against six. Responding to the European Parliament's resolution, the Foreign Office had expressed disappointment over the development. "The discourse in the European Parliament reflects a lack of understanding in the context of blasphemy laws and associated religious sensitivities in Pakistan - and the wider Muslim world. The unwarranted commentary about Pakistan's judicial system and domestic laws are regrettable," read a statement by the FO. "Pakistan is a parliamentary democracy with a vibrant civil society, free media and independent judiciary, which remains fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights for all its citizens without discrimination," the Foreign Office had added.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zaabi, calls on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu. - DNA

**Pak-UAE enjoy brotherly ties: CAS**

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zaabi, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force in his office. The visiting dignitary congratulated the Air Chief on assuming command of the PAF. He also assured of cooperation and support in all spheres of collaboration between the two countries and their Air Forces. The Air Chief said that Pakistan and UAE have deep-rooted religious, cultural and historical bonds which are manifested through strong cooperation between UAE Air Force and Pakistan Air Force. Various matters of mutual interests and bilateral cooperation were also discussed in the meeting.

# PM Imran, OIC envoys discuss Islamophobia

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan met the Islamabad-based Ambassadors of countries belonging to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Recalling the two letters addressed by him to the leaders of the Islamic world last year, the Prime Minister briefed the envoys on Pakistan's efforts at the international level to create awareness about Islamophobia and the need to collectively address the phenomenon. The Prime Minister stressed that Pakistan's initiatives were aimed at building mutual understanding and promoting inter-faith harmony.

**"PM briefed the envoys on Pakistan's efforts to create awareness about Islamophobia"**

Noting that Islamophobic acts fan inter-religious hatred and disharmony among civilizations, the Prime Minister called for addressing the underlying reasons for the rise in such incidents worldwide. Falsely equating Islam with radicalism and terrorism, he added, was leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of Muslims. The Prime Minister emphasized that the vilification of Islamic precepts and reli-

gious personalities, wrongly justified under the garb of expression or opinion, hurts the sentiments of 1.5 billion Muslims around the world. The Prime Minister urged the OIC to work together for making the international community understand the deep-rooted love and reverence of all Muslims for the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and the Holy Quran.

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## Briefs

**President stresses observing SOPs**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Monday urged the masses to follow the guidelines of National Command and Control Centre (NCCO) on COVID-19 in bazaars and outdoor gatherings, however said the same precautions were also required to be observed at mosques, Imambarahs and processions. "Bazaars are the most important [to follow SOPs], but directions are also for Masjid, Imambarahs, Taraveehs, Majalis and processions," the president said in a tweet.

**Ready to cooperate in electoral reforms**

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari Monday said that his party has always been an advocate of electoral reforms, adding that the PPP is ready for all such reforms. "In a bid to stop rigging in elections, it is necessary to introduce legislation," said Bilawal. Praising his party, he said that in every other by-polls, the vote bank of the PPP continues to increase. He further said that if PML-N has solid proof of rigging in NA-249 by-polls, then it should contact the Election Commission of Pakistan.

## CORRECTION

ISLAMABAD: Reference to our news regarding appointment of Afzal Latif as Secretary Establishment, it is clarified that Afzal Latif is BPS 22 officer of PAS. It was erroneously mentioned as BPS 21. Error is regretted.



RAWALPINDI: Ambassador of China in a meeting with Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. -DNA

# Pakistan eyes vaccinating 70mn people in 2021

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: SAPM on Health Dr Faisal Sultan Monday announced on Monday that the government has planned to vaccinate 70 million people by the end of 2021 and efforts are underway to acquire coronavirus vaccines so that it is able to do so. In a media briefing, Dr Faisal Sultan said due to the agreement on the transfer of technology, the National Institute of Health (NIH) will be able to produce three million doses per month which

Continued on Page 06

# COVID-19 claims 79 more lives

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: The national tally on Monday of total active COVID-19 cases recorded 87,953 with 4,213 more people tested positive for the deadly virus and 5,842 people recovered from the disease during the last 24 hours. Seventy-nine corona patients have died during past 24 hours, 73 of whom were under treatment in hospital and six out of the hospital in their respective quarantines or homes, according to the latest update issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCO). During the past 24 hours, most of the deaths have occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa followed by the Punjab. Out of the total 79 deaths occurred in the last 24 hours, 24 of them had died who were under treatment on ventilators.

# Eid holidays from 10-15 May

ISLAMABAD: The Interior Ministry said in a notification on Monday that 5-day Eid-ul-Fitr holidays will be observed throughout Pakistan from May 10 to 15. The decision came after National Command and Operations Centre (NCO) recommended 5-day Eid-ul-Fitr holidays in the country. "Announcement of Eid Holidays from 10-15 May 2021 - clearly stating the intention of reducing national mobility," read the statement from the NCO. As the coronavirus cases are increasing rapidly in Pakistan, NCO has also announced comprehensive guidelines by the name of "STAY HOME, STAY SAFE - Eid-ul-Fitr-2021 from 8-16 May 2021". - DNA

# Finance minister slams IMF's 'grave injustice'

ZUBAIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD: Newly-appointed Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin on Monday said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) committed grave "injustice" against Pakistan in terms of the Extended Fund Facility offered to the country. Tarin remarks came during a meeting of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs. The meeting was chaired by the committee chairman, Faiz Ullah Kamoka. "IMF did injustice to Pakistan, the demand to increase the electricity tariff is unjustified," said the minister, adding that due to the move,



the economy has stopped moving forward, while corruption is on the rise. The minister told the lawmakers that if the current government is not able to take the GDP growth to 5%, then the country will be at "God's mercy for the next four years". He assured the lawmakers that he is trying to explain the situation to the IMF.

Continued on Page 06

# Pakistan welcomes Tajik, Kyrgyz ceasefire

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has welcomed the recent ceasefire agreement between the governments of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. We remain confident that both the countries would be able to resolve the issue amicably through dialogue and peaceful means, says a press release received from the office of the spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs here today.

# Egyptian envoy meets Railways minister



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Railways Azam Swati has expressed the desire to further strengthen trade relations between Pakistan and Egypt. He was talking to Egyptian Ambassador to Pakistan who called on him in Islamabad on Monday. The Minister said Pakistan Railways is working to enhance its customer base by entering into long term agreements with the domestic and international suppliers. Azam Swati said the Egyptian investors should take advantage from investment friendly environment in Pakistan.

## Inside...

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# Govt unveils electoral reforms agenda: Fawad

Under the reforms package, section 103 is being amended to allow the use of E-voting machines

NEHAL MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: The government has prepared an electoral reforms agenda to ensure transparency and fairness in the election process. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhary Fawad Hussain and Adviser on Parliamentary Affairs Babar Awan shared details of the reforms agenda at a news conference in Islamabad on Monday. Babar Awan said the reforms agenda envisages a series of amendments to the constitution and the Election Act 2017. He said reforms agenda will be put forth before the stakeholders including the civil society, the media and bar councils and associations for their inputs. Under the reforms package, the Adviser on Parliamentary Affairs said section 103 is being amended to allow the use of electronic voting machines to check rigging in the elections. He said section 94 will be amended to give the right of franchise to the overseas Pakistanis. The Adviser on Parliamentary Affairs stressed that there should also be democracy within the political parties.

Therefore, it has been decided to bring an amendment in section 202 under which the political parties having representation of ten thousand members will be able to get themselves registered. A new section of 213A is also being introduced making it



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry along with Adviser on Parliamentary Affairs to Prime Minister, Dr Babar Awan addressing press conference at Pak China Center. - DNA

compulsory on the political parties to hold their annual conventions. An amendment in section 15 will provide an opportunity to the candidates to challenge the polling staff. Babar Awan said it is also being proposed that the electoral rolls be prepared on the basis of

registration data available with the NADRA. He said we also want the delimitation of constituencies on the basis of registered voters. The Adviser on parliamentary affairs said two constitutional amendments will be brought with the aim to ensure open ballot in the Senate and allow the overseas Pakistanis to contest the elections. Babar Awan said that our reforms agenda also envisages the proposal of further empowering the Election Commission of Pakistan. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhary Fawad Hussain said the government wants to get the reforms agenda passed from the parliament through consensus. He said if the opposition parties are not ready for the reforms, it will impede the process of political and democratic development. The Information Minister said it is the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan that the political parties sit together to carry out the electoral reforms. He said the reforms will enhance the confidence of the people, political parties and intelligentsia on the election process. He defended the use of electronic voting machines in the election saying it will ensure early results.

## Briefs

## CM appreciates firefighters

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar has appreciated the firefighters, who save the lives of people while endangering their own lives. In his message on firefighter's day, the chief minister said the firefighters' role was very crucial in minimizing the losses of life and property in the incidents of fire, adding that the Punjab government had paid attention to the training of firefighters on modern lines. The professional training minimizes the losses in untoward incidents and resources have been provided by the Punjab government to improve the training standards of firefighters, he added. Besides providing modern training to Rescue-1122, its scope has also been expanded to the level of tehsils, the CM added.

## 'Media's liberty linked with democracy'

LAHORE: The speakers at a national webinar on press freedom called upon the need to create unity among journalist organizations for their rights and said media freedom in Pakistan was associated with the independence of democracy.

The webinar was organized by Punjab University School of Communication Studies in which Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Dr. Saleem Mazhar, SCS Director Prof Dr. Noshina Saleem, senior most teachers of journalism, including Prof Dr. Mehdi Hasan, Prof Dr. Shafiq Jullandhry, Dr. Mujahid Ali Mansoori, eminent journalists Salmaan Ghani, Hamid Mir, Lahore Press Club President Arshad Ansari, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists President Rana Muhammad Azeem, PU TV Director and moderator Dr. Shabbir Sarwar, faculty members and a large number of students participated in the event.

Addressing the webinar, Dr. Mehdi Hasan said: "We cannot achieve press freedom unless we ensure 'right to know' and promote investigative journalism." He added that political parties and organizations of journalists should jointly work for the freedom of press in the country. — APP

## CCPO punishes cops, seals restaurants

DNA

LAHORE: Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Lahore Ghulam Mahmood Dogar, during his visit to markets to review implementation of coronavirus standard operating procedures (SOPs), ordered for sealing restaurants including the truck stand at Sabzi Mandi for violating the ban on indoor dining and other restrictions. The police arrested owners of restaurants and hotels including Saeed & Ilyas Dumba Karahi while eight FIRs were registered at police station Ravi Road.

The CCPO expressed displeasure over violations and said only take away and home delivery were allowed by hotels and restaurants but indoor dining was strictly prohibited, as per the government directions.

He ordered to suspend In-charge Chowki Sabzi Mandi Ghulam Bari. A letter of explanation was issued to DSP Shafique Abad Circle over poor supervision and two-year service of SHO Ravi Road was forfeited over failure in enforcement of corona SOPs. Dogar directed all divisional SPs to take indiscriminate legal action against all hotels and restaurants not following the corona SOPs. The CCPO also visited markets at MM Alam Road, Liberty Market and DHA to review the enforcement of corona SOPs. During his visit, he ordered for sealing restaurants and shops including Irfan Alfalah Store, Zakir Tikka, Dogar Restaurant, Mukhtar Hot and Spicy, Karachi Bar-B-Q, Iceland and other commercial establishments.

## 5 more vaccination centers being set up in Faisalabad

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: As many as five more corona vaccination centers is being established to facilitate the public for fast vaccination and tackle the rush in the city area.

This was informed to State Minister for Information & Broadcasting Mian Farukh Habib by Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ali during the inspection of Corona Vaccination Center at Sports Complex Samanabad.

Deputy Commissioner further informed that More than 48 thousand citizens have been vaccinated with Corona Virus in district so far including first and second dose. He informed that 17 centers are fully functional in double shifts and all arrangements were being monitored regularly. State Minister and Deputy Commissioner also examined the process of vaccinations to senior citizens and checked whether they are following Corona SOPs or not and also guided officers to increase convenience for aged men and women. They also communicated with senior citizens and



asked about vaccines from duty doctors until they were satisfied. State Minister directed to facilitate the people and functional fans should be present at centers. Deputy Commissioner instructed duty staff

of civil defence to make sure they guide senior citizens in a proper manner and from taking them when entering the main gate to leaving them to the vehicle after vaccination, they should assist them generously.

He also guided to make sure everyone follows Corona SOPs and maintain cleanliness in vaccination centers. Health officer told that process of senior citizen vaccinations is being implicated on daily bases in Sports

Complex Samanabad, Tehsil headquarters Hospital new building, Sports Complex Jhumra, Tehsil Headquarters Hospital New building Tandlianwala, Sports Complex Jaranwala and Rural Health centre new building

Khurianwala. He added Corona SOPs are being followed in these centres. Assistant Commissioners Umar Maqbool, Syed Ayub Bukhari, CDO Rana M. Abbas and other officers were also present.

## Ministers, MPs meet CM Buzdar, discuss issues of mutual interest

KHAYAM ABBASI

LAHORE: Two Punjab minister and various parliamentarians called on Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar at his office on Monday and discussed matters of mutual interest.

Those meeting the CM were: Punjab Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Ijaz Alam Augustine, Energy Minister Muhammad Akhtar Malik, Sardar Muhammad Khan Leghari, MNA, and MPAs Mahindar Pal Singh, Saleem Akhtar and Ghulam Ali Asghar.

The CM reiterated his resolve to continue consultations with the parliamentarians for timely solution to people-related problems and promised to give importance to their proposals, adding that feasible suggestions would be implemented.

A mechanism had been devised to monitor development projects at every level to get positive results, he added.

The CM said that timely completion of development schemes was important to facilitate citizens and the sustained monitoring would ensure efficiency and transparency. The menace of corruption, in development projects, was a thing of the past and no one would be allowed any wrongdoing now because development schemes were executed through hard-earned money of people, he continued. "I am personally monitoring different development projects by conducting regular field visits and a vigilant eye is kept on every development scheme," he said. Usman Buzdar said that no one would be allowed to misappropriate funds.

The chief minister announced provision of facilities to people at their doorsteps by upgrading healthcare and educational facilities. Regrettably, money was wasted on exhibitory projects in the past while neglecting the actual demands and priorities of people, he said.

The incumbent government has ended that wrong tradition and the negative tactics of influencing people through political jugglery were also done away with. Similarly, the era of the lip-service was over and the government practically performs. Those who keep pending official instructions have no right to stay on their posts, he said. No vindictive action has been initiated against anyone in the province nor would be done in future, he added.

The CM said that the minority empowerment package

of Punjab was a worth-following example for other provinces, adding that resources have been provided for repair and maintenance of temples, churches and gurdwaras of the minority communities. Similarly, necessary facilities were being ensured at the religious places of minority communities in the province, he added. Along with it, the PTI government was correcting the mistakes of the past as the country has deviated from its destination due to the wrong policies of the past rulers. There was no room for any wrongdoer in Punjab as a country lagged due to corruption, he added.

The PTI government has raised a strong voice against corruption and a new example has been set by introducing meaningful reforms in a short period of time, added the CM.

## Balochistan govt beefs up Covid-19 health facilities

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: The Balochistan government has scaled up all of its efforts aimed to beef up healthcare facilities to prepare for any untoward situation in the wake of rising third wave of COVID-19.

A state-of-the-art 30 beds Intensive Care Unit (ICU) with an automated ventilator and oxygen system has been set up at Civil Sandeman Hospital Quetta, an official told media. Moreover, 20 High Dependency Unit (HDU) beds were also added in Fatima Jinnah Chest Hospital Quetta with all required facilities, instruments and equipments, he added.

The government, he said has also expedited vaccination process and set up many vaccination centers in the province. Some 558 tests were conducted across the province during the last 24 hours and 92 people were tested Covid positive whereas the province has highest positivity rate of 15.5 percent. The positivity ratio was determined at every 100 samples indicating confirmed positive cases out of the total samples observed, he added. In the wake of rising third wave of COVID-19, the provincial government was taking extra measures to make sure implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that were the only remedy after vaccine to fight the disease, the official said. He added that the government has tightened the situation to ensure implementation of SOPs and for that purpose four Special Magistrates have been posted in Quetta.

## 12 outlaws held in Sargodha

MEHBOOB AHIR

SARGODHA: Police have arrested 12 alleged criminals and recovered narcotics and weapons from them. Police said on Monday that during the ongoing campaign against drug-pushers and criminals, teams of different police stations conducted raids and arrested 12 accused and recovered 1.5-kg hashish, 110 litres of liquor, five guns of 12-bore, two rifles of 444-bore, two pistols of 30-bore and a Kalashnikov from them. They were identified as Muhammad Zeeshan, Imran Khalid, Ghulam Murtaza, Naveed, Jamal Ali, Pervaiz and others. Police have registered separate cases.

## PCF bars cycling activities due to pandemic

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF) President Syed Azhar Ali Shah on Monday barred all cycling activities due to ongoing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

"The third wave of the coronavirus is very dangerous and to avoid this epidemic, the public and athletes should take special care of the use of masks and Standard Operating Procedures SOPs and must follow the government precautionary measures," he told APP.

He said the athletes should continue their practice individually with at their homes. "Athletes should pay attention to their physical fitness and diet during the coronavirus outbreak so that they stay physically and mentally fit," he said.

To a question, he said that several international events were to be held under the auspices of Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF) but due to the coronavirus in the country, all cycling competitions have been postponed as foreign athletes have to participate in these events.

"The cycling championship was also to be held in Lahore, but was postponed due to the coronavirus. A further decision to hold the cycling events will be taken after the situation of the coronavirus is under control in the country," he said.

He said that the federation would use all its resources for the promotion of cycling in the country. "Regular cycling competitions will also be organized in the educational institutions as to promote cycling at the grass-root level," he said.

He said no sport can develop in any country without the government's patronage and support from the sponsors. "The government and sponsors should focus on cycling like other sports so that cyclists can win more medals for the country at the international level.

## By-election arrangement reviewed by RPO

SARGODHA: Commissioner Sargodha Division Dr. Farah Masood and Regional Police Officer (RPO) Sargodha Ashfaq Khan visited Khushab district on Monday and reviewed security arrangements for the by-elections in PP-84 constituency.

Both the officers visited the Returning Officer's Sub Office Roda. DC Khushab Musarat Jabeen and DPO Khushab Muhammad Naveed were also present.

The RPO directed the district police officer (DPO) Khushab and deputy commissioner (DC) Khushab to ensure security and administrative matters in the by-elections in PP-84 constituency.

He said that it was a responsibility of the police to maintain law and order during the election process and foolproof security should be provided as per the standard operating procedures (SOPs), issued by the Election Commission.

The commissioner directed the DC Khushab to ensure implementation of the corona SOPs, issued by the government and ensure safe delivery of ballot boxes and other election materials at the polling booths. — APP



HYDERABAD: Members of Hyderabad Union of Journalists (HUIJ) burns candles in connection of world Journalism day outside Hyderabad press club. — DNA

## ICCBS reports 70 genomes of corona globally

To achieve the large scale testing objective, NIV placed several PCR machines and deputed highly trained virologists to Indus Hospital

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Around 70 full genomes of SARS-CoV-2 virus have been sequenced and globally reported from the genome center of the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) so far and 350 genetic mutations have been identified by the center.

The nationwide genome surveillance was conducted to keep a close watch on the emergence of deadly variants in Pakistan to monitor the mutational changes in the SARS Cov-II virus at the Jamil ur Rahman Center for Genomics of the ICCBS.

These views were expressed by the Director ICCBS Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Chaudhry, while mentioning the Center's services to the nation

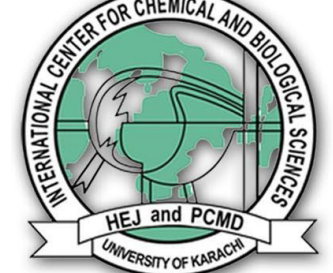
during COVID19 pandemic. Talking to media, he said that the National Institute of Virology (NIV) of ICCBS conducted over 140,000 PCR based tests helping in national fight against the health crises.

To achieve the large scale testing objective, NIV placed several PCR machines and deputed highly trained virologists to Indus Hospital.

He introduced that the Industrial Analytical Center (IAC) of the ICCBS, is the largest industrial support facility of Pakistan in the academic setup, initiated 24 hours testing services of items manufactured locally to fight pandemic. IAC is an ISO 9000 and 17025 accredited center, and its reports are internationally recognized.

IAC's services ensured that only those products are allowed to be

sold which are as per international standards, he said. Prof. Chaudhry said that the ICCBS's Center for Bio equivalent Studies and Clinical Research (CBSCR)



conducted clinical trials in per international standards on two traditional medicines, prescribed in China. This was the only center at that time to conduct clinical trials in

search of better treatment of COVID patients in Pakistan. CBSCR also conducted phase I clinical trials on SinoPharm vaccine and proved its safety in Pakistan. SinoPharm vaccine is the only vaccine which is currently being dispensed in government hospitals to people, he informed.

He said that ICCBS researchers have validated the efficacy of drugs such as remdesivir, and dimethyl lithospermate against molecular targets in SARS-CoV-2 virus. They also successfully cultured the virus in green monkey's cells and started testing various herbs for their antiviral effects.

Results of these studies were published internationally and patented in Pakistan and in USA, Prof. Chaudhry mentioned. The ICCBS is one of the finest academic research establishments

of chemical and biomedical sciences in the developing world. This center has won more international awards than any other institution in Pakistan. These international awards include Islamic Development Bank Prize for the Best Science Institution (twice 2004 and 2010), World Health Organization Collaborating Center. This is UNESCO Category II center. ICCBS is also recognized internationally by the IOC, and, TWAS as their Center of Excellence.

It has the most decorated faculty in the country that has won UNESCO Science Prize, Fellowship of the Royal Society, Khwarizmi International Prize, ECO, and COMSTECH awards and UNESCO Science Prize, while the national awards include Nishan-e-Imtiaz (01), Hilal-e-Imtiaz (05), Sitara-e-Imtiaz (13), Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (13), etc.

## Briefs

### IHC reserves decision on remand of lawyers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday reserved its judgment on an appeal of prosecution seeking more physical remand of lawyers in IHC building attack case. A division bench comprising Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Mohsin Akhter Kiyani heard the case challenging the decision of Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) rejecting the request for more physical remand. During hearing, State Counsel Danial Hassan adopted the stance that a witness had told that the two lawyers including Tasadaq Hanif and Hammad Dar had tried to snatch gun from a personnel. He prayed the court to grant physical remand for more investigation. The court observed that the prosecution had already obtained around one-month remand of the accused and noted that it was filing this application just now while the ATC had rejected the request on March 22.

### Motorway police recovers 2 stolen vehicles

ISLAMABAD: The Motorway Police Monday recovered two stolen vehicles and arrested a carlifter allegedly involved in two different incidents. According to the details, upon receiving reports that a Corolla car model 2015 bearing registration number LEA 3802 was stolen from Lahore, the Motorway police started vigilance. When the police tried to stop a suspected car at KalarKahar, its driver attempted to drive it away. The police intercepted the car after chasing it and arrested the accused Muhammad Isman of age 28 years, the resident of Talagang. In another incident, the Motorway police found and took into custody an unclaimed Land Cruiser bearing registration number UV 808 parked near Sangiani at M-1 which was reportedly, stolen from Islamabad and handed it over to Taxila police for further legal proceeding. - APP

### DPO awarded certificates, cash prizes to police

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: District Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani in a ceremony awarded commendation certificates and cash prizes to those police personnel and locals who collectively foiled a dacoity attempt in PindSultaniarea and arrested three dacoits. The dacoits were involved in theft, dacoities and other crimes in PindSultani and surrounding areas in the jurisdiction of Basal Police Station. Those rewarded include Sub Inspector Allah Yar, ASI EhsanUllah, ASI Zahid, Constablefatb, Constable Yasir, Constable Bilal, Head Constable Shaheen, Constable GulHaider and Constable Tariq, Nawazish Khan, Haji Nasir, Malik Naveed, Zareef Shah and Waqar.

### Screening workers can warn for future viruses

ISLAMABAD: Covid-19 infections in healthcare workers during the first wave of the pandemic provided an accurate sample of the general population, said researchers suggesting that data from healthcare workers could be used to estimate the severity of future viruses more quickly. Healthcare workers in Ireland made up 31.6 per cent of all test-confirmed infections while only representing three per cent of the population. However, researchers from RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences in collaboration with IBM Research, found that the healthcare worker data closely. - APP

## Businessmen cannot afford any further lockdown after May 16

ICCI President said that the business community of the entire country had been demanding the government to lift restrictions and extend business hours as they have already suffered huge losses due to the previous lockdowns

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) said that to avoid rush, the Saudi government has allowed business activities for 24 hours with strong enforcement of SOPs and same policy should be adopted in Pakistan to save businesses and the economy from further losses. He further called upon the government to avoid any more lockdown after May 16, 2021 as the business community would not

afford any further lockdown after the Eid holidays. He said that during a recent visit along with the Deputy Commissioner Islamabad to various markets of the federal capital, it was observed that the majority of the business community and the customers were following SOPs, due to which the trend of Covid-19 cases in Islamabad was on the decline. Therefore, this situation demanded that the government should have relaxed restrictions on businesses in the federal capital during the last week of Ramadan. Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said



that as the Covid-19 situation in Islamabad was much better as compared to many other cities, the businesses of Is-

lamabad should not be treated at par with other cities for imposition of restrictions and emphasized that the business community in the federal capital should be allowed to continue businesses till Sehri during the last week of Ramadan. ICCI President said that the business community of the entire country had been demanding the government to lift restrictions and extend business hours as they have already suffered huge losses due to the previous lockdowns. However, it was unfortunate that the NCOC was making de-

isions about restrictions on businesses without any consultations with chambers of commerce and trade associations in such decisions. He said that Pakistan is estimated to have already suffered an economic loss of Rs.2.5 trillion due to coronavirus and emphasized that the government should lift all restrictions on businesses after May 16 as keeping these restrictions for longer duration or imposing further lockdown after Eid would have devastating impact on the businesses and the overall economy.

### Salma Shaheen appointed Secretary (Legal HR)

ISLAMABAD: Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has appointed Salma Shaheen, an officer of Inland Revenue Services as Secretary Legal HR (BS-19 on acting charge basis), FBR headquarter, Islamabad. According to FBR notification issued here Monday, she has relinquished the charge of the post secretary (BS-18/OPS), Legal HR, FBR head quarter, Islamabad. She assumed the charge of the post. FBR also notify that HiraNazir, (IRS/BS-19 on acting charge basis) has appointed as Secretary, International taxes Operation (BS-19 on regular basis) FBR headquarter, Islamabad. - APP



ISLAMABAD: UK-Pakistan Business Council Delegation had a meeting with Hon'ble Mr. Shafiqat Mahmood Federal Minister for Education at his office. - DNA

## President for establishing telemedicine clinics

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi on Monday emphasized the need for establishing primary healthcare telemedicine clinics to provide free advice to the people and improve the quality of healthcare in the country. He said there was a need to invest in telemedicine through enhanced infrastructure, technology and human resource to provide equitable health facilities to

the population living in remote areas of Pakistan. The president was chairing a meeting on telehealth here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. The meeting was attended by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSRC) Dr. Faisal Sultan, Director General Health Dr. Rana Muhammad Saffdar and other senior government officials. The Ministry of NHSRC gave a presentation about the importance

of telehealth in Pakistan. The ministry informed that it provided free online consultation across Pakistan under the Sehat Express Portal, which provided medical advice to the people during the COVID-19 pandemic. President Alvi underscored the need to strengthen the capacity of health sector at the national level with the help of medical professionals in the fields of public health and artificial intelligence to analyze various data sets and predict out-

breaks of the epidemics. He stated that the government was committed to transform the healthcare delivery sector of the entire country and initiate measures to provide free-of-cost medical advice to the people under the telehealth programme. The president emphasized the need for amalgamating all platforms working for telehealth in the country so as to provide medical relief to the people in a more efficient and effective manner.

### NTC, 1Link sign agreement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) has signed an agreement with the 1Link, a consortium of major banks, to provide online payment facility to its subscribers especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. This online payment facility is available for more than 30 banks using online payment receipt setup throughout Pakistan, the National Telecommunication Corporation said in a news release. "In the available facility, multiple options such as Internet Banking, ATM, Mobile banking and Over-the-Counter are available," it added. The corporation said its subscribers could also pay their bills through Easy Paisa and Jazz Cash applications through 1Link. For guidance of the National Telecommunication Corporation subscribers, necessary steps for online payment have also been posted on National Telecommunication Corporation website www.ntc.net.pk.

## Air quality remains ideal, healthy

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The air quality in the federal capital was recorded healthy throughout the outgoing month of April as air pollutant ratio was recorded below safer limits. The air pollution was also less than April, 2020 during which lockdown was imposed across the Capital amid Covid-19 pandemic rise. A monthly data projection of air quality, for April, 2021, released by Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA), the particulate of 2.5 (PM2.5) microns which was a

hazardous ambient air pollutant causing chronic respiratory diseases and premature deaths was recorded lower than permissible limits. The PM2.5 was not only below National Environmental Quality Standards (NEQS) of 35 micrograms per cubic meter rather World Health Organization (WHO) standard of 20 micrograms per cubic meter. The air quality data revealed that average PM2.5 was recorded 16.32 micrograms per cubic meter whereas sulphur dioxide was recorded 21.21 micrograms per meter cube and nitrogen dioxide was 15.5 against the NEQS of 120 micrograms per meter

cube and 80 micrograms per meter cube respectively. However, the air quality data of April 2020 revealed that average PM2.5 was recorded 17.67 micrograms per cubic meter whereas sulphur dioxide was recorded 13.29 micrograms per meter cube and nitrogen dioxide was 10.13 against the NEQS of 120 micrograms per meter cube and 80 micrograms per meter cube respectively. An EPA official told media that there was drop in air pollutant ratio which was not only due to intermittent rain spells during April as this time offices, transport construction and Industrial sector were opened.

## Partnership signed to enhance Pakistan-China cultural ties

Video Content Competition on Pakistan China relationship will be launched to promote culture and trade between the two countries

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Diplomatic relation between Peoples Republic of China and Pakistan was established on 21 May 1951. Although people to people understanding between two countries is exemplary however cultural understanding between businesses and people can be improved. For the purpose China Pakistan Study Center (CPCSC) at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) and RINSTRATECH signed memorandum of understanding. The memorandum of understanding was signed by Dr. Talat Shabir Director China Pakistan Study Centre and Amir Jahangir Chief Executive Officer RINSTRATECH Technologies.

Speaking at the occasion Director General Institute of Strategic Studies Ambassador Azaz Ahmad Chaudhary said "The ISSI provides a platform for quality policy input through informed research, objective analysis and dialogue on regional and international issues affecting peace, security and development of Pakistan. We are confident that this partnership will create knowledge resources among the youth and the business community alike while providing strategic direction for policy makers". On the signing of the MOU Dr. Talat Shabir Director ISSI said "The memorandum of understanding underlines to build cultural, business and economic cooperation and understand-

ing. The partnership will also highlight China and Pakistan's cooperation and implication for the region and the world. This partnership will help building people to people relationships, Government relations in defense cooperation and societal collaboration for building knowledge ecosystems. Amir Jahangir Chief Executive Officer RINSTRATECH Technologies said "In this new era of information engagement it is important to build the vocabulary and understanding around the partnerships that both Pakistan and China are striving for. This cooperation between CPCSC and RINSTRATECH will set new benchmark for understanding around the future challenges for our

international partnerships. This partnership is being signed to build better understanding among the masses and the business community in both China and Pakistan. The partnership will also facilitate content development in Mandarin, Urdu and English. More than 60,000 Chinese expats live in Pakistan and more than 20,000 Pakistani students are studying in Chinese universities. Pakistan exports to China stood at US\$1.87 Billion during 2020. Multibillion dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor has strengthened China Pakistan partnership yet there is much more work required in People to People Relationship Building in Knowledge Development.

## NAB apprehends impersonator, seeks Interpol help

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has apprehended Aamir Hussain, a member of impersonating gang and started investigations against him besides writing a letter to Interior ministry to cancel passport of Dubai based ringleader Khalid Solangi and sought Interpol help for nabbing him. A NAB spokesman said in a statement that both impersonators son and father, were involved in looting people including government officers by impersonating themselves as NAB chairman and Director General of NAB Karachi. According to spokesman during investigations the accused Aamir Hussain has revealed startling disclosures and bureau has decided to proceed further into the investigations in light of these revelations. NAB Karachi has also prepared a list of the victims of impersonator Aamir Hussain which includes people as well as government officers. The statements of the affectees will also be recorded. Khalid Solangi, the father of Aamir Hussain used to blackmail various persons and government officers from Dubai by posing himself as Chairman NAB and DG, NAB Karachi. While his son Aamir Hussain collected money from the victims. It merits mentioning here that the NAB Karachi on November 27, 2020 had informed people and government servants through chief secretary Sindh about the illegal activities of Dubai based criminal gang. Through a media campaign, the people as well as government officers were advised not to bribe these gangsters as NAB, a law abiding institute, has nothing to do with such gangs. On the directives of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Justice (Retd) Javed Iqbal, NAB intelligence wing in last three years has arrested 10 impersonating gangs who were involved in looting people by using the name of NAB or posing themselves as NAB officers. Legal proceedings were also continuing against these fraudsters. NAB once again informed people that the NAB officers were not authorized to summon any accused by telephone. Instead the accused required in personal appearance in connecting with a case were being summoned in writing.

## Bar presidents to record statement in IHC attack case

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday instructed the police to record the statements of presidents of bar associations in bail petitions of three accused lawyers in IHC building vandalizing case. A division bench comprising Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Mohsin Akhter Kiyani heard the post arrest bail cases of three lawyers including secretary Islamabad High Court Bar Association Tasadaq Hanif, member Islamabad Bar Council (IBC) Naseer Kiyani and Hammad Dar Advocate. The court directed to re-

cord the statements of presidents of IHCBA, IBC and District Bar Association (DBA) in the bail cases besides reserving the verdict. The court observed that the office bearer of bars were present on the occasion and trying to stop the protesters. The court directed the police to record their statements. SSP Operations Islamabad Attaur Rehman produced the report of JIT and said that several others lawyers' names had come on surface during the investigation process. Justice Mohsin Akhter Kiyani asked the police officer to clear the lawyers who had no connection with the incident.

### BECOME A RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN

It is our legal and social responsibility to inquire/acquire necessary information about the person, group or organization that we are considering for our donations.

We can give our money to the deserving in cash or send it through online transfer or deposit in a bank account. In addition, we can also donate sacrificial hides or do voluntary service to help the deserving. However, it is our responsibility to ensure that our money should only reach those who deserve it. Always remember that no person or organization can force you to donate money. A case of terrorism can be lodged against anyone who forcibly tries to extort money from you.

Government of Pakistan's organization NACTA has compiled a list of such persons and organizations that are banned to receive any kind of donations.

If you know about any dubious person or organization then you can report to 1717.

## Briefs

**2,168 e-challan issued by safe city**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: As many as 2,168 e-challan were issued to the motorists over various traffic violations in Islamabad through safe city cameras during the last one month. The e-tickets were delivered to the violators at their home address, available with excise and taxation office, said IGP Islamabad Qazi Jameel-ur-Rehman on Monday.

Talking to media, he said a copy of challan was being attached with master file of the vehicle at excise office over non-payment of penalty amount within the given time. The car owners who were subjected to submit fine could not sell or transfer their vehicle until clearance of dues, he said.

The fine amount could be paid through JS Bank, Jazz cash, mobile accounts and other digital means. He claimed that there was a significant decline observed in the number of road mishaps and traffic violations in the federal capital after introducing this new challan system.

The move was aimed at getting residents of the capital to abide by traffic laws even in the absence of wardens with the use of modern technology, he maintained.

**PNCA announces results of talent hunt contest**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Monday announced the results of week-21 of PNCA talent hunt music edition.

The first jury award won by Inzamam Ali, second jury award by Tayyaba Kazmi and third award won by Ismail Tahim.

Director General PNCA Dr. Fouzia Saeed has announced the results in online video on PNCA official page. She said PNCA would also provide opportunities to the winners and special nominees in its upcoming concerts and music functions.

PNCA has started this programme for the promotion of classical and semi-classical to folk, modern tunes and pop singing among the younger generation and to groom their hidden talent at the National Art Gallery. Renowned professionals' artists in different specialized music fields were taking auditions of registered participants at PNCA. — APP

**Attock crossed tally of 2 thousand Covid cases**

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: Attock district witnessed another spike in novel coronavirus Covid-19 cases as the district crossed the tally of two thousand patients on Monday while one more lose battle to Covid-19 during the last 24 hours. Health officials said on Monday.

District focal person for Covid-19 Kashif Hussain has informed that 18 more persons were tested positive in the district raising the number of Covid-19 positive patients to 2006.

He informed that 37 years old Aqeel Shah- a resident of Mirza village succumbed to the virus and was buried under Covid-19 burial SoPs. While giving details about the newly affected persons, he said that as many as 13 patients belong to Attock city while five to Hazro. He informed that the number of active patients in the district is 181 and in which 178 were home isolated while three others were hospitalized. About the active patients, he said that as many as 108 belong to Attock city, 34 to Hazro, 15 to Jand, 13 to Pindigheab, 8 to Hassanabdal while 4 to Fatehjang. He informed that 11 suspected patients are also admitted in district headquarters hospital and all were in critical condition.

He informed that the number of suspected patients in the district rose to 32,804 while screening of as many as 36,056 persons was carried out across the district in which 30,748 were tested negative.

# MoIT, Huawei to provide ICT trainings to govt. officials

Huawei Pakistan CEO Mr. Mark Meng added that Huawei will collaborate with the public and private sectors in Pakistan to create an ICT ecosystem that drives digital transformation forward

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi has called for promoting Knowledge-Economy and digitalization of Government organizations to enhance the efficiency of work and service delivery. He said that Pakistan was blessed with immense talent and resources and the government was making serious efforts to channelize this potential in the right direction. The President stated this while talking to a delegation of Huawei, led by

the Vice President of Huawei Middle East Region, Mr. Space Lee, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today.

The meeting was attended by Secretary M/o Science and Technology, Dr. Arshad Mahmood, Secretary M/o Federal Education and Professional Training, Mrs. Farah Hamid, Additional Secretary M/o IT&T, Mr. Ali Sher Mehsud, Huawei Pakistan CEO Mr. Mark Meng, other senior officials of the Government while the Chairman PM's Task Force on Science and Tech-

nology Dr. Atta-ur-Rehman attended the meeting via video link.

Mr. Space Lee gave a presentation about the role of his organization in the promotion of IT Skills in Pakistan.

He informed that Huawei had contributed to Pakistan's economy by providing 10,000 jobs and paying \$120 Million in taxes to the Government from 2018 to 2020, besides spending \$6 Million to support disaster-relief efforts of the government. He highlighted that his organization had

contributed to Pakistan's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) talent by providing 10,000 certifications till 2020. Mr. Space Lee informed that the M/o IT&T in collaboration with Huawei would train over 1,000 Government employees to achieve Digital Pakistan initiative. He apprised the meeting that government officials would be registered and enrolled for training programs which would be conducted through Huawei Experts. Huawei Pakistan CEO Mr. Mark Meng added that Hua-

wei will collaborate with the public and private sectors in Pakistan to create an ICT ecosystem that drives digital transformation forward. Huawei will continue to support the government's Digital Pakistan vision with the latest technologies, unlocking new avenues of growth and innovation. President Arif Alvi appreciated the initiative of Huawei to provide training and ICT skills to the people of Pakistan. He asked the M/o IT&T to develop an action plan and set timelines for launching training pro-

grams for the government employees to train them in fields like Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Technology, Big Data, Block chain, Neural Networks and Communication Technologies. He urged the M/o IT&T to come up with more innovative ideas and enhance collaboration with Huawei for early realization of Digital Pakistan Initiative. After the meeting, Mr. Space Lee presented one award to the President for his efforts made towards the development of the ICT Sector in Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Mr. Shaukat Tarin, Chairing the meeting of the National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) at the Finance Division to review the price trend of essential items. — DNA

**CDA starts fixing faulty machinery**

ISLAMABAD: According to the directives of the Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), the MPO Department using its resources, overhauled 2 bulldozer machines D65EX16 and made them usable. And has saved the company Rs. 148 million from this. After that, more machineries will be repaired which will become an asset of CDA.

According to the details, following the instructions of the Chairman CDA, the MPO Department of CDA has overhauled two bulldozers D65EX16 machines which were badly damaged by CDA and made them usable again. — DNA

**AIOU to dispatch matric books before Eid ul Fitr**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is making all-out efforts to complete the process of dispatching books before Eid ul Fitr to the students enrolled in matriculation program offered in spring 2021 semester.

The university has, already, dispatched almost 50, 000 books parcels and is striving hard to dispatch the rest before the commencement of Eid ul Fitr holidays by employing workers in double shifts to achieve this end.

According to the Director, Admissions, the process of

mailing of books for intermediate programs will be initiated this week as the academic calendar for both these programs spans from May 1, 2021 to August 31, 2021.

In accordance with the directives of Prof Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum, university administration is making efforts to dispatch books to all students before the commencement of academic activities as scheduled in academic calendar. However, university has also uploaded PDF books of these programs on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) to facilitate the students to prepare their assignments in time and plan their academic activities accordingly.

## Islamabad schools to reduce April, May fees by 20%

It was stated that the orders will be imposed on schools charging fees of more than Rs 8,000

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The district administration of Islamabad has decided to reduce fees for the months of April and May at private schools across the capital by 20%.

In a notification issued on Monday, it was stated that the orders will be imposed on schools charging fees of more than Rs 8,000.

The decision was taken to provide relief to parents as the third wave of the novel coronavirus continues to grapple the country. Schools in the capital have been closed since mid-March. Education institutions across the country were closed in April after coronavirus metrics rose. Cambridge, Intermediate and Matriculation exams have been cancelled as well. All educational institutions

across the country were closed in late February 2020 after coronavirus cases began to rise. They were reopened in phases starting September 15, 2020.

On November 23, 2020, after the second wave of coronavirus cases hit the country, the government announced that all educational institutions would close again from November 26, 2020.

Classes were taken online till December 24, 2020, and winter vacations started from December 25, 2020, and were supposed to last till January 10. The government said it would hold a meeting to review the decision to reopen schools on January 4. The NCOC then decided that schools would reopen in phases with classes' nine to 12 being the first to reopen on January 18.

## Man held for involvement in sexual assault cases

He also admitted to abuse a policewomen in 2018 while three other females also identified him

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Police on Monday have arrested a person allegedly involved in more than 20 cases of sexual abuse and snatching valuables from female victims.

Addressing a press conference, Superintendent of Police (Rural) Rana Abdul Wahab said that a female lodged a complaint at Koral police station on April 8, 2021 that she was on way to her home from Fazaia stop when an unidentified

person put his hand on her mouth and forcibly took her in nearby forest area and took her mobile.

Following this application, the SP (Rural) said that a team was constituted under his supervision including SDPO Koral Rukhsar Mehdi, SHO Koral Shaukat Abbassi, SHO Nilore Sattar Baig and others.

This team investigated the case by using technical means and succeeded to arrest the culprit identified as Zaheer Ahmed resident of Bagh, Azad Kashmir. During the preliminary in-

vestigation, he confessed to be involved in 20 cases of sexually abusing females after finding them alone.

He also admitted to abuse a policewomen in 2018 while three other females also identified him. Police have also recovered mobile phones from him and obtained five-day physical remand from the concerned court for further investigation.

Talking to media-men, SP (Rural) Rana Abdul Wahab said that 43 criminal gangs have been busted during the last three months while

valuables including cash worth more than Rs. 28 million was recovered from the gangsters.

He said several other criminal gangs have been traced and efforts are underway to ensure arrest of its absconding members. Moreover, he said that investigation on 63 property related cases had been completed and their challans were submitted in relevant courts. SP (Rural) said that every possible effort would be made to ensure protection to the lives and property of the citizens.

**'Subsidized Ramzan bazar providing relief to masses'**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, Farrukh Habib on Monday said that Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI), government is giving subsidy to "Ramzan bazars" for providing relief to the masses. Subsidy amounting Rs. 5 billion given to Ramzan Bazars to support the general public so they can purchase essential commodities at affordable rates, he said while talking to a private television channel.

Commenting on high petroleum prices in the region, he said the government has reduced the levies on petroleum prices to extend relief to consumers of the petroleum products. Replying to a question about sugar mafia, he said the incumbent government has played unprecedented role for controlling sugar mafia. Farrukh Habib said that all out efforts are being made to regulate the sugar mills operating in the country. He further stated that it was also the responsibility of the provincial governments to monitor markets and price control lists.

## Sania meets 'Ehsaas Rehriibaans' to gain insights

She obtained their viewpoints on the multi stakeholder initiative and explored possibilities to improve the street vending ecosystem

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection Dr. Sania Nishtar Monday visited the 'Ehsaas Rehriibaan' site in G-11 Markaz of the federal capital to interact with street vendors who have been provided with improved carts and training to streamline local vending activities.

The collaborative street vending initiative aims to create an enabling environment for street vendors in Islamabad.

During the visit, Dr. Sania walked around the vending carts and met with local street vendors. She obtained their viewpoints on the multi stakeholder initiative and explored possibilities to improve the street vending ecosystem.

Under the umbrella of Ehsaas, model vending carts with ecofriendly structures have recently been handed over to a select number of existing vendors in G-11. Speaking to media during her visit, Dr. Sania stated, "In line with the



PM's vision to create an enabling environment for street vendors, 'Ehsaas Rehriibaan' has embarked upon furthering local vending to improve overall ecology. The model vending initiative is an outcome of collaboration between

Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division (PASSD), Capital Development Authority (CDA), Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), ICT Administration and Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)."

'Ehsaas Rehriibaan' is a first pilot project of its kind in the country wherein street vendors are being actively engaged with multiple government stakeholders to contribute effectively to local economy. Street vendors were happy to see Dr. Sa-

nia around them and lauded Ehsaas saying that this was the first time that the government has provided vending license and improved carts to them. Now, they can earn their respectable living and do not have to run away when municipal authorities visit the area.

'Ehsaas Rehriibaan' initiative is an outcome of months of work, consultations, and engagement among various government stakeholders to crystallize the contours of the interventions, meant to improve street vending ecosystem in Islamabad. Currently, Ehsaas has provided prototype vending carts to 25 street vendors in the first phase.

According to findings of a street vendor survey, there are overall 85-street vendors operating in G-11, Markaz. The placement of remaining 60-street vendors in G-11 with improved carts will be up scaled later this year.

Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Amer Ali Ahmed elaborated on the directives from Prime Minister Imran Khan for addressing the plight of street vendors through a sustainable solution.

**Youm-e-Ali (AS) observed with religious fervor**

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: The Youm-e-Ali (AS) was observed on Monday with religious fervour and reverence in the city to pay tribute to the Fourth Caliph of Islam on the day of his martyrdom.

In this regards the Imam Bargah Punjatan Attock City held Majlis-e-Aza under the supervision of Secretary General Asad Abbas of Anjuman Bazm-e-Imam Mehdi (a.s.) and Caretaker president Syed Ather Zaidi of Anjuman Janisaran-e-Hussein (a.s.).

They also met the Assistant Commissioner Zaib-un-Nisa, ASP Jawad Ishaque and SHO City Mazhar ul Islam who requested to make sure all the SOPs will be followed as per government directive.

Assistant Commissioner Attock asked not to take procession outside of Imam Bargah due to COVID spread on which the Imam bargah administration assured to follow all the protocols. Majlis-e-Aza was held inside the Imam Bargah Punjatan in which local religious speaker Hafiz Zafar addressed the majlis to speak about Hazrat Ali (a.s.) and mentioned that his lifestyle is fatal for oppression and brutality and all difficulties could be overcome by making his saying a beacon of light rather all type of fear, harassment and terrorism could also be rooted out by doing so.

**5 members of criminal gang busted**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad police has busted five members of criminal gangs and recovered snatched and stolen motorbikes, mobiles phones, cash, weapon and other looted items.

According to a news release on Monday, the capital police has renewed efforts against anti-social elements following directions of Inspector General of Police Islamabad Qazi Jameel-ur-Rehman. As per details SP (Saddar-Zone) Capt. (ret'd) Hamza Hamayun constituted teams of Margalla and Golra police stations that arrested three members of bike lifters' gang identified as Shakar Ali, Usman Khan and Aryan Khan.

The authorities recovered five stolen motorbikes from their possession. Similarly, SP (Industrial-Area) Fida Hussain Satti constituted a team under the supervision of ASP Abdul Haleem including SHO Industrial -Area Iqbal Gujjar and other officials.

The team arrested two members of a gang involved in snatching mobile phones and other valuables at gun point from the citizens.

The gangsters were identified as Maaz Abbasi and Moez Abbasi and recovered two snatched motorbike, cash, mobile phone and weapons used in crime. During the preliminary investigation, they confessed their involvement in several incidents of crime in various areas of twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Cases have been registered against the accused and further investigation is underway, it added.

**IESCO issues power suspension programme**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Monday issued a power suspension programme for Tuesday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 07:00 AM to 10:00 AM, Mandra-2, Hamid Jhangi, Old Jhangi, LTC, Ward No. 8, Scheme-1 Feeders From 06:00 AM to 10:00 AM, Angoori, Treat, Gulf City, Nogzi, Fazia 1&2 , Top City, I-14/3, Sarai Alamgir, Al-Rizwan Mill, Al-Qadir Mill, Chakral, Sarcal, Sarpak Feeders, From 08:00 AM to 02:00 PM Dhudial Rural feeder and surrounding areas.

## Electoral reforms

**T**HE past few elections in the last years have generated controversy and allegations of foul play. Violence has often broken out at the site of the polling, and everything, from kidnapping poll workers to fake votes and gerrymandering has been accused by parties whom the election results did not favour. How true these accusations of rigging are is a different matter but the fact that a peaceful election—the process of which appeases everybody and leaves no room for doubt in its credibility—is a rarity in Pakistan indicates the need for serious electoral reform.

This is why the government's initiative to bring about electoral reforms is one that should have all parties on board. The Prime Minister has brought the topic up again after the NA-249 election, which despite having a low voter turnout, prompted allegations of irregularity from all parties, except the victor PPP. He referenced the US elections with their digital voter technology and invited the opposition to cooperate with the government on deciding from EVM models to improve the credibility of future elections.

Some political parties like PML-N have responded by asking the government to look into their party's conduct during the Daska by-elections, where PTI workers were accused of misconduct. Yet this is not a productive response. Every party, from PML-N, to PPP, to PTI has been accused of foul play, and every party, from independent candidates, to the mainstream political parties, to even the previously banned group, TLP, have accused the provincial government of the region of interference in an election. This is a rare issue where all parties have a shared grievance—and is a good opportunity for bipartisanship. The premier has proposed electronic voting machines and other solutions allowing for more tech-based scrutiny of the after-blot process. If the opposition has a difference of opinion on methodology to make elections more transparent, then it ought to participate enthusiastically in any talks held on the issue of reforms. Otherwise, this debacle of no party ever accepting the results of an election will continue to be a problem.

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## Minimum wage

**A**CCORDING to recent announcements, the minimum wage for workers in Punjab has been increased to Rs20,000 from the pre-existing Rs18,000. According to the Chief Minister of Punjab Usman Buzdar, providing relief to the workforce should be made a priority, especially considering the tough economic circumstances that our country is in. However, the question of whether this two-thousand-rupee increase is enough and if the quality of the life of the workers will improve through this marginal increase still remains. Outside of the increase in salary rates, the government is working towards the provision of free or subsidised medical services, education and property for the workers and their families. Keeping in mind that all this work is done for the purpose of ensuring that sustaining a decent quality of life is within the financial grasps of the people, a mere ten percent increase is unlikely to offer immediate relief.

The pandemic has already caused production to decline due to various lockdowns and for exports to remain limited due to travel restrictions. Even more troublesome is the rate at which inflation continues to increase. Judging by the fact that this minimum wage pays for entire households, one can deduce that it is simply not enough for daily expenses let alone securing long-term financial stability. Despite increases in monthly pays, if the purchasing power of the workers remains unchanged or is reduced, then the entire concept of minimum wage is contradicted.

The government's aim is to provide protection to the workers against the effects of a struggling economy. If policies do not facilitate this aim, then they have to be changed. Accordingly, it is vital that this increase in minimum wage is reconsidered and a more generous value is offered to the workforce.

## Pakistan and ASEAN

Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan



**Pak attempt to diversify its industrial base could find openings in ASEAN markets, and it could also benefit from the experience of some ASEAN countries, like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, which have been quite successful in achieving economic progress through industrialization**

**M**OST recent "paradigm shift" in national/foreign policy of Pakistan from geopolitics to "geo-economy" has now opened new window of opportunities to establish bilateral or trilateral ties in diverse sectors of economy, trade & commerce, joint venture, science & technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalization, ICT, infrastructural development, banking & finance, FDIs, education and culture with regional countries mainly, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with which it has normal, friendly and progressive relations, unmarred by any conflict or disputes. They cooperate with one another on full range of international issue.

ASEAN was established in 1967. It is an economic alliance of 10 member states in Southeast Asia. The member states are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. According to official statistics (2020), population of the ASEANs was about 655 million people in 2019 which represented 8.5 percent of the world population.

It has holistic approach for "conflict resolution" which is based on consultation, consensus, and non-interference. It is a major partner of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and maintains a global network of alliances, and is considered by many as a global powerhouse. Now ASEAN is a leading force of regional trade and security issues, involved in numerous international affairs, and hosts diplomatic missions throughout the world.

ASEAN awarded Pakistan the status of Sectoral Dialogue

Partner (SDP) in 1997. The ASEAN-Pakistan SDP covers the sectors of trade, industry, investment, environment, science and technology, drugs and narcotics, tourism and human resource development.

There are several other areas for cooperation between Pakistan and ASEAN countries such as, culture, education, transport, energy, communications, intelligence and information sharing, information technology and agricultural research. Pakistan has proposed collaboration in three additional categories: information technology, agricultural research and transport and communication.

Pakistan desires to achieve two major objectives in its negotiation with the ASEAN and its member states. Pakistan should be accepted as a full dialogue partner and, also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Expansion of trade and investment between Pakistan and ASEAN countries is eminently feasible and will be mutually rewarding. There is considerable degree of complementarity between the two sides.

Pakistan's attempt to diversify its industrial base could find openings in ASEAN markets, and it could also benefit from the experience of some ASEAN countries, like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, which have been quite successful in achieving economic progress through industrialization. Some ASEAN countries like Indonesia have valuable experience in tourism, Islamic banking, and insurance, food-processing and fruit-canning which could be of benefit to fruit producers of Pakistan. ASEAN countries may be keen to relocate some of their labour intensive industries to Pakistan. Tourism is another large untapped area of development. Pakistan has a lot more to offer than many Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia and Singapore which have yet been able to develop a thriving and profitable tourist trade. The present low level of trade between Pakistan and ASEAN can be expanded if the private sector has access to information about the opportunities in trade and investment and is assisted in making contacts with potential partners. Pakistan is soon completing a deep water port at Gwadar, which can become a gateway to the land-locked Central Asian states. Pakistan can become a connecting link between South, West and Central Asian states. It may be further used for their exports to ASEAN in the days to come.

Indonesia and Malaysia are the two strongest economies of the ASEAN. Pakistan has close relationship with both the countries. Indonesia is the strongest country in ASEAN with reference to GDP and GNP propositions. It is the most populous Muslim country with much commonality to Pakistan in terms of culture, and values. Both countries are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), SCO and ECO which may be used for the further strengthening of bilateral relations.

Historically, Pakistan played important role during the Indonesian Revolution. The founder of Pakistan urged Muslim soldiers serving in British army to join hands with Indonesians in their fight against the Dutch Imperial colonization. As a result, 600 Muslim soldiers left the colonial forces putting their lot at stake, and allied with Indonesians. Out of these 600 soldiers, 500 died in war. Thus historic "holy connection" is there to strengthen diplomatic ties for the befitting propositions of both the countries.

Critical analysis revealed that Pakistan's relationship with Indonesia was greatly developed during the time of Mr Sukarno, first president of Indonesia and Gen. Ayub Khan. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, Indonesia offered to provide Pakistan with military help, and seized 'Andaman and Nicobar Islands' of India so as to distract it from the Kashmir front.

For the further strengthening of bilateral military cooperation, Pakistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) on defense cooperation with Indonesia. It offers Indonesia to take part in joint-manufacturing between Pakistan and China of the JF-17 fighter jet. The exchange of military personnel for training between Indonesia and Pakistan also increased.

During 2018, the two sides agreed to strengthen, expand and diversify military cooperation. Moreover the two countries have a standing preferential trade agreement, the Indonesia: Pakistan Preferential Trade Agreement. Indonesia being the strongest and largest economy in the ASEAN has great influence in ASEAN and also looks after evolving from regional power to becoming a major player in global affairs. Pakistan needs to support Indonesia in achieving its long-aimed goals through establishing connections and in return expect to earn dividends.

On the 53rd ASEAN Day Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi affirmed further strengthening ties with ASEAN nations in line with Pakistan's Vision "East Asia Policy". Undoubtedly, the incumbent government has initiated concrete steps to speed-up bilateral economic cooperation with South Korea, Singapore, Japan, and Malaysia and expressed interest in upgrading Pakistan's sectoral partnership with ASEAN to full partnership. It hopes that further expansion of economic and strategic ties with ASEAN may help Pakistan to seek more and more FDIs, boost employment opportunities, improve the balance of trade by amplifying exports, and boost Pakistan's economic clout and regional connectivity. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has opened up avenues of regional integration and economic growth for Pakistan. CPEC may help boost Pakistan's exports to ASEAN and invite investments if it is branded properly by providing numerous befitting propositions to all the members of the ASEAN.

Malaysia is one of Pakistan's top trading partners and the volume of trade between the two countries has been around USD \$2 billion. Pakistan's export potential under Pakistan and Malaysia's 2008 FTA alone is more than double this at USD \$4.6 billion. There is an urgent need to rectify the trade balance favoring the ASEAN partners by increasing the export flow to countries that ease the import barriers like Indonesia, which removed 30 percent of its import duties on 20 of Pakistan's exports last year.

Pakistan may also exploit the comparative advantage its exports, commonly cotton and textiles, enjoyed in markets in Brunei, Cambodia, Thailand, and Australia. There is also demand for Pakistani arms exports in ASEAN, evidenced by Malaysia's interest in buying JF-17 Thunder fighter jets and anti-tank missiles from Pakistan.

Pakistan is an important exporter of seafood and raw materials to Thailand, the two countries have been negotiating a FTA. Further, Thai companies are seeking investment avenues in the country as they recognize it as a significant trading partner. Likewise, appreciating the potential of Pakistan's automotive market, the Malaysian automotive company Proton will open its first South-Asian production facility in Karachi by 2021.

There are certain impediments to have stronger economic ties with the ASEAN. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept, shared by the United States and other regional allies has conflicting chemistry with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region, Japan strategic ties with India through the Quad and moreover India's persuasion to "urge" South Korea not to invest into CPEC last year all present element of strategic power politics.

Moreover, Beijing's principal stance towards the South China Sea (SCS), littoral states in the region have faced growing territorial disputes with China and maritime tensions and India's "Act East" policy, considers Southeast Asian nations as important trading partners, and further does not

look at Islamabad's full membership in ASEAN favorably are the stumbling blocks in further strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and ASEAN.

Pakistan should now consider to expanding economic engagement with ASEAN. ASEAN trade volume with China stands at USD \$644 billion despite tensions in the SCS. Similarly, while Australia signed a defense deals with India, its trade surplus with China increased by 174 percent in March 2020. Just as such countries have found ways to engage with China despite direct conflicts, Pakistan must likewise create its own way into the Southeast Asian/ASEAN markets in which "innovative diplomacy" may help the country to boost its role as a player in regional issues, for instance, Pakistan could help Japan address its Hormuz Dilemma concerns over the secure passing of energy supplies through the strait and assist Tokyo's mediation efforts in the Middle East, leveraging it to advance ties with Japan. Likewise, enhancing engagement with Southeast Asia will expand Islamabad's economic footprint and political clout in the region, ultimately adding to its regional connectivity pursuits.

It is suggested that trade volumes between Pakistan and ASEAN may be increased through trade via the Chinese ports which provides shortest trade route resulting in less transit time and lower costs. China has granted Nepal access to some of its ports; a similar agreement could be drafted with Pakistan.

Pakistan's Gwadar Port has enhanced China's access to its west, Northwestern Chinese Ports, for example Qingdao port, can supplement Pakistan's access to Northeast Asia. For instance, while it can take over twenty days at sea for Pakistani exports to reach Port Busan in South Korea from Karachi, it could take thirteen days if trade is done via land. The Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Pakistan under flag-ship of CPEC is important for inviting foreign investments. Pakistan has offered SEZ's tax exemptions and other special incentives to Singapore. The Singaporean companies have shown interest in investing in CPEC projects. Pakistan has proposed to establish an exclusive economic.

People-to-people contacts such as academic exchanges and cultural programs should be promoted between Pakistan and ASEAN countries. People-to-people interaction, frequent dialogue and discussions are required so that each is able to understand each other better. Currently, the climate is conducive for foreign investment and joint ventures in Pakistan. There is a need to great trade exchange and promotion of investments between Pakistan and ASEAN.

Being prominent regional expert I submit concrete efforts should be initiated to establish a joint Pak-ASEAN Business Forum for the further strengthening of relationships in diverse sectors of economy, greater socio-economic integration, food & energy cooperation, tourism, education, culture cooperation, military cooperation and last but not least make bridges of better social, political and economic understanding between Pakistan and ASEAN through "holistic" approach of "participatory development". Pakistan has rich experience of anti-terrorism tactics/strategies which should be shared with ASEAN for achieving greater regional stability and peace in the days to come.

Moreover, majority of ASEAN member countries are Muslims which may be a bench mark for greater socio-political integration. Moreover, artificial intelligence, cyber security, digitalization, agriculture development and last but not least, tourism would be preferential areas for future cooperation between Pakistan and ASEAN. Security matters may be further streamlined and strengthened by granting Pakistan membership in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

— *The writer is the Director, Geopolitics/Economics, Member Board of Experts, CGSS, Islamabad*

## Pakistan Rupee out through crisis: Rise after the fall?

Aqsa Shahid



**Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have increased due to the inflow of foreign loans and surplus current account during the fiscal year 2020-2021**

**T**HE Pakistani Rupee is in the news once again and this time for good reasons. The PKR is on its way up, surprising the people with its long awaited appreciation. After being in a slump, with a previous all-time low of 168.4 PKR against the USDollar in August 2020, the Pakistani Rupee is on its way on an upsurge. An increased current account deficit of 4% of GDP, a fall in foreign exchange reserves from \$17.4 billion to \$12.1 billion and the pressure of debt payments among others were some factors that contributed to the depreciation of Pakistan Rupee in 2018. The fall of the PKR in 2018 was one of the biggest concern that raised serious questions on the performance of the new government. The value of PKR against the USD in December 2017 was Rs.105 which kept rising and was at Rs.135 by October 2018. During 2019, the PKR further depreciated to 141.39 PKR against the US dollar and by January 2020 PKR stood at Rs.154.4 against the USD.

During the early days of COVID, further depreciation of the PKR was an expected thing as most emerging economies were bound to be financially and economically affected by the crisis. Before the crisis occurred, PKR was being traded at Rs.154.55 against the dollar in the month of February before depreciating to a new low of Rs.166.5 in March 2020. This was a result of withdrawal of investments in local bond from the local market, this cost Pakistan over \$3 billion. As a result, the dollar was being traded at the record highest price of Rs168.4 in August in the inter-bank market and around Rs170 in the open market.

In October 2020, things took a turn for the PKR when PKR started to appreciate against the dollar. The PKR appreciated to Rs.160.35 and stayed at the same level with slight fluctuations for the next three months. The value of Pakistan Rupee as on April 22, 2021 is Rs.153.4 and is expected to appreciate further looking at the economic indicators facilitating the economy. The conditions that led to the appreciation of the PKR are the result of improvement in some economic factors. There was a decline in the current account deficit to \$50 million in February 2021 which was \$197 million in the corresponding month a year earlier. According to the data provided by the State Bank the current account deficit decreased to 0.2% of the GDP which was 0.9% a year ago. As stated by the SBP, Pakistan Current Account was in a surplus of \$881 million during the first eight month of the fiscal year 2020/2021 which was in a deficit of \$2.7 a year earlier. The surplus in the current account was attained with the help of strong growth in workers Remittances and a Sustained recovery in the exports since November 2020. The Remittances increased by 24.1 percent to 18.7 billion in the first eight month of the fiscal year. According to the SBP, the sturdy growth in Remittances ahead of Ramadan was the main driver that filled the current account gap. Furthermore, as stated by the ministry of Commerce, Pakistan exports saw an increase of 7% in the first nine months of the Fiscal year 2020-2021 to \$18.669 billion which was at \$17.451 billion in the previous year. The increase in the foreign exchange reserves was

also a positive indicator for the exchange rate of PKR. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have increased due to the inflow of foreign loans and surplus current account during the fiscal year 2020-2021. The foreign reserves have increased by \$378 million during the end of March 2021 after the release of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) by the international Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF released \$498.7 million under the EFF program to the State Bank of Pakistan. As a result of the IMF inflows, Pakistan Foreign Reserves reached 39-month high level of \$13.67 billion at the end of March 2021. Additionally, the introduction of Roshan Digital Accounts (RDAs) has increased the demand for PKR as people are sending money to Pakistan in these accounts. There is a huge amount of inflow in the Roshan Digital Account, the deposits in the RDA have crossed \$1 billion in only seven months. This inflow of dollar is also a positive indicator for the economy. All these factors together have contributed to the appreciation of the PKR. The amount of inflow through these factors resulted in an increase supply of dollars to the country, resulting in an upward pressure on PKR, encouraging its appreciation. Since Pakistan runs under a market-based exchange rate system which depends on the demand and supply condition in the foreign exchange market, the inflow of dollar is a stabilizing factor for the PKR. Hence, the stability of the PKR depends on the contribution of these economic factors which is crucial for maintaining the exchange rate.

— *The writer is studying MBA (D) Strategic Finance from SZABIST, Islamabad*

## Briefs

Saudi forces  
destroy  
Houthi drones,  
missile

DNA

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's defense forces intercepted a ballistic missile and two Houthi explosive drones targeting the southern city of Najran, the Arab coalition said on Sunday. The coalition affirmed that operational measures have been taken to protect civilians, Middle-East daily Asharq Al-Awsat reported.

The Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimen condemned the failed Houthi attempts to target Saudi Arabia. He affirmed the OIC's support to the Kingdom in all the measures it takes to protect its security and stability and the safety of citizens and residents, state news agency SPA reported. Earlier, the coalition confirmed two Houthi explosive drones had targeted the southern areas of the Kingdom, including one that was launched toward Khamis Mushait, Al-Arabiya TV reported. "The Houthi militia is committing serious violations of international humanitarian law," the Arab Coalition said. The Saudi defense ministry had also said, earlier on Saturday, it intercepted and destroyed an unspecified 'hostile air target' aimed at Jeddah.

Finance  
minister  
slams IMF's..

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"The increase in tariff is leading to a rise in inflation. We have told the IMF that we will reduce the circular debt but increasing the tariff is unexplainable," said the minister.

He also told the lawmakers that even though the revenue has risen in the last two months, the government still has to make tough decisions to revive the economy. "Instead of introducing taxes, there is a need to increase the tax next. Our country lacks short-term, medium-term and long-term policies," deplored Tarin. He cited the example of China, Turkey, and India where there are consistent economic policies in place. The minister said he is of the view that there is a need to improve policies in agriculture, industries, the housing sector, and price control. Tarin told the lawmakers that mortgage in the country is at 0.25%, adding that if the housing sector is revived, then 20 other industries will start working. "The government should privatise all institutions that it is unable to run," Tarin said, adding that there very little amount is spent on education and health.

SL beats  
Bangladesh  
in 2nd Test

PALLEKELE: Sri Lanka spinner Praveen Jayawickrama enjoyed a dream debut as he claimed 11 wickets to seal a 209-run victory over Bangladesh in the second Test at Pallekele on Monday. Chasing a daunting 437 to win, Bangladesh were dismissed for 227 in the first session of the final day after resuming at 177-5 as Sri Lanka wrapped up the match, and the series 1-0, after 90 minutes of play. The 22-year-old left-arm bowler Jayawickrama was named player of the match after claiming 11-178 on his first Test appearance as he added five second-innings wickets to his six in the first.

Jayawickrama said it was a dream come true just to get a place in the Test team.

"It was a childhood dream to play for Sri Lanka one day," Jayawickrama said. "To get 11 wickets in the game is simply unbelievable."

He thanked senior players for their encouragement.

"They just told me not bother when the batsmen go after the bowling, just to be patient and do the basics right," he said. "I am glad that it all worked today." Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, who was named player of the two-match series for scoring 428 runs in three innings, said Jayawickrama and off-spinner Ramesh Mendis worked well as a team. "Ramesh also gave him (Jayawickrama) a lot of help from the other end, in terms of building pressure," Karunaratne said. - APP

## Blinken presents new North Korea approach in G7 moot

"Our policy will not focus on achieving a grand bargain, nor will it rely on strategic patience," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Friday, while acknowledging that successive administrations have failed to achieve the goal of ending N. Korea's nuclear programme

DNA

LONDON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday opened the Group of Seven's first in-person talks in two years by presenting the new administration's fresh approach on North Korea, which has already denounced it.

With Covid raging in India but increasingly coming under control in the West, Britain welcomed foreign ministers of the club of wealthy democracies to London discuss a post-pandemic agenda and prepare for a G7 summit in southwest England next month. India, South Korea, South Africa and ASEAN bloc chair Brunei were invited as guests to the three days of talks, which will also address rising tensions with Russia and China as well as diplomacy to

revive a nuclear accord with Iran. Amid stringent anti-Covid measures including restrictions on movements, Blinken met separately at his hotel with the foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea days after President Joe Biden completed a review on North Korea policy. "We are grateful to have this opportunity to have in-depth discussions with the US after the conclusion of your policy review," South Korean Chung Eui-yong said, as he welcomed the "very positive and open message" by Biden in his address to Congress last week. The State Department said that Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi "shared their concerns about North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes" in their meeting. They agreed to work together along with Japan's some-

time rival South Korea "towards denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," a statement said. Biden ordered an assessment of North Korea policy after his predecessor Donald Trump's unusual, highly personalised diplomacy that featured three made-for-television meetings with the totalitarian state's young leader Kim Jong Un. The review proposed a middle ground by moving away from Trump's ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful bid to reach a far-reaching agreement that, after seven decades, could finally bring an official end to the Korean War. But the White House also said it would engage with North Korea, a shift from former president Barack Obama's policy of "strategic patience" - or, keeping Pyongyang at arm's length until its behaviour changes. "Our policy will not focus on achieving a grand bargain, nor

will it rely on strategic patience," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Friday, while acknowledging that successive administrations have failed to achieve the goal of ending North Korea's nuclear programme. North Korea on Sunday denounced the Biden approach, saying he was keeping a "hostile policy" in place for more than half a century. The US-claimed 'diplomacy' is a spurious signboard for covering up its hostile acts, and 'deterrence' touted by it is just a means for posing nuclear threats to the DPRK," foreign ministry official Kwon Jong Gun said through state media, using the official name of North Korea. US officials largely expected a strident reaction from North Korea, which is known for its colourful statements, including in

2019 describing Biden as a "rabid dog" who "must be beaten to death with a stick". A welcoming dinner for the Group of Seven foreign ministers will address both North Korea and Iran. Both the United States and Britain have played down reports that Iran will release their respective nationals from captivity as diplomacy steps up. Britain said that talks were still continuing and denounced the "torture" of dual national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe after Iranian state television said that she could be released from years of detention after London settles an old debt. After the G7, Blinken will head Wednesday to Ukraine in a show of support after Russia last month deployed but then pulled back some 100,000 troops along its border and in annexed Crimea.



TASHKENT: Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Furqat Sidikov giving awards to the winners of the XV International Competition for "OLTIN QALAM" ("Golden Pen") National Prize at the magnificent Turkiston Palace. - DNA

## UN chief calls on all govts to ensure freedom of media

DNA

NEW YORK: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on all governments to do everything in their power to support a free, independent and diverse media. "Free and independent journalism is our greatest ally in combatting misinformation and disinformation," Guterres also noted the personal risks journalists and media workers face, including restrictions, censorship, abuse, harassment, detention and even death, "simply for doing their jobs", and that the situation continues to worsen. The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic has hit many media outlets hard, threatening their very survival, he added.

"As budgets tighten, so too does access to reliable information. Rumours, falsehoods and extreme or divisive opinions surge in to fill the gap", the Secretary-General said, urging all governments to "do everything in their power to support a free, independent and diverse media". Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, also highlighted the importance of free, uncensored and independent press as "a cornerstone of democratic societies", conveying life-saving information, improving public participation, and strengthening accountability and respect for human rights. "Around the world, people

have increasingly taken to the streets to demand their economic and social rights, as well as an end to discrimination and systemic racism, impunity, and corruption", she said. However, journalists fulfilling their fundamental role of reporting on these social protests have become targets, with many becoming victims of unnecessary and disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests, and criminal prosecution, Ms. Bachelet added. In addition to dissuading other journalists from critically reporting on relevant issues, such attacks weaken public debate and hamper society's ability to respond effectively to challenges, including COVID-19, she said.

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## 'Pakistan ready to boost Philippines' war on terror'

MANILA: Pakistan is ready to share its "vast and valuable experience" with the Philippines in its war against terror to strengthen ties between the two nations, particularly in security and cultural diplomacy, Pakistani Ambassador to the Philippines Intiaz Kazi said in an exclusive interview with Arab News. "Pakistan can rightly claim it has won the war on terror, albeit at a costly price," Kazi said. "Inside Pakistan, there were suicide attacks, terror attacks, our entire fabric of society was really disrupted. We suffered \$130 billion (in economic losses). More than that ... 60,000 to 70,000 people have died," he said, adding that 8,000 to 9,000 of those were "officers and men of the Pakistan Army." However, Pakistan has succeeded in "dismantling terrorist networks which operated in its border areas" and, since 2014, has been "one of the best examples in containing terrorism." "It is ready to share the Pakistani forces' capabilities and its experience of operation, namely, Zarb e Azb and Operation Raddul Fasaad, (to help) countries in their fight against terrorism," Kazi said. Citing the example of the 2017 Marawi siege in the Philippines - staged by Daesh-inspired militants who had recruited several Muslim youths - Kazi said that Pakistan had developed modest defense capabilities and equipment in addition to deradicalization programs, launched by the Pakistan National Counterterrorism Authority (NACTA), which it can share with the Philippine military. - DNA

## 25 killed in boat accident

DHAKA: At least 25 people were killed in a collision between two boats in central Bangladesh on Monday, police said. "We have rescued five people and retrieved 25 bodies," local police chief Miraz Hossain told AFP. The collision was between a packed boat carrying at least 30 passengers and a vessel transporting sand in the Padma river near the town of Shibchar. More people were reportedly missing while fire service officials and locals continued rescue operations, another policeman said. - APP

## At least 8 reported killed in Myanmar protests

Thousands of people, in towns and cities across the country, joined the protests calling for "the Global Myanmar Spring Revolution"

BURMA: At least eight people have been killed in Myanmar after security forces opened fire on some of the biggest protests against military rule in days, three months after a coup plunged the country into political turmoil. Thousands of people, in towns and cities across the country, joined the protests on Sunday calling for "the Global Myanmar Spring Revolution". Rallies in support of the anti-coup protests also took place outside Myanmar, as Pope Francis called for peace. "Shake the world with the voice of Myanmar people's unity," the organisers said in a statement. Two people were shot and killed

in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, according to the Mizzima news agency. The Irrawaddy news site earlier posted a photograph of a man in plain clothes taking aim with a rifle in Mandalay. Three people were killed in the central town of Wetlet, the Myanmar Now news agency said, and two were killed in different towns in Shan State in the northeast, two media outlets reported. One person was also killed in the northern jade-mining town of Hpakant, according to the Kachin News Group reported. The Reuters news agency could not verify the reports and a spokes-

man for the ruling government did not answer calls seeking comment. The military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) in a coup on February 1, triggered a civil disobedience movement of strikes and mass protests. Long-running conflicts with ethnic armed groups in border areas in the north and east have also intensified, displacing tens of thousands of civilians, according to United Nations estimates. The military has responded to the protests with arrests and lethal force and ignored calls from neighbouring countries and the

UN to end the violence. In Yangon, young people gathered on a street corner before marching swiftly down the streets in a flash mob - dispersing soon after to avoid a clash with the authorities. "To bring down the military dictatorship is our cause!" they chanted, waving a three-finger salute in a show of resistance. In eastern Shan state, youths carried a banner that read: "We cannot be ruled at all". Bomb blasts were also reported in different parts of Yangon on Sunday. Explosions have been happening with increasing frequency in the former capital and authorities have blamed

them on "instigators". There have been no claims of responsibility for the explosions. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), which is monitoring the situation, says security forces have killed at least 765 protesters since the coup, while some 4,609 people have been arrested. The military, which has labelled the AAPP an unlawful organisation, has acknowledged 258 protesters have been killed, along with 17 policemen and seven soldiers. The 50-year-old Myanmar for nearly 50 years until they began a tentative reform process 10 years ago. - Agencies

Germany's  
Oktoberfest  
cancelled  
again

WEB DESK

BERLIN: Germany's iconic Oktoberfest beer festival has been cancelled for the second year running due to the pandemic, Bavarian state premier Markus Soeder said Monday. Holding big public events in Bavaria, including the annual Oktoberfest in the regional capital Munich, will not be feasible this year, Soeder said after a meeting with city mayor Dieter Reiter. "In the classic beer tents at the big festivals, social distancing, masks and other measures are practically impossible to implement," Soeder said. "The situation is too precarious," he added. "Imagine there was a new wave and it then became a superspreader event. The brand would be damaged forever and we don't want that." Reiter said the cancellation was "a great pity" for the millions of fans of the festival, with "existential consequences" for people's livelihoods. The event, which draws around six million visitors annually from late September to October, was cancelled in 2020 for the first time since World War II. But the Oktoberfest has previously fallen victim to epidemics - cholera kept the beer tents empty in 1854 and 1873.

Pakistan  
eyes...

From Page 01

will significantly reduce the country's dependence on other countries.

He said China was a strong partner and had gone out of its way in keeping up a supply chain and transferring technology to Pakistan. The SAPM said the government had planned to vaccinate 70 million people by the end of this year. "The population of Pakistan which was currently eligible for vaccination was 100 million out of 220 million as the vaccines had only been approved for those above 18." He added that for the first half of the year, January to June 2021, the government had received and expected to receive 19.82 million doses. He added 91% of these doses were purchased, which clearly shows the country is not dependent on donations.

Dr Faisal said, "In totality, we have signed deals for over 30 million doses so the fact that we have already secured 30 million doses and will continue to procure more for the rest of the year should be very reassuring." He said Pakistan was now vaccinating nearly 150,000 people daily while the target was to reach 300,000. "The government has started vaccination for 40 years and above and in this regard, the registration was opened last week." Dr Faisal said, "Our procurement is a result of proactive efforts. The government initiated the conversation with vaccine manufacturers and GAVI in July 2020 which is well before any vaccine had been fully developed and approved."

PM, OIC  
envoys...

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The Prime Minister also underlined the need for instituting legal safeguards aimed at protecting the sensitivities of all religious groups. He underscored the imperative of OIC's collective efforts to project the true image of Islam, and its message of peace and tolerance. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that Pakistan remained committed to dialogue and cooperation with all members of the international community for promoting universal values of tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence among all nations and peoples.

Nong Rong, Ambassador of China to Pakistan called on General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) at GHQ, today.

Matters of mutual interest, recent developments in Afghan peace process, progress on CPEC, regional security and current situation of COVID-19 were discussed during the meeting. COAS thanked the dignitary for China's contribution towards fight against COVID-19 in Pakistan and said that Pakistan Army greatly values its friendly relations with China. Visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's sincere efforts for peace and stability in the region, especially Afghan Peace Process.

## Miandad all praise for Babar Azam

ISLAMABAD: Batting legend Javed Miandad believes Pakistani Skipper Babar Azam was the best in the world at the moment saying Pakistan has got such a player, after a long time. "He's a superb player and after a long time Pakistan has got such a player. I rate him on a very high level and I think he is the best in the world at the moment. He plays solid with the bat and that is cricket. He is a very good striker and plays in the middle in his limit which is a very good quality," he said in a video on his Youtube channel. It may be mentioned here that recently Babar Azam became the fastest cricket player to reach the milestone of 2,000 runs in the Twenty20 international format, having accomplished the feat in just 52 innings. The prolific batsman bagged the record during Pakistan's deciding third and final T20 against Zimbabwe at the Harare Sports Club. The Lahore-born cricketer has scored 2,194 runs in 31 Tests, 4,077 runs in 85 ODIs and 2,168 runs in 58 T20s. The former skipper, who scored 8,832 runs in 124 Tests, said people expect a lot when a player performs. "If you want to increase your level then you have got a very good chance as you are in form. A player learns when he is in good form as this is the time when you are mentally very strong and free of mind," he said. He was of the view that a player also plays bad shots during his innings while scoring a 100. "A player should identify and improve those bad shots he played during his innings as then he will go on scoring 200 to 300 runs," he said. Miandad, who scored 7,381 runs in 233 ODIs, said his father had a lot of influence on him as he used to ask him whether he got out after scoring a 100 or remained unbeaten. "My father used to tell me that a player should go on scoring a 200 or 300 after making 100 instead of getting out," he said and added that he wants the players to learn on scoring big when they are in form. - DNA

## Police probe Man Utd fans protest

SPORTS DESK

MANCHESTER: Police have launched an investigation after an officer required emergency hospital treatment following the protest that led to the postponement of Manchester United's Premier League clash at home to Liverpool. Fans invaded Old Trafford and went onto the pitch on Sunday as part of a protest against United's owners, the US-based Glazer family. Hundreds of fans managed to make their way into the ground, chanting "we want Glazers out." Large numbers of supporters had also gathered outside the stadium and there were clashes with police as they moved to disperse the crowd, with objects thrown at officers and horses. Two officers were injured, with one "attacked with a bottle and sustaining a significant slash wound to his face, requiring emergency hospital treatment", according to a Greater Manchester Police statement. Assistant chief constable Russ Jackson criticised the "reckless and dangerous" behaviour of supporters involved in violent acts, saying it meant GMP had to "take officers from front-line po-

licing and call in support from neighbouring forces to prevent the disorder getting worse".

A United statement said: "Our fans are passionate about Manchester United, and we completely acknowledge the right to free expression and peaceful protest. However, we regret the disruption to the team and actions which put other fans, staff, and the police in danger. We thank the police for their support and will assist them in any subsequent investigations."

The Premier League said while it understood the fans' "strength of feeling", it condemned "all acts of violence, criminal damage and trespass, especially given the associated Covid-19 breaches". Manchester City could have been crowned Premier League champions on Sunday had United lost the match. The Premier League added that the "rearrangement of the fixture will be communicated in due course".

Anger towards the Glazers has been reignited by United's part in a failed European Super League (ESL) project, that collapsed within 48 hours last month after a backlash from fans, players, governments and governing bodies.

## Briefs

## Europe stocks rise as Asia falls on risks

LONDON: European markets rose Monday but Asia was mostly down as investors weigh the risk of inflation as the global economy recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

With London, Tokyo and Shanghai closed for holiday, traders elsewhere diverged ahead of more company results and US unemployment figures later this week.

Investment giant Warren Buffett instilled some unease after saying at the weekend that he expected the US economy was in "super high gear" thanks to massive Federal Reserve and government support but that it would fan inflation.

He said "people have money in their pocket and they're paying higher prices" and there was more inflation than expected six months ago.

His comments revived concerns that the explosive recovery, vaccinations and easing of lockdowns would push up prices to the extent that the Fed would have to ease up on its market-supportive, ultra-loose monetary policies.

Those worries continue to hover over trading floors despite Fed boss Jerome Powell's repeated insistence that they will not tighten policy until they are happy that unemployment has been tamed and inflation is running consistently hot for some time.

However, Dallas Fed president Robert Kaplan broke ranks with Powell on Friday as he said tapering could soon be considered.

"We're now at a point where I'm observing excesses and imbalances in financial markets," he said.

"I'm very attentive to that, and that's why I do think at the earliest opportunity I think will be appropriate for us to start talking about adjusting those purchases."

National Australia Bank's Ray Attrill said in a note: "The main overarching rationale remains on the pace of the recovery which he sees as being much faster than he previously expected and now forecasts unemployment at 4 percent by year's end. - APP

## Malaysia reports 2,500 new Covid cases

## WEB DESK

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia reported 2,500 new COVID-19 infections, the Health Ministry said on Monday, bringing the national total to 417,512.

Health Ministry Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah said in a press statement that four of the new cases are imported and 2,496 local transmissions.

Another 18 more deaths have been reported, bringing the death toll to 1,551. A total of 2,068 patients have been released after recovery, bringing the total number of cured and discharged to 385,208 or 92.3 percent of all cases.

Of the remaining 30,753 active cases, 352 are being held in intensive care unit and 186 of those are in need of assisted breathing.

## Denmark drops J&amp;J vaccine from vaccination

## DNA

COPENHAGEN: Denmark said Monday it would not include the Covid-19 vaccine from US drugmaker Johnson & Johnson in its national vaccination campaign, citing worries over serious side effects involving blood clots.

"The Danish Health Authority has concluded that the benefits of using the Covid-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson do not outweigh the risk of causing the possible adverse effect... in those who receive the vaccine," the authority said in a statement.

"Therefore, the Danish Health Authority will continue the Danish mass vaccination programme against Covid-19 without the Covid-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson," it added. The WHO and European medicines watchdog have both authorised the vaccine.

## India nears 20m cases as Europe eyes opening up

Amid severe shortages, India's federal and state authorities have been scrambling to get extra oxygen to hospitals, including by sourcing it from the steel industry and sending special "Oxygen Express" trains

## MONITORING DESK

NEW DELHI: India's total Covid-19 caseload neared 20 million and oxygen shortages exacerbated a devastating second wave on Monday, as the EU proposed new rules that could allow travellers who are fully vaccinated to enter the bloc.

Cases have soared by around eight million since the end of March, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi under growing pressure to take decisive action to reverse the surge.

Scores died over the weekend in hospitals hit by shortages that have forced clinics in the capital New Delhi to send urgent appeals for

help on social media. "Oxygen is a basic requirement of a hospital and a consistent supply has not been assured. We are constantly firefighting," the head of the Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital Dr Dinesh told the Indian Express daily.

The crisis had already raised questions about whether the Indian Premier League should go ahead, though cricket authorities, who stand to lose hundreds of millions of dollars if it is halted, have insisted it is helping to raise spirits.

But on Monday, the league was forced into its first coronavirus postponement this season, after two players tested positive despite

the tournament's bio-secure "bubble". The match - between the Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore - was called off just hours before its start in Ahmedabad after Varun Chakaravarty and Sandeep Warrier became infected.

Amid severe shortages, India's federal and state authorities have been scrambling to get extra oxygen to hospitals, including by sourcing it from the steel industry and sending special "Oxygen Express" trains. International aid has also poured into the country.

"Out there the hospitals are full. People are sometimes dying in front of the hospitals. They have no more oxygen," German ambassador Walter J. Lindner said.

Stung by defeat in a key state-level election and a Supreme Court ruling ordering him to rectify the oxygen situation in Delhi by midnight (1830 GMT), embattled Prime Minister Modi held talks with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen Monday. The pair discussed "the prevailing Covid-19 situation in India and the EU", according to a statement from Modi's office, with the Indian leader thanking the bloc for "mobilizing quick support for India's fight

against the second wave". The grim situation in India stands in stark contrast to gradual reopenings in Europe and other wealthier parts of the world, where rapid vaccination programs buoyed by easy access to jabs have helped keep new cases down.

Von der Leyen's Commission on Monday proposed that travellers who are fully vaccinated with EU-approved jabs be able once again to enter the bloc, if they come from countries keeping Covid-19 at bay.

"The Commission proposes to allow entry to the EU for non-essential reasons not only for all persons coming from countries with a good epidemiological sit-

uation but also all people who have received the last recommended dose of an EU-authorized vaccine," the commission said.

Among those preparing for a post-pandemic future is France, which on Monday relaxed controls on movement and allowed the partial return of students to classrooms as part of a four-stage process of opening up. The next step is expected on May 19, with the limited reopening of shops, cinemas, museums, theatres and outdoor bars and restaurants.

Greece is also due to reopen outdoor dining after six months of closures as it eyes the beginning of the tourism season.

## Iraq evacuates citizens from virus-stricken India

## DNA

BAGHDAD: Iraq on Monday began evacuating its nationals from India amid the spread of corona-virus pandemic in the south Asian country.

"Iraqi Airways launched first exceptional flights to India to evacuate Iraqi citizens stranded there due to the spread of corona-virus," airline chief Kifah Hussein said in a statement.

He said all official approvals have been obtained from the Iraqi and Indian authorities for bringing the Iraqi nationals back home.

India has registered another global record in daily corona-virus infections with over 350,000 cases since April 22. The country's overall tally reached over 19.9 million cases, including 218,959 fatalities. - DNA

## EU summons Russian ambassador

## DNA

BRUSSELS: The European Union summoned the Russian ambassador on Monday after Moscow put eight EU nationals, including top Brussels officials, on a blacklist in retaliation for sanctions by the bloc.

Moscow's envoy was to meet senior officials from the European Commission and the EU's diplomatic service later in the afternoon, EU spokesman Peter Stano said.

"These counter sanctions are obviously very politically motivated and lack any legal justification," Stano said.

"We will convey to him strong condemnation and rejection of this decision." On Friday, Russia barred entry to eight officials from the EU - European Parliament president David Sassoli and commission vice-president Vera Jourova were among them - in response to sanctions from the bloc over abuses, including the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen, European Council boss Charles Michel and Sassoli condemned Moscow's measures as "groundless" in a joint statement on Friday and threatened "to take appropriate measures in response".

The latest row with the Kremlin comes as tensions between the bloc and Russia have surged over Ukraine, Navalny and the tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats involving a number of EU members state.

## Covax signs deal for 500m Moderna vaccine doses

## WEB DESK

GENEVA: The Covax global vaccine equity programme said Monday it has struck a deal to buy 500 million doses of Moderna's Covid-19 jabs.

The doses, to come on stream from October at the earliest, will broaden out the portfolio of vaccines in the Covax scheme, which has so far been heavily reliant on the AstraZeneca vaccine and hit by delays.

The Moderna doses are expected to start supplying Covax in the final quarter of 2021, with 34 million doses available before the end of the year, the Covax scheme's co-leader Gavi announced in a statement. A further 466 million doses will follow in 2022.

The Covax facility ensures access to jabs in poor countries, with the cost covered by donors. Wealthier countries can bulk-buy through the scheme. Covax is co-led by the World Health Organization, the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. The scheme aims to distribute enough doses to vaccinate up to 27 percent of the population in the 92 poorest territories participating in the program by the end of the year. "We are very pleased to sign this new agreement with Moderna, giving Covax facility participants access to yet another highly efficacious vaccine," said Gavi chief executive Seth Berkley.

## Saudi's King Salman appoints new ministers

JEDDAH: Faisal bin Fadel bin Mohsen Al-Ahmed was appointed as Saudi Arabia's new minister of economy and planning in a series of new government appointments issued by King Salman on Monday. Amid the royal decrees, Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud was made a minister after being appointed as special advisor to the King, and made chairman of the board of trustees of the King Salman Foundation.

Abdullah bin Amer Al-Swaha was appointed as chairman of the board of directors of the Saudi Space Authority. Iman bin Habas bin Sultan al-Mutairi was appointed as deputy minister of trade, while Badr bin Abdul-Mohsen bin Abdullah bin Hadab was named assistant to the minister of commerce. Khaled bin Abdullah Al-Sabti was made a minister when he was appointed as an advisor in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, and made chair of board of directors of Education and Training Evaluation Commission. -APP



ISLAMABAD: Vice President of the Huawei Middle East Region, Mr. Li Xiangyu, presents a souvenir to President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-E-Sadr. - DNA

## Cuba's 2 COVID-19 vaccines might be ready in summer

## DNA

ANKARA: Two Cuban COVID-19 vaccines are in solid progress to be available in summer, Dr. Rolando Perez Rodriguez, director of Science and Innovation at the Cuban Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industries Group (BioCubaFarma), told Anadolu Agency in an exclusive interview.

Boasting one of the highest ratios in the world in terms of doctor density, 8.2 per 1,000 people according to the World Bank, Cuba has stood out as one of the most capable countries in the world to fight the coronavirus pandemic with only 664 reported deaths so far and slightly over 108,000 infections. The US state of Florida alone, which is a stone's throw from the Caribbean nation, has registered over 35,000 deaths, according to Maryland's Johns Hopkins University. Overall US infections have

surpassed 32.4 million and fatalities have rapidly climbed to over 577,000. Dr. Rodriguez said Cuba has decided to develop its own vaccine candidates to immunize all of its population, based on the capacities of the national biotech industry.

He shared that the "immunization program will cover, stepwise, risk and vulnerable groups, adults,

and finally pediatric population."

Two vaccine candidates - Soberana 02 and Abdala - are now in Phase III clinical trials, Rodriguez said, with "efficacy data expected by June." "However, positive safety and immunogenicity data from these vaccine candidates have been obtained in previous clinical trials," he added.



He said Cuba plans to complete vaccination of all its people, against all odds, before the end of this year, and drew attention to "a shortage worldwide for available supplies of raw materials and primary packaging material for the pharmaceutical industry."

"This situation is even worse in Cuba due to the economic and financial embargo imposed by USA against our country for several decades, which has been reinforced during the last years, even during the situation of sanitary emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic," he complained.

In February 1962, US President John F. Kennedy proclaimed an embargo on trade between the United States and Cuba, "in response to certain actions taken by the Cuban Government," and directed the departments of commerce and the treasury to implement the embargo, which controversially remains in place to date.

## Thousands dance mask-free at UK live gig trial

LIVERPOOL: Thousands danced without face coverings at a music festival in northern England as the UK government permitted the country's first post-lockdown gig.

A crowd of 5,000 people cheered, danced and sang along to performances from bands including English indie pop act Blossoms at the sold-out event on Sunday at Liverpool's Sefton Park.

The festival was part of a pilot project by the UK government called the Events Research Programme (ERP) to test crowd safety at live events ahead of planned lifting of restrictions on June 21. Hugging a group of friends outside the concert tent, Matt Berry said they were "getting back to doing normal things that normal people do... finally"

"I think it is good to get it all started again to test if it can all work for summer, and if it will all go ahead in the summer as well," said another concert-goer, Freya Begley.

The government has previously allowed limited numbers of supporters to attend sports events such as the FA Cup semifinal at Wembley. Researchers are monitoring how well different approaches to social distancing and ventilation work.

All those attending the two-day concert had to take lateral flow coronavirus tests before entering the venue and will also have to take another test afterwards.

They have to give their contact details to the state-funded health service so they can be traced if they test positive.

The bands performed in a tent. At the entrance to the venue, audience members had to show QR codes and Covid test results. - APP

## US to begin reuniting migrant families

"We are pleased that the process of reunifications is beginning this week and that these four mothers will be hugging their children after so many years"

## FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States will begin reuniting migrant children with their parents this week after they were separated by the administration of former president Donald Trump, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said Monday.

Mayorkas tweeted that four mothers who had fled "extremely dangerous situations in their home countries" would be reunited with children as young as three years old.

"We are pleased that the process of reunifications is beginning this week and that these four mothers will be hugging their children after so many years," he wrote. He added in a statement released by his department that the move was "just the beginning."

"We are reuniting the first group of families, many more will follow, and we recognize the importance of providing these families with the stability and resources they need to heal." President Joe Biden has prioritized a special task force to reunify the hundreds of families as part of his sweeping rolling back of Trump's hardline policies, which focused on deterring migration from Central America.

Biden has called the family separations a "moral failure and a national shame." Trump announced his zero tolerance policy towards undocumented migrants in 2018, declaring that they would be arrested and charged with a crime.

As part of the new regime children were separated from their parents, on a promise that the families would be reunited within weeks. But this

did not happen in thousands of cases. A public outcry and lawsuits forced the Trump administration to halt the separations, but for as many as 5,000 children, the damage had been done.

Trump's immigration officials kept poor records and did little to cooperate with groups seeking to help the children, forcing more lawsuits. It was not clear how many children were still separated from their parents by the time the Biden administration took over, but estimates put it at as high as 1,000.

Many of them are from rural, inaccessible mountain communities, with reunification made even harder by the coronavirus pandemic and two hurricanes that ravaged Central America last fall. The task force created by Biden has been "working tirelessly to establish

a complete database of separated families, correct inaccuracies in the files they were provided, and build the processes to find every family and give them the opportunity to reunite and heal," the homeland security statement said.

It did not clarify if the children will be permitted to stay in the United States legally with their parents. The reunifications begin as the Biden administration confronts the third major increase in unaccompanied children arriving at the border in seven years.

It has made strides moving children from grossly overcrowded Border Patrol facilities to US Department of Health and Human Services shelters, which are more suited to longer-term stays until children are placed with sponsors in the US, typically parents or close relatives. The average stay for an unaccompanied

child in Border Patrol custody has plummeted to about 20 hours, below the legal limit of 72 hours and down from 133 hours in late March, Mayorkas said.

There are currently 677 unaccompanied children in Border Patrol custody, down from more than 5,700 in late March. Health and Human Services opened 14 emergency intake centres, raising capacity to nearly 200 beds from 952 when the Federal Emergency Management Agency was dispatched on March 13, Mayorkas said.

About 400 asylum officers from US Citizenship and Immigration Services have been assigned as case managers to speed the release of children to sponsors. As of Thursday, Health and Human Services had 22,557 children in its care.

**Briefs**

**Pak-Saudi envoys discuss PM's upcoming visit**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Lt. Gen. (Retd) Bilal Akbar held a meeting with Saudi envoy to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, in Riyadh on the other day and discussed matters related to the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to the kingdom. Pakistan embassy in Riyadh on its social media account Twitter said during the meeting, the envoys of both countries reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthen the "time tested brotherhood and friendship with a renewed focus on economic cooperation." Last week, ambassador Al-Malki had told the international media that "this visit will further strengthen relations between the two countries in all fields," adding "many memoranda of understanding will be signed during the visit." The two countries had inked agreements of \$20 billion investment projects during the crown prince's visit to Pakistan in February 2019. Al-Malki said that while work on the projects had "already begun," a planned preferential trade agreement would also lead to broader economic cooperation.

**NAB seeks closure of inquiries against Chaudhrys**

DNA

LAHORE: An accountability court (AC) in Lahore on Monday reserved its verdict in the petition filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), seeking closure of three inquiries against the Chaudhrys of Gujrat. AC Judge Sheikh Sajjad heard the NAB's petition. According to NAB Prosecutor Hafiz Asadullah, Chaudhry Shujaat and Punjab Assembly Speaker Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi are facing inquiries in assets beyond known sources of income, illegal recruitments cases. He, in the petition, stated that since no proof had been found against Chaudhrys in these cases, therefore, it was better to close inquiries against them in these cases.

**Sindh to take strict steps to curb virus surge**

DNA

KARACHI: Chief Minister of Sindh has decided to take strict measures to curb the soaring cases of coronavirus in Hyderabad and Karachi East districts. A meeting of Sindh's Coronavirus Task Force Monday informed that Sindh have 5.4 percent positivity rate of coronavirus tests. The recovery rate of coronavirus patients in Sindh has been 93 percent and the death rate 1.6 percent, the session of the task force chaired by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah was briefed. "In April 154 Covid-19 patients died in Sindh," according to the briefing. Chief Minister of Sindh decided to take strict measures to curb the surge in cases of coronavirus in Hyderabad and Karachi East districts. Sindh CM expressed concern over rampant violation of the coronavirus SOPs and directed the police and Commissioner Karachi to ensure strict enforcement of the precautionary measures. The ministers should visit the city for implementation of the SOPs, he further said. The Covid-19 pandemic claimed 79 more lives across Pakistan over the previous 24 hours, raising the death toll from the disease to 18,149.

**Korea keen to promote co-op with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Suh Sangpyo met with a number of government officials; expressed his desire to develop close relations

STAFF REPORT

PESHAWAR: The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Suh Sangpyo called upon prominent governmental and civil services figures of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during his visit to Peshawar. Suh Sangpyo called upon the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, H.E. Mr. Mehmood Khan who was accompanied by the Minister for Health and Finance of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Taimour Salim Jhagra and Minister for Local Government and Law, Akbar Ayub Khan. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest and the measures being taken for providing a more conducive environment for Korean investments to various areas including hydropower. Various matters regarding to the promotion of Buddhist tourism in the province were also discussed in the meeting. Ambassador Suh Sangpyo similarly called upon the In-

spector General of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, Sanullah Abbasi and the Deputy Inspector General of Counter Terrorism Department of KP Police, Javed Wazir to discuss matters of security cooperation to enhance the inflow of Korean tourists into the province. Suh Sangpyo additionally called upon the Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Higher Education and Information, Kamran Khan Bangash to discuss possible areas of educational cooperation between universities of both countries and to encourage student to student exchanges. The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea hoped that these meetings would prove to be instrumental in enhancing cooperation between the Government of Korea and the Provincial Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and would pave the way for enhanced foreign investments, increased tourism and educational cooperation.



**Kazakh researchers present finished QazVac vaccine**

DNA

NUR SULTAN: Kazakhstan has joined the list of countries that have produced and made available their own COVID-19 vaccine. The country on Monday started administering its COVID-19 vaccine called QazVac. Health Minister Alexey Tsouy received his first dose of QazVac vaccine in a local outpatient clinic in the capital Nur-Sultan on Monday, Kazinform reported. After being inoculated in a live broadcast, Tsouy said he feels good, adding they have started vaccinating the public in various parts of the coun-

try, Anadolu Agency reported. "In March 2020, the first coronavirus case was confirmed in Kazakhstan. On March 23, samples were taken from those who became ill, and biological properties, from which a virus identified as COVID-19 was isolated, were studied," said the Kazakh Ministry of Education and Science in a statement. The vaccine was registered by the World Health Organization as a candidate vaccine on May 15, 2020. The phase I clinical trials in September 2020 involved 44 volunteers, while a phase II clinical trial began on Oct. 17 with 200 volunteers. On Dec. 19, the Kazakh Ministry of Healthcare granted permission for phase III clinical trials. 3000 people volunteered and were vaccinated with the QazCovidin vaccine in the cities of Almaty and Taraz. No severe side effects or complaints were reported. The vaccination against the coronavirus started on February 1 in Kazakhstan. The nation currently uses Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, which is manufactured at the Karaganda pharmaceutical plant.



**Pakistan's stance clear on Palestine, Kashmir: Ashrafi**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Special Representative on Inter-religion Harmony Molana Tahir Ashrafi says resolving issues of overseas Pakistanis is top priority of government. Addressing a news conference in Islamabad on (Monday), he said during his upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister will hold consultations with Saudi leadership. Molana Tahir Ashrafi said the Prime Minister will also interact with the Paki-

stani community living in the Kingdom and will raise their problems with the Saudi authorities. He said the Prime Minister today held meeting with the representatives of Muslim countries and stressed the need to build unanimous narrative on issues related to the sanctity of Prophet hood. Prime Minister's Special Representative on Inter-religion Harmony Molana Tahir Ashrafi said Pakistan's stance on Palestine and Kashmir is very clear; therefore, the country is not going to make any compromises on that.

**Dr Firdous defends tirade against AC Sialkot**

DNA

LAHORE: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Punjab Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan is holding a press conference, and offering her clarification on the controversy involving Assistant Commissioner Sialkot Sonia Sadaf. The Punjab chief minister's advisor spoke on the incident, saying that the attitude by the assistant commissioner was disappointing. She said Chief Minister Usman Buzdar had asked for a report to be submitted on the matter, adding that he had also expressed displeasure over the public having to stand in long queues to buy sugar. Speaking about the incident, she said, "If implementation is not being done on the coronavirus SOPs fixed by the government, then [it should be understood] that we [public office holders] are accountable to the people." She turned her guns towards some media persons, saying that they had distorted the picture yesterday when the incident took place.

**Pak student to apply China's poverty reduction experience home**

DNA

BEIJING: Esha Iqbal, a Pakistani graduate student in China Women University (CWU) Esha Iqbal hoped to apply China's poverty reduction experience home, reports China Economic Net (CEN). As a co-founder of Youth Impact, a youth development organization, Esha attached great importance to female's power in poverty alleviation. "Women represent 50% population overall in the world. There are statistics that women are more poverty stricken. So if women are not there to talk about their own needs, there won't be anyone to represent them," she mentioned. Therefore, it is important

that a woman not only speaks for herself, but also speaks for her community. And only then can women hold up half the sky, Esha added. Back home Esha was a Regional Operations Manager at Habib Bank Limited (HBL) in Mirpur District, Azad Kashmir. Also, she was a field trainer for National Financial Literacy Program of State Bank Of Pakistan in Kolti & Bhimber district. "Pakistan is a society where we have a certain amount of gender segregation and financial participation for women is limited. That's why my presence in that training was somehow crucial," she explained, adding that she included lots of women in that training and helped them open accounts in the bank.

**Govt to facilitate free media: Fawad**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In his message on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhary Fawad Hussain reiterates government's commitment to ensure free and independent media in the country. He said the government regards the freedom of press as a fundamental, democrat-

ic and constitutional right of Journalists. The Information Minister made it clear that there is no concept of media censorship in the country and the media in Pakistan enjoys unprecedented freedom. He said the government encourages self-regulation by media. In his tweets, Chaudhary Fawad Hussain also paid tributes to journalists, who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

The Minister pointed out that the journalists in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Palestine and other areas face difficulties in search of truth and for promoting it. Chaudhary Fawad Hussain said it is part of our agenda to introduce new media technologies and new projects will also be brought this year especially for the young journalists. Meanwhile, at a meeting

with Chairman Naya Pakistan Authority in Islamabad, Information Minister and Minister of State for Information discussed matters pertaining to inclusion of journalists in the Prime Minister's Housing programme. Later on, the programme will be extended to Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad and Gujranwala. The Information Minister said the program will be taken to Peshawar and Quetta.

**Pak to get COVAX vaccines this week**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is expected to receive vaccine doses via the COVAX vaccine facility starting this week, sources said Monday. According to the sources, the first consignment will bring 1.2 million doses of the Oxford-Astrazeneca coronavirus vaccine to the country. The shipment is arriving from South Korea. The first batch is expected to reach the country on Friday, May 7, sources said. Through the COVAX vaccine facility, Pakistan has planned to vaccinate 20% of its population free of charge, sources said. Last month,

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi had announced that Pakistan will receive 15 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine from the COVAX scheme as the country continues to battle the pandemic's third wave. Qureshi took to Twitter to announce the development after his meeting with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas in Berlin. "Following my meeting with Foreign Minister @HeikoMaas, I am happy to announce that Pakistan will receive 15 million doses of the #COVID vaccine under COVAX, with a commitment for these to be delivered by May," FM Qureshi said in a tweet.

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LARGEST CIRCULATED DIPLOMATIC MAGAZINE