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Italian FM cancels trip to France after ‘insults’ from Paris

PARIS (Agencies): Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani called off a planned trip to France on Thursday, accusing French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin of “insulting” his country by criticizing Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s handling of illegal immigration. “I will not go to Paris for the planned meeting” with French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, Tajani tweeted on Thursday afternoon. “[Gerald Darmanin’s] insults against the [Italian] government and Italy are unacceptable. This is not the spirit with which common European challenges should be faced.” Earlier on Thursday, Darmanin told France’s RMC radio that Meloni has been “unable to solve the migration problems on which she was elected,” and accused her of “lying” to voters. Meloni rose to power last year promising to ramp up deportations and stop NGO-operated vessels from ferrying crowds of migrants to Italian ports. Despite her government cracking down on the activity of these ships – which she calls a “ferry service” – and fining their operators, the number of migrants arriving on Italian shores has



almost quadrupled under her watch. More than 42,400 people have landed in Italy so far this year, compared to 11,220 in the same period in 2022. Amid this surge, the Italian government declared a six-month state of emergency in April, and began constructing new shelters for the arrivals. France has grudgingly accepted thousands of migrants whose NGO ships were turned away from Italian ports. Colonna warned in November that there would be “consequences” if Meloni’s

government continued to bar migrant ships from docking, adding that France was only taking the boats in “because of Italy’s stubborn refusal and lack of humanity.” A month earlier, the dispute over the NGO ships led France to cancel a deal in which it agreed to take in roughly 3,500 migrants temporarily housed in Italy. The migration issue has divided the Italians and French since before Meloni came to power. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron accused Italian Prime Minister Matteo Salvini of “cynicism and irresponsibility” when he refused to allow a French ship carrying migrants to dock. Months later, Salvini called Macron an “international embarrassment” after French policemen were spotted dropping apprehended migrants off in an Italian forest along the two countries’ shared border. Shortly after Darmanin’s interview on Thursday, the French Foreign Ministry stated that it was still keen to work with Rome on migration issues, Italy’s ANSA news agency reported. As of Thursday afternoon, it is unclear whether Tajani and Colonna’s meeting will be rescheduled.

US drug regulator approves world’s first RSV vaccine

NEW YORK (Agencies): The US Food and Drug Administration has approved a vaccine against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) - an illness that kills thousands of Americans each year. The vaccine still needs approval from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention before it can be rolled out to the public. Officials say the vaccine, named Arexvy by the manufacturer GSK, is a major breakthrough that will save many lives. It could be available to people over 60 within months, officials say. “Today’s approval of the first RSV vaccine is an important public health achievement to prevent a disease which can be life-threatening,” said Dr Peter Marks, who leads the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). RSV is a respiratory illness that typically results in cold-

like symptoms for adults, but can be dangerous for young children, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions. On average, it kills 100-300 children under the age of 5 in the US every year, according to the CDC. It also kills about 6,000 to 10,000 adults over 65 annually, and causes between 60,000 to 120,000 hospital admissions. In severe cases it can cause bronchiolitis, which includes a build-up of inflammation in the lungs and trouble in breathing. The drug was over 60 years in the making, and is the first to win approval to prevent RSV anywhere in the world. A study by GSK, a UK-based firm, which was published in February found a vaccine efficacy of 82.6%. Side effects were mostly “mild or moderate” and ended within two days. The most common are pain around the injection site or fatigue.

Laos activist Anousa Luangsuphom survived cafe shooting, rights group says

SINGAPORE (Agencies): A Laos political activist who was reported to have died after being shot point blank in the face and chest is alive, activists say. The family of Anousa Luangsuphom, 25, has told Human Rights Watch (HRW) he is recovering in hospital after being shot in a cafe in the capital Vientiane. They had initially told people he had died in a bid to protect him from being targeted again, the rights group said. This reflects the level of fear for dissidents in Laos, the group added. “Friends and family basically told people he was dead because they were worried if the gunman knew that they had not succeeded in killing him, they would return to finish the job,” said HRW spokesman Phil Robertson. Mr Luangsuphom is a prominent critic of the Laos government. Security camera footage of his attack on Saturday night has been widely

shared on social media and reported in local media. It shows a gunman dressed in a brown long-sleeved shirt and black cap using a facemask to open the cafe door, before entering and firing twice at Mr Luangsuphom, who is seated on the floor. The video then shows the gunman fleeing while bystanders rush to Mr Luangsuphom’s aid. The activist is known for running the Kub Kluen Duay Keyboard (Driven By Keyboard) Facebook page, where people have expressed criticism of the Communist authorities. On Wednesday night, the page’s administrators shared a message from another Laos political commentator, based in Europe, who has a large online following among people in Laos and abroad. The family had requested that the Facebook influencer release the information that Mr Luangsuphom was alive, Mr Robertson said.

GCC plans to implement unified ‘Schengen-style’ visa for tourists, expats

DUBAI (Agencies): The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and its member states are set to implement a unified visa for tourists and businesspeople from dozens of countries, in an initiative comparable to the European Union’s Schengen zone visa. During the ongoing Arabian Travel Market at the Dubai World Trade Centre, in which a panel discussion on ‘The Future of Travel for the GCC’ took place, it was revealed that the bloc is planning on the introduction and implementation of a common visa system for nationals, residents, tourists and business visitors from 35 Arab and foreign countries. According to regional media outlets, Bahrain’s Tourism Minister, Fatima Al Sairafi, said that discussions are still underway among GCC nations at the ministerial level on how to achieve such a visa. “We see that happening very soon because we see people flying from abroad to Europe usually spending their time in several countries rather than in one country. We really saw the value this can bring, not to each country, but all of us”, she stated. With the unified visa sys-

tem reportedly aiming to boost tourism and facilitate travel within the region, nationals from the 35 countries – which have not been specified – would be able to visit Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman under a single visa. GCC residents would also be able to travel visa-free throughout all member states, just like nationals do. Samira Al Gharib, the Kuwaiti Trade Ministry’s assistant Under-Secretary for Tourism, also confirmed that plans for a “unified tourism visa” are being considered by the bloc’s member states’ interior ministries, and that it “targets frequent visitors to the GCC”. She denied that the new visa system would be implemented by next year, citing obstacles to be overcome prior to its introduction. A key driver for the idea of a common visa in the GCC was reportedly the FIFA World Cup held in Qatar last year, which, according to the Arab Gulf Centre for Studies and Research (CSRGulf), benefited all Gulf countries immensely in terms of their economic and tourism sectors.

Iraq to raise electricity production to 24,000 megawatts in May

BAGHDAD (Agencies): The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity announced its plans to raise electricity production to 24,000 megawatts in May, an increase of 3,500 megawatts from the current production, local media reports. According to the report, the Ministry said that it started early with the summer plan, which included three phases, indicating that periodic and emergency main-

tenance work has been completed for the production units of all stations, which will be ready on the first of next May, with the provision of spare parts and financial allocations. The report also added that the country indicated that the stability of the load at 24,000 megawatts, an increase of 3,500 megawatts, will achieve good stability hours in the summer.

Pakistan-led Committee on Information’s 45th session ends, pledging to promote accurate information

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The 45th session of the United Nations Committee on Information ended Thursday, with Pakistani envoy Aamir Khan, who presided over it, making a unity call to promote a peaceful, transparent, and inclusive information world for all. In his closing remarks, he lauded the consensus adoption of a resolution that reaffirms fundamental principles of the UN Charter, including the principles of cooperation, development, equality, and non-discrimination. The text reaffirms the significance of information in today’s interconnected world and underscores the need for member states to work together to promote access to reliable, accurate, and timely information. “I commend the member states for their commitment to these important issues, and I believe that we will expand our efforts to find solutions to the problems facing the information world today,” Ambassador Aamir Khan, who is deputy permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told delegates. Pakistan was elected to chair the 45th session when it began its current deliberations. It is the second time Pakistan led the committee, a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly. Under its terms, the resolution acknowledges the challenges arising from the rapidly changing media landscape, including the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation. It calls on member states to promote media literacy and digital literacy, to support independent media and journalism, and to combat hate speech and incitement to violence. In addition, the resolution recognizes the importance of preserving cultural diversity and peaceful co-existence, and calls for access to information for all, including marginalized and vulnerable populations. The effort to promote an agreement on the resolution required extensive negotiations to reconcile differing views, in which Mariam Shaikh, press counsellor at Pakistan Mission to the UN, also took part. Aamir Khan urged all member states to take action to implement the provisions of the resolution. In statements made by the G-77 and China and other member states, speakers applauded the efforts of the chair, Aamir Khan, for playing a crucial role during the negotiations to reach the consensus.

Israel Defence Forces probe high rate of Iron Dome missile interception failures

TEL AVIV (Agencies): The failure rate of Israel’s Iron Dome missile defence system is causing concern among the Israeli military commanders. Resistance groups in Gaza fired a barrage of 22 rockets into Israeli settlements near the besieged enclave following the death of Palestinian hunger striker Khader Adnan in an Israeli prison on Tuesday. Only four were intercepted by Iron Dome. According to the Israeli news website, the system’s success rate has fallen from 96 per cent last year, to just 67 per cent. This has apparently prompted the Israeli army to launch a probe into why “an otherwise reliable air defence system, which routinely boasts a success rate in the high nineties, has exhibited such a significant backslide in performance.” The IDF is frustrated that



the latest failure happened “in broad daylight with high visibility and prior intelligence.” A similar fall in the success rate has been observed against rockets fired from Lebanon. While expected to intercept 28 rockets, the system failed to stop three. Reports in local media said that Anonymous Sudan has claimed that it hacked into the Iron Dome system yesterday. The group “warned that it would do so again should more rockets be launched,” said the Jerusalem Post.

Moscow says US behind Kremlin drone attack, air raid sirens sound in Kyiv



KYIV (Reuters) – Russia said on Thursday that the United States was behind an alleged drone attack on the Kremlin aiming to kill President Vladimir Putin, and air raid sirens sounded again in Kyiv as darkness fell following attacks the previous night. Reuters witnesses heard gunfire and repeated heavier explosions near the centre of Kyiv. Residents who made their way to air raid shelters told Reuters they saw drones in the air. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking in The Hague after visiting the International Court of Justice (ICC), said Putin must be brought to justice over the war and that Kyiv would work to create a new tribunal for this purpose. Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov, without providing evidence, said Ukraine had acted on U.S. orders with the alleged drone attack on the Kremlin citadel in the early hours of Wednesday. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said Peskov was “just lying” and that the United States neither encouraged nor enabled Ukraine to strike outside its borders. Kyiv has also

denied involvement in the incident, which followed a string of blasts over the past week targeting freight trains and oil depots in western Russia and Russian-controlled Crimea. Moscow has blamed Ukraine for those attacks too. “Attempts to disown this (attack on the Kremlin), both in Kyiv and in Washington, are, of course, absolutely ridiculous. We know very well that decisions about such actions, about such terrorist attacks, are made not in Kyiv but in Washington,” Peskov told reporters. Peskov said an urgent investigation was under way and that any response would be carefully considered and balanced. Russia’s foreign ministry said the alleged drone attack “must not go unanswered” and showed Kyiv had no desire to end the 15-month old war at the negotiating table. Russia has increasingly accused the United States of being a direct participant in the war, intent on inflicting a “strategic defeat” on Moscow. Washington denies this, saying it is arming Kyiv to defend itself and retake illegally seized land

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

Decades old Pak-China ties grow stronger with every passing day: CS

PESHAWAR (APP): The Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary has said the decades-old mutual relationships between Pakistan and China are growing stronger and stronger with every passing day. “The friendship between Pakistan and China is higher than the Himalayas, sweeter than honey and deeper than the sea. These are not just words, in fact they are the feelings and emotions of every Pakistani,” he said while addressing the 72nd anniversary of Pak-China Diplomatic Relations as the Chief Guest at the China Window Centre here. The main reason for the strong bond between the two countries was that the mutual relationships are based on seven decades which brought the people of the two countries closer to each other, he observed. The CS said that the brotherly neighbouring country China has supported Paki-

stan in every difficult time and Pakistan has never been left behind, adding that today, although Pakistan is facing a difficult economic situation, but the economic plan that China has started as CPEC will definitely start a new era of economic development in the country. He said this plan would help stabilize the national economy besides making Pakistan an economic hub in the world. Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry further said that the government was making every possible effort to speed up the work on CPEC, adding that foreign and local investors are taking a keen interest in Rashakai economic zone. He said that the investors are setting up factories in Rashakai economic zone which will lead to an increase in exports and economic activities in the province along with providing employment to people. Aslam said it has been 72 years since the establish-

ment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In all this time, the friendship between the governments and especially the people of the two countries has been a source of pride. He appreciated the organisers of the China Window for arranging the event and said that it would send a strong message on behalf of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Chinese brothers and sisters about their love and affection. He said that he is happy that the China Window has provided a wonderful opportunity to bring the people of the two countries closer together and share joint happiness. The CS on behalf of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government congratulated the people of China on the occasion of the 72nd anniversary of friendship and expressed hope that the people of Pakistan and China will continue to share each other’s happiness in the future.

KP CS for effective mechanism to curb smuggling, hoarding of food items

PESHAWAR (APP): The Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary has emphasised upon the line departments and stakeholders to chalk out an effective and intelligence-based mechanism to curb smuggling and hoarding of food items. Presiding over a meeting, he said that prevention of smuggling of essential commodities such as wheat and sugar was imperative to ensure the availability of these commodities to people at cheap rates, said an official release issued here.

He directed all the line departments and stakeholders to strengthen the intelligence-sharing mechanism and curb the smuggling and hoarding of wheat, sugar, other edible items and fertilisers. He asked the district administrations to keep an eye on dealers’ stock and take immediate action in case of hoarding. The meeting was attended by various officials, including Secretary Food, Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, security officials, custom officials and other relevant authorities.

128 POs held; arms, narcotics recovered

NOWSHERA (APP): The district police during crackdowns against criminal elements arrested 1686 suspects including proclaimed offenders and drug peddlers during the month of April and recovered huge quantity of narcotics and arms. The district police spokesman said here Thursday that as per the directives of Inspector General of Police (IGP) the district police beefed up crackdowns against criminal elements and in various actions

arrested 1445 suspected persons. The police also held 128 proclaimed offenders (POs), 113 drug peddlers and 1505 persons on expiry of bail orders. Similarly, 76 kg hashish, nine kg ICE, 218 pistols, 13 AK-47 guns, 20 rifles and 3229 cartridges of different bores from the arrested persons. The police registered cases against the suspected persons and sent POs and drug peddlers behind the bar while investigation was underway from the suspected persons.

CTP distributes free helmets among motorcyclists; warns action from next week

PESHAWAR (APP): The City Traffic Police (CTP) in a bid to encourage use of helmets by motorcyclists distributed free helmets among the riders and warned strict action against violators from next week. Chief Traffic Officer Qamar Hayat Khan, SSP Investigation Shahzada Kokab

Farooq and other officers distributed helmets among the riders and advised them to use it for their own safety. It is to mention here that the traffic police issued challan tickets to as many as 47,632 motorcyclists in the provincial capital during the month of April for not using helmets.

Cloudy weather with chances of scattered rains, thunderstorm predicted for KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Meteorological Center Peshawar on Thursday predicted mainly partly cloudy to cloudy weather over most districts of the province. However, scattered rain-wind/thunderstorm (with isolated heavy rainfall/ hailstorm) is likely to occur over Chitral, Lower & Upper Dir, Swat, Buner, Malakand, Shangla, Kohistan, Torghar, Battagram, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Hangu, Orakzai, Karak, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Tank, D. I. Khan, North & South Waziristan districts. During the last 24 hours mainly partly cloudy

and dry weather prevailed over most districts of the province. However, thunderstorm-rains occurred at isolated places in Mansehra, Mardan and Nowshera districts. Rain (recorded in mm): Cherat 02, Balakot 01, Takht Bhai and Risalpur Trace (each). The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in centigrade at different stations of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were Peshawar City 30/23, Chitral 30/11, Timergara 27/15, Dir 27/11, Mirkhani 27/09, Kalam 20/05, Drosh 29/14, Saidu Sharif 26/14, Patan 29/17, Malam Jabba 14/07, Takht Bhai 30/18, Kakul 22/10, Balakot 25/13, Parachinar 22/08, Bannu 32/19, Cherat 21/13, D.I. Khan 31/21.

Accused of murder shot dead outside Judicial complex

PESHAWAR (APP): A man accused of murder was shot dead in front of the Judicial Complex gate here on Thursday. The police arrested the shooter and his facilitator on the spot. According to Capital City Police, the accused of murder was being brought to the judicial complex for a court hearing when Zubair in disguise of a Burqa-clad woman shot him in

the head with a pistol as a result of which the former died on the spot. The police said that the accused and his facilitator tried to escape from the scene after committing the crime but were nabbed by police on the spot. It further added that the murderer and the slain were close relatives and the latter was named in the killing of the former’s brother.

Malakand court issues arrest warrants of Murad Saeed

PESHAWAR (APP): A local in Dargai, Malakand on Thursday issued an arrest warrant for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former Federal minister Murad Saeed in a sedition case. The case against Murad Saeed was registered at Levies police

station Dargai on April 28. The judicial magistrate civil 2 released a bailable arrest warrant for Saeed under section 204. Earlier on Wednesday, Murad Saeed approached the Lahore High Court (LHC) to provide details of the cases registered against him.

Alkhidmat Foundation provides Rs 66.7 million for orphans in first quarter

PESHAWAR (APP): Alkhidmat Foundation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) during the first quarter of year 2023 provided financial support of Rs 66.7 million to orphan children in the province. According to a press release issued here on Thursday, The foundation was currently taking care of over 4,800 orphan chil-

dren in the province and under its orphan family support programme provided financial assistance of Rs 66. 7 million to 4400 orphans. It said that the funds were contributed by philanthropists and volunteers and efforts would be made to attract more sponsors for taking care of more orphan children as the num-

ber of such children in the province who were deprived of the basic facilities was much more and there was no system to support them. It said that the foundation was committed to providing all basic facilities, especially education to each and every orphan and deserving child in the province.

PHC adjourns election date seeking hearing till May 10

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Thursday adjourned the hearing of a petition seeking the date for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections till May 10. A division bench of the high court heard the petition filed by the KP Assembly Speaker Mushtaq Ghani seeking date for the provincial legislature’s election. Earlier, Tariq Afridi Advocate, who has been nominated by Governor KP Haji Ghulam Ali as his lawyer, sought adjournment of the hearing due to his election campaign for High Court Bar Association’s polls. Tariq Afridi is contesting for the presidential office in the bar election. He pleaded for fixing the

date of hearing after May 11. “The election of the provincial assembly is an important issue,” petitioner’s counsel Gohar Khan said. “Constitutional period of 90 days has been passed, still the election date has not been fixed,” he said. “The provincial government has submitted its reply in the court,” Advocate General Amir Javed said. “The election commission’s reply has been prepared and will be filed in the court,” the ECP lawyer said. Barrister Gohar Khan pleaded to the court to fix the hearing tomorrow. “Tariq Afridi has been a candidate in the Bar’s election, the case will now be heard nex week,” Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim said.

Power suspension for Haripur, Hattar, Kurram Garhi notified

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco) on Thursday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from 132 KV Haripur Grid Station on 6th and 8th May from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of 11 KV Chamba, Zeb Pharma, Panian 1,2, D/C Special Economic zone 1,2 and consumers connected with 11KV KOT 1 feeders will face inconvenience. The power supply will remain suspended from

132 KV Hattar Grid Station on 7th May from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of 11 KV Hattar 1, 6, 7, Shadi and Suraj feeders will face inconvenience. The power supply will remain suspended from 66 KV Kuram Garhi Grid Station on 8th, 11th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 22nd May from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. resultantly consumer of 11 KV Air Port 1 and 66 KV Kuram Garhi Transmission Line connected with 11 KV feeders will face inconvenience.

WSSP replaces rusted water supply pipeline in provincial capital

PESHAWAR (APP): The Projects Department of Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar (WSSP) has completed replacement of 297 kilometers long rusted water supply pipeline in the provincial capital since its inception in September 2014. The company has been replacing rusted water supply lines across the city to ensure that Peshawarites have easy access to clean drinking water a basic human right,

said the spokesman of WSSP Hassan Ali. Besides, it reconstructed and rehabilitated 100 tube wells and replaced old machinery that increased water pressure and addressed complaints of tail-end consumers, he added. The company also installed Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system on 46 tube wells with financial assistance from UNICEF to measure water extraction automatically.

Conversion of outdated farming practices with advanced production technologies stressed

PESHAWAR (APP): Patron in Chief Pakistan Fruits and Vegetable Association (PFVA), Waheed Ahmad has stressed on the conversion of outdated farming practices with advanced production technologies by adopting the climate smart innovations to improve agriculture and horticulture produce in the country. These views were expressed by him while speaking at National Dialogue on Agriculture Research organized with the objective of harnessing the agriculture potential to boost the economy of Pakistan. Speaking as keynote speaker on the topic of High Value Horticulture, Novel Propagation Techniques and Innovative Management Studies, the PFVA chief observed that the adoption of advanced production technique was key to increasing our per acre yield and combating the threats posed by

climatic changes to agriculture and horticulture sectors. Waheed Ahmad shared that Pakistan’s share in global market of fresh fruits and vegetables was very nominal only 0.37 percent, contributing US Dollar 850 million in the world market of US dollar 229 billion. The country’s agriculture produce can be enhanced manifold by opting for new methods of farming and optimal utilization of available resources like higher yield from small area due to more number of trees, he reiterated. He also suggested for promotion of high value horticulture and asked Department of Plant Protection Department (DPP) to devise SOPs for allowing progressive farmers and processors to import disease free plant material. PFVA’s head also suggested government to install Model pilot irrigation projects in all districts for

encouraging farmers to adopt sprinkle and drip irrigation practices to reduce water losses. Local companies should be encouraged to make joint ventures with foreign enterprises to locally manufacture the materials, he added. Government should facilitate small scaled farmers by providing loans and insurance of crop of national interest. Similarly organic farming practices be promoted to fetch the best return and originally certified fruits and vegetables should be introduced through which 400 percent increase in profitability of horticulture produce can be achieved, Waheed claimed. The Patron in Chief PFVA demanded creation of a Research and Development Fund with a worth of Rs. 3 billion over a period of three years for the promotion of high value horticulture produce. He recommended for upgrading of university

curriculum of agriculture and horticulture disciplines to match to current advancement in the industry. Research projects in varsities should be aligned with industrial needs and the student be provided advanced hands on training to cater modern requirements of the industry. Pakistan spends huge foreign exchange in 2021 on the import of garlic to the tune of US dollar 68.7 million and ginger to the tune of US dollar 112 million, he added. Indigenous production of these products needs to be focused to safeguard the hard earned foreign exchange, he continued. Apprising the participants about Horticulture Vision 2030, Chairman PFVA said its goals is to increase country export of fresh fruits and vegetable to US dollar one billion in two years, US dollar 2.5 billion in five years and US dollar six billion in ten years.



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Commemoration ceremony of the 100th Birth Anniversary of the Azerbaijani National leader held in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (Adnan Hameed): A special musical concert was organized by the Embassy of Azerbaijan to commemorate the 100th Birth Anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the National leader of Azerbaijan was held on Tuesday in a private hotel in Islamabad. The event was witnessed by the ambassadors of different countries, bureaucrats, and friends of Azerbaijan along with a large number of media outlets. The event started with the national anthems of both the countries Azerbaijan and Pakistan, after which a special documentary film was also



shown regarding the professional life of the national leader of Azerbaijan. In addition, a group of Azerbaijani musicians comprising of Ms. AlamaKhanim – Mugham Singer, Mr. Massim Islamov – Tar Player, and Mr. Alvin Novruzov – Kamancha player,

gave performances with distinctive national characteristics at the commemoration ceremony and received good applause from the audience with their performance. Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination Mr. Abdul Qadir Patel witnessed the event as a Chief Guest. During his opening remarks, Mr. Khazar Farhadov, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan said: the year 2023 was declared the “Year of Heydar Aliyev” in our country, and this important occasion is being celebrated solemnly in Azerbaijan and abroad.

Bilawal to represent country in SCO CFM meeting in India today

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will lead Pakistan delegation at Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Council of Foreign Ministers meeting being held in Goa, India on Thursday. According to Foreign Office, Pakistan delegation is attending the meeting at the invitation of India's Minister for External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar who is current Chair of the SCO, CFM. The Foreign Office said our participation in the meeting reflects Pakistan's commitment to the SCO Charter and processes and the importance that Islamabad accords to the region in its foreign policy priorities.



Since becoming a member in 2017, Pakistan has been actively and constructively contributing in all SCO activities to realize its multi-sectoral aims and objectives in a mutually beneficial manner. On the sidelines of the CFM meeting, the Foreign Minister will also meet with his counterparts of friendly countries.

Visit of Chinese Foreign Minister to Pakistan



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): At the invitation of Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, China's State Councillor and Foreign Minister H.E. Qin Gang would pay an official visit to Pakistan on 5 and 6 May 2023. This would be his first official visit to Pakistan since assuming office. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and State Councillor Qin Gang will co-chair the 4th round of the Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue. The Strategic Dialogue is a structured mechanism that reviews bilateral cooperation in key areas. The two sides will reaffirm the abiding vitality of the All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership; develop a roadmap for multidimensional cooperation between Pakistan and China; and discuss the evolving regional and global landscape. The 3rd round of the Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue took place in July 2021 in Chengdu, China.

Huge quantity of liquor recovered

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): City police claimed to have recovered a huge quantity of liquor during a crackdown on Thursday. According to the spokesman, a drug peddler named Munawar Lohar was arrested with a large number of wine bottles under his custody from the area of old Sabzi Mandi road, near Taj marriage club in the limits of civil lines police Station. Police have started the investigation and registered against the culprit.

Kisan training camp organised in Rangpur

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): Kisan training camp was organised at sub-tehsil Rangpur of district Muzaffargarh like other ruler places 'as per the vision of CM Punjab'. According to an agricultural department source, modern ways of cultivation with reaping healthy crops were taught in the program attended by a large number of growers hailing across the region. Agricultural officer of Rangpur, Zahid Farooq pressed on farmers to keep in contact with an agricultural officer to boost per-acre cultivation in their fields. He said committees were being constituted at the village level with regard to the cotton awareness drive. He advised them to complete cultivation by approved seeds of cotton cultivation by the 31st of May to reap the desired result.

Child's body recovered from canal

MULTAN (APP): The dead body of a minor girl was recovered from a canal near Adda bum mor in Jabalpur Pirwalla. The command and control centre of Rescue 1122 and police reached the site. According to the rescuer, the body was found to be floating on the canal water. The father said the child had gone out to buy milk but could not get back despite passing three days. The body was handed over to the heirs. Police have started the investigation.

President for implementing disability quota in public, private sector jobs

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday called for implementation of the disability quota for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in public and private sector jobs to make PWDs financially independent. The president, in a follow-up meeting on framework for classification of disabilities, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, said that almost 12-14% of Pakistan's population suffered from some form of disability and the government and private sector needed to provide them employment for their financial empowerment. The meeting was attended by senior officials of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Government of Pakistan. During the meeting, the president said that disability quota should be implemented as per its actual spirit, adding that chambers of commerce and industries, banks, multi-national corporations, trade bodies, and other private sector organizations needed to employ differently-abled people (DAPs) as per their skill sets and nature of disabilities. He said that Pakistan must focus on providing DAPs with skill-based education



to help them secure jobs and ensure their inclusion in the mainstream of socio-economic activities. President Alvi highlighted the need to develop close coordination among relevant stakeholders to impart skills to PWDs as per their special needs as well as market requirements. He underscored that training institutes and relevant government organizations should accelerate their efforts to equip PWDs with marketable skills and link them with potential employers in the private sector to provide them suitable jobs in accordance with their skills and quota. He also urged the need to provide disability certificates to PWDs in a quick, easy and hassle-free manner enabling them to benefit from different schemes and facilities being offered by the government.

Roundtable with Danila Ganich on “75th anniversary of Pakistan-Russia Diplomatic Relations”



ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Roundtable with Danila Ganich, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Pakistan, on 'Commemorating 75th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Pakistan and Russia.' The discussion was chaired by Amb. Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI. Participants included: Ms. Sahar Kamran, former Member Senate of Pakistan; Lt. Gen. Asad Durrani (R), Ambassador Nadeem Riyaz, President, IRS; Ambassador Shah Jamal, former Ambassador of Pakistan; Ambassador Tasneem Aslam, former Ambassador of Pakistan and Spokesperson; Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, DG, ISSRA, NDU; Dr. Tughrul Yamin, Senior Research Fellow, IPS; Dr. Farah Naz, Assistant Professor, NUST; Dr. Shabir Ahmed Khan, Director, Area Study Centre for China,

Russia & CARs; Dr. Asma Naveed, Professor, NUML; Dr. Afia Malik, Research Economist, PIDE; Mr. Ali Salman, Executive Director, PRIME and Research Associates from CASS and IPRI. Dr. Neelum Nigar, Director CSP, and the research faculty of ISSI also participated in the Roundtable. In his welcome remarks, DG ISSI Amb. Sohail Mahmood outlined the different phases of Pakistan-Russia relations over the past 75 years – including in the cold war era, the post-cold war years, and the current phase. He underlined that the relationship, currently, was marked by friendship, increased mutual understanding, and growing cooperation across myriad domains. Noting convergent interests across a range of regional and international issues, he observed that the desire for enhanced cooperation was driven by Pakistan's deepening engagement with the Eurasian region and the imperatives of geo-economics.

Meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue held with Senator Saleem Mandviwalla in Chair.

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue was held here at Parliament House on Wednesday with Senator Saleem Mandviwalla in Chair. The Senate Committee took up the issue of maltreatment of customs officials towards Pashtoon Businessmen. Senator Sardar Muhammad Shafiq Tareen, the mover of the matter, stated that several raids have been made against the Pashtoon Businessmen who were running their businesses in Sindh. He further added that there must be a clear distinction between legal and illegal goods because the goods cleared by Chaman, Quetta, and Taftan authorities are specially targeted. Chairman FBR stated that raids were not conducted on the basis of ethnicity, however, it was primarily a part of the government anti-smuggling drive. Senator Anwar ul Haq Kakar pointed out the oil smuggling

in Balochistan and apprised that around 2 to 3 crore liters of Iranian oil enter every day in Pakistan. Senator Saleem Mandviwalla directed the Chairman FBR to look into the matter. However, Senator Farooq Hamid Naek questioned how smuggled items have managed to reach local markets and why action has been taken against local businessmen instead of smugglers who are primarily responsible for damaging the economy and financial system of the country. Asim Ahmad, Chairman FBR, apprised the committee that Prime Minister Mian Shabbaz Sharif has constituted the committee to curb the menace of smuggling and consequently, the committee has incorporated sugar, wheat, and urea in essential items list in order to control their smuggling. Chairman Committee directed the FBR to hold meetings with local businessmen so that their issues could be resolved.

PTI's politics based on lies, fake narratives : Ahmad Yar Hunjra

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-N senior Leader Malik Ahmad Yar Hunjra on Thursday criticized the previous government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for the current economic mess and said that politics of PTI leadership revolve around fake narratives and lies. “The Riyasat-e-Madina was founded on principles of good conduct but on the other hand, PTI's politics is only based on lies and propaganda as every promised

they made to the nation was a lie”, he said while talking to ptv news channel. He said that PML-N had a track record of delivering to the nation, adding, in 2013, we eliminated the menace of load shedding and flushed out terrorists. He said Imran Khan used an undemocratic attitude and during his four-year rule, he never had a meeting with the opposition leaders, adding, Khan established such a bad tradition in politics which we can not even recall.

Coalition government to complete its constitutional term: SAPM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister Muhammad Ahmed Khan Thursday said that all institutions need to work within the constitutional limits and a coalition government will complete its constitutional tenure as the general election will be held on time. Talking to a Private news channel, he said that the ruling coalition had shown all the flexibility that was needed and showed their respect for a constitution, adding, through dialogue, the government wanted to make things acceptable to all. He stressed that a well-functioning judiciary is the need of the hour in the country to restore

the confidence of the people, and safeguard democracy. Replying to a question, he said flexibility in dialogue is the only way forward to bring the country out of the crisis, adding, it was the stance of the government that the National Assembly, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies should not be dissolved before the time. He said that PML-N set aside its differences and took all the political forces on board to bring the country out of the current challenges. To another question, he replied the dissolution of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies was a strategy to escape from Toshakhana cases against him.

ANF recovers over 74 kg drugs; arrests nine

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in six operations managed to recover over 74 kg drugs and arrested nine accused including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He said in an operation near Taramari Chowk in Islamabad, ANF recovered 850 grams charras and rounded up an accused resident of Islamabad. In another operation near Peshawar Hayatabad Tatara Park, ANF intercepted a car and recovered 45.6 kg charras from secret cavities. Two accused residents of Attock were also netted during the operation. The spokesman informed that in a

third operation conducted near Haripur Railway Road, ANF recovered 600 grams charras and arrested an accused resident of Haripur. In the fourth operation near the Faisalabad Amirpura area, eight kg heroin was recovered from the possession of two drug smugglers residents of Peshawar netted during the operation. 12 kg heroin was recovered from the Chaman Friendship Gate Check Post area and a resident of Chaman was nabbed. In the sixth operation near the Quetta-Sariab road bus stop, 7.2 kg charras was recovered from the possession of two women residents of Sukkar.

Indian troops arrest four youth in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): In Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Indian troops arrested four youth in Srinagar and Jammu region. The troops during a raid arrested a youth who was working in a hotel as a driver in Srinagar. Indian troops and police personnel arrested three more youth who were travelling in

a truck in Kathua district of Jammu region, KMS reported. Meanwhile, the occupation authorities have deployed more Indian troops and police personnel in Srinagar and other areas ahead of the G-20 meeting being hosted by the Narendra Modi-led fascist Indian government in Srinagar later this month.

Training session for intending Hajj pilgrims held

SIALKOT (APP): The ministry of religious affairs organized a training programme for intending Hajj pilgrims at Canal City, Wazirabad Road. Under the supervision of In Charge Hajj Operation Syed Mujeeb Shah, prominent scholar Maulana Imran Bashir imparted training and gave awareness to pilgrims. Mujeeb Shah said arrange-

ments had been made for the training of 2,200 pilgrims from Sialkot district and surrounding areas, adding that stalls had also been set up outside the training centre where various items for pilgrims had been placed. The lectures of scholars and information regarding Hajj would also be providedthrough 3-D video, he said.

Police net 11 drug peddlers on recovery of over 10 kg charras

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers conducted raids in different areas and rounded up 11 accused on recovery of over 10 kg charras. According to a police spokesman, Waris Khan police held Saleem for having 1700 grams charras and Babar for possessing 1710 grams charras. Rattaamral police rounded up Niaz Ahmed for having 1350 grams charras while Sadiqabad police nabbed Husnain for having 1260 grams charras. Wah Cantt police ap-

prehended Kabir with two kg charras and Rawat police arrested an accused namely Mohsin on recovery of 1260 grams charras. Other accused were sent behind the bars on recovery of charras. Separate cases have been registered against all accused while further investigations are underway. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani had directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against drug peddlers, bootleggers and other law-breakers, he added.

Joint working group formed for best traffic management

FAISALABAD, (APP): A joint working group comprising various departments was constituted for ensuring uninterrupted traffic flow on roads. A spokesperson said here on Thursday that a first meeting of the working group was held at the office of traffic police which was attended by the officers from traffic police, regional Transport Authority, National highways Authority, Patrolling police, Rescue-1122, Metropolitan Corporation, Motorway police, Environment Department, and Road Engineering Department. The meeting unanimously evolved a strategy for bringing down ratio of road accidents, removal of encroachments,

improving parking system, ensuring fitness of public transport, stopping overloading and over speeding on highways as well as smoke emitting vehicles on roads, marking lines, lanes and zebra crossing on all roads, repair of roads, maintenance of traffic signals, street lights etc. Meanwhile, CTO with Chief Officer Municipal Corporation held a meeting with traders and loader transport union and took them into confidence for improving traffic flow in all the eight bazaars of clock tower chowk and removal of encroachments as well. They also ensured for including their proposals in the agenda of joint working group meeting.

Over 20 shelter homes set up across province: DG Social Welfare

MULTAN (APP): Director General (DG) Social Welfare Punjab, Mudassar Riaz Malik, on Thursday, said that the shelter home constructed at the cost of Rs 75 million in the city would be inaugurated in the current month. He expressed these views during his visit to Shelter home Nishtar Hospital and took a briefing about the project. He was accompanied by Vice Chancellor (VC)Nishtar Medical University Rana Altaf and Medical Superintendent (MS) Nishtar Hospital Dr Rao Amjad. He informed that

the caretaker Punjab Chief Minister (CM) has given the task to make the shelter home functional at the earliest as it's the second one in South Punjab. The DG said that accommodation and food facilities would be provided to 144 men and women in the center. He said that steps were being taken to upgrade old age home adding that reforms were to be implemented in the department in a true sense. Mudassar Riaz informed that over 20 shelter homes had been established across the province.

Planning for plantation on Pasrur road completed

SIALKOT (APP): Deputy Commissioner Sialkot Adnan Mehmood Awan said that under the Clean and Green Sialkot program, the planning for plantation on Pasrur Road was completed. A total of more than 5,000 saplings of various types were planned to be planted on the road. The remaining targets regarding planting on the three main highways (Khawaja Safdar Road, Shahabpura Road, Kashmir Road) and the process of replacement of damaged plants would be started soon. He expressed these views while addressing the meeting regarding beautification here on Thursday. He said that fruit trees were planted in

Miyawaki forest. Irrigation system on Khawaja Safdar Road, Kashmir Road should be completed this week,he stressed. Deputy Commissioner directed the officers that curb stones on Wazirabad road should be fixed immediately and fence should be installed to protect the plants. He said that ongoing plantation work on Shahabpura Road should be completed by May 5. Deputy Commissioner directed that the plant supply company should arrange for prompt replacement of wilted plants and the company should complete the number of saplings on the highways where there are less saplings planted than the target.

PESSI decides to gear up construction work of hospitals

LAHORE (APP): It has been decided to gear up construction work of all under construction social security hospitals to provide medical facilities to registered workers in their native districts. According to a spokesman for the PESSI, Commissioner Punjab Social Security Institution Kusr Khan started monitoring the construction work and visited Sargodha in this regard where she inspected the under construction so-

cial security hospital building. She was briefed that the building would be completed by October 2023. She instructed the contractor to gear up speed of construction and directed him to submit weekly progress report. Kusr Kahn said more than thirty-five thousand workers and their families would have medical benefits from the hospital and it will be one of the biggest hospitals of the PESSI in Sargodha.

Extensive campaign launched to overcome outburst of jaundice AJK’s city

MIRPUR (APP): An extensive drive had been launched to prevent the rising outbreak of jaundice in lake-side Mirpur city with full collective efforts by the district administration, State health department, and public health engineering department, it was officially said. “In the wake of continual further improvement to this direction, all the hotels, shops and food vendors have been given a week to clean their water tanks immediately installing filters to ensure supply of hygienic drink-

ing water”, Deputy Commissioner Ch. Amjad Iqbal said. “Action will be taken against involved restaurants and the sellers of other food items,” the DC said while addressing an emergency meeting of the concerned departments held late Wednesday in the wake of the steps to combat the disease in the city and the rest of the district. ”It was decided in the meeting that the Department of Public Health Engineering will gradually clean all the supply tanks in the city. Citizens should clean the wa-

ter tanks of their homes and use air or filtered water because of the spread of jaundice due to cleaning, the supply of water from the main water tank supplying to different sectors would be stopped for two days from May 5. Therefore, the citizens should clean the tanks of their houses and store water beforehand.” The meeting decided to continue stringent measures preventive measures for the eradication of jaundice disease in the lakeside Mirpur district and the rest of the city.

IRSA releases 133,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 133,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 138,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1439.84 feet and was 41.84 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 32,600 cusecs while outflow as 30,000 cusecs. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1122.15 feet, which was 72.15 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 47,000 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa , Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 44,500, 52,800, 37,200 and 9,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 32,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 17,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Three held for decanting

FAISALABAD (APP): Jhang Bazaar police held three accused for re-filling liquefied petroleum gas here on Thursday. A police team with civil defence officials raided and arrested Jamil, Javed, and Tahir asthey were allegedly involved in decanting. Police registered a case against the accused and sent them behind bars.

Two medical stores sealed

SARGODHA (APP): Two medical stores were sealed for selling illegal medicines here on Thursday. According to official sources, a team headed by Deputy Drug Controller Dr Faheem Zia conducted raids at various medical stores to check quality of drugs and licence of the stores. The team sealed Raja and Shahzad medical stores in Shahpur city. The challans were sent to the District Quality Control board for further action.

Tarar terms Khan’s medical report ‘fake’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Interior Attaullah Tarar on Thursday termed medical report of infection in leg as ‘fake’ and has urged all courts to reject it. “Why’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan preparing medical reports from his own medical institute ‘Shaukat Khanum’ and why didn’t he go to proper medical checkup from government hospitals or other well reputed private medical labs,” he said in a press conference here. He said that Imram Khan was playing different types of tactics on medical grounds from a long time to get relief from the courts. Tarar was also of the view that PTI workers had launched an organized social media campaign against state institutions and government officers.

Three held, drugs recovered in Quetta and Chaman raids

QUETTA (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) arrested three suspects and recovered heroin and hashish during raids conducted in Quetta and Chaman area of Balochistan. The ANF spokesperson said on Thursday, the staff of Anti-Narcotics Force, on receiving a tip-off, arrested two women residents of Sukkur while conducting an operation at the bus stop on Saryab Road in Quetta.

PM Shehbaz’s wakeup call drives world into action to tackle climate changes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, through his ardent and relentless efforts, has successfully driven the world community to immediately address the catastrophic climate change impacts that brought unprecedented devastation to Pakistan in the shape of historic monsoon flooding. As the monstrous monsoon deluge burst out inundating huge chunks of land across Pakistan, causing human casualties, affecting 33 million people besides, colossal damages amounting to over \$30 billion, the prime minister effectively and vociferously reminded the world that the natural catastrophe triggered by climate impacts of the developed countries which hit Pakistan could engulf the other regions in future. The prime minister had attended and co-chaired the Sharm El Sheikh United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) last year where he enlisted international community support. Earlier, as an acknowledgment of the proactive leadership and the global efforts of the prime minister on the climate change action plan, the United Nations Climate Change Conference – COP27,



had announced to hand him over the vice-chairmanship of the conference, jointly chaired by the prime minister along with the Egyptian president and the Norwegian prime minister. Becoming a vice president of the UN Conference of Parties (COP27) had been a global recognition for the efforts led by Pakistan over the drastic measures to cope with climate change. Among 195-member countries of the United Nations, Pakistan received the honour due to efforts of PM Shehbaz Sharif at the global and regional forums, regarding the need for an urgent climate action plan. Different heads of government, in their interaction with the premier on the sidelines of the mega climate change summit, termed his continued presence in flood-affected areas as an “extraordinary gesture”.

G20 countries’ meeting in IIOJK, clear violation of int’l law: INSPAD

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of the Institute of Peace and Development (INSPAD), an NGO active for world peace, dialogue, harmony and human rights, Dr Sardar Muhammad Tahir Tabassum on Thursday said that holding a meeting of G20 countries in the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) was a clear violation of international law and treaties. These countries should boycott the meeting and urge India to implement the UN resolutions. This meeting is a failed attempt to fool the world, by which India wants to tell that there is

peace in Occupied Kashmir, which is a complete lie and deception. In a statement issued on Thursday, Sardar Tahir Tabassum said that India wants to commit more atrocities and violate human rights on Kashmiris during the G20 meeting. The United Nations and other international organizations should stop India from this heinous act. He said that the government of Pakistan should make an immediate and effective effort at the diplomatic level to stop this meeting in Occupied Kashmir by making effective contacts with the G20 countries.

Agri deptt sets target for cotton cultivation in division

FAISALABAD (APP): The agriculture department has set a target for bringing 118,000 acres land under cotton crop cultivation in the division during the current year. The agri department would ensure provision of quality seed to farmers for completing cotton crop by May 30. Agriculture Director Chaudhry Abdul Hameed said on Thursday that the best per acre cotton produce could be achieved by adopting modern production technology.

He said an awareness campaign for farmers about cultivations methods, enhancing per acre production, use of fertilizer and pesticides were ongoing across the division. He asked farmers to follow the recommendations of the agriculture department while cultivating of cotton crop. He advised farmers to sow only approved BT varieties of cotton as they had more resistance power againstinsect attack on the crop.

Imran’s use of wheelchair to skip court appearance divine retribution: Marriyum

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Thursday said that a person (Imran’s) use of a wheelchair to skip court cases was divine retribution as he used to ridicule others for their diseases in past. In a statement, referring to Imran Khan without naming him, she said a person who made fun of Sharif’s family members’ illnesses was lying in a wheelchair today. The minister asked the PTI Chairman instead of indulging in the blame game he should

appear in the courts and provide evidence. Marriyum said Imran has constantly been changing his get-up and script according to the situation. She said Imran in fear of bail cancellation was using a wheelchair as a tactic. “If the court calls him, he has the excuses of plaster, disability, canister and now wheelchair”, she remarked. Marriyum said first, Imran played a dirty game of cypher, then apologized to the US and blamed General Bajwa, Asif Zardari and now Mohsin Naqvi for his ouster.

Two street criminals arrested; Rs 96,500 snatched cash recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): In an operation against criminal elements, Rawalpindi Police here on Thursday arrested two street criminals and recovered Rs 96,500 snatched cash, two mobile phones, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Pirwadhai police arrested two members of Wali gang including Jan Wali alias Wali, ringleader and Raheem Shah, wanted in various cases. He informed that the police

team constituted under the supervision of SHO Pirwadhai Police Station on the directives of the Superintendent of Police conducted a raid and managed to net the accused. Police also recovered Rs 96,500 cash, two mobile phones, weapons and other items from their possession. As per the preliminary police record, the criminals were also involved in other crimes, he said adding, the accused have been shifted to jail for identification parade.

Rising threat levels, Aukus subs deal boost BAE sales

LONDON (Agencies): BAE Systems, Britain's biggest defence company, said elevated threat levels from the war in Ukraine were continuing to boost sales, and in the longer term, the Aukus submarine defence pact, would help deliver growth. Demand for weapons, ammunition and military equipment has soared as Britain, the US and allies support Ukraine and look to shore up their own stocks, while in the Asia-Pacific



ic region, growing threats are also driving military spend. Aukus, the deal between the US, Britain and Australia to provide Australia with

nuclear-powered submarines, was signed in March and BAE said it would be "significant" for the company. BAE also said that Finland's membership of Nato, which it joined in April, could lift sales with BAE's position in the Eurofighter Typhoon military jet and its shareholding in missile company MBDA likely to benefit as Finland raises defence spending to meet Nato commitments.

China's factory activity dips in further sign of economic imbalance

BEIJING (Agencies): China's factory activity struggled in April, a private survey showed, adding to signs of imbalance within the economic recovery. The China Caixin manufacturing purchasing managers index dropped to 49.5 last month from 50 in March, pointing to a contraction in factory output for the first time since January, Caixin and S&P Global said in a statement Thursday. The index covers mainly smaller and ex-



port-oriented businesses compared to the official PMI, which unexpectedly fell in April to 49.2. "This suggests that China's economic recovery

significantly slowed after Covid-19 infections peaked at the start of this year," Wang Zhe, senior economist at Caixin Insight Group, said in a statement accompanying the data. "It remains to be seen if the rebound is sustainable after a short-term release of pent-up demand." China's economy expanded at the fastest pace in a year last quarter, largely driven by consumer spending as the nation ended its Covid curbs.

Google, Meta push back against Canada's online news bill

TORONTO (Agencies): Google and Meta would withdraw access to news articles in Canada if legislation compelling internet companies to pay news publishers is passed, company executives told Canadian lawmakers on Wednesday. Canada's proposed legislation would force platforms like Google parent Alphabet Inc and Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc to negotiate commercial deals and pay Canadian news publishers for



their content, part of a broader global trend to make tech firms pay for news. Google and Meta would withdraw access to news articles in Can-

ada if legislation compelling internet companies to pay news publishers is passed, company executives told Canadian lawmakers on Wednesday. Canada's proposed legislation would force platforms like Google parent Alphabet Inc and Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc to negotiate commercial deals and pay Canadian news publishers for their content, part of a broader global trend to make tech firms pay for news.

Oil's selloff worsens with 7.2% tumble at Asia open

SINGAPORE (Agencies): Oil futures endured a roller-coaster ride as Chinese traders returned after a break, first collapsing to the lowest level since 2021 in a chaotic opening spell before erasing losses to trade higher. West Texas Intermediate futures initially tanked by as much as 7.2% at the start of trading amid concerns that a looming US recession would hurt demand. The steep drop was pared, then overturned by



mid-morning in Asia. "It was panic selling again, amplified by algorithmic trading, no doubt," said Vandana Hari, founder of consultancy Vanda Insights, referring to the selloff. Oil has retreated 14% this year, showing that a plan by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies to regain control of the market by cutting output from this month isn't yet working. The losses have been driven by concerns that global growth is slowing, potentially hurting energy demand.

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Biden administration OKs boost in Chinese airline flights to US

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The US will allow Chinese airlines to increase US passenger services to 12 weekly round-trips, the Transportation Department (USDOT) said on Wednesday, equal to the number of flights Beijing has permitted for American carriers. It is a boost from the eight weekly round-trip flights currently allowed by Chinese carriers and matches what Beijing

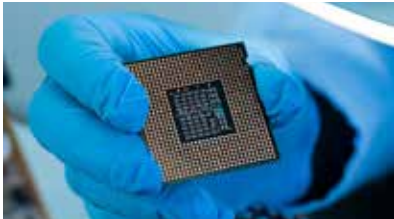


has permitted for US carriers, but a small fraction of the more than 150 round-trip flights allowed by

each side before restrictions were imposed in early 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. USDOT's order said its goal was "a gradual, broader reopening of the US-China air services market." China in March reopened its borders to foreign tourists for the first time in the three years after abandoning Covid-related border controls for its own citizens in January.

US chip ban barely slowed China's AI industry

BEIJING (Agencies): US microchip export controls imposed last year to freeze China's development of supercomputers used to develop nuclear weapons and artificial intelligence systems like ChatGPT are having only minimal effects on China's tech sector. The rules restricted shipments of Nvidia Corp and Advanced Micro Devices Inc chips that have become the global technology industry's standard for developing chatbots and other AI systems. But



Nvidia has created variants of its chips for the Chinese market that are slowed down to meet US rules. Industry experts told Reuters the newest one – the Nvidia H800, an-

nounced in March – will likely take 10% to 30% longer to carry out some AI tasks and could double some costs compared with Nvidia's fastest US chips. Even the slowed Nvidia chips represent an improvement for Chinese firms. Tencent Holdings, one of China's largest tech companies, in April estimated that systems using Nvidia's H800 will cut the time it takes to train its largest AI system by more than half, from 11 days to four days.

SAMA raises interest rates following US Fed's move

RIYADH (Agencies): The Saudi Central Bank, also known as SAMA, has raised its main interest rate by 25 basis points in line with the US Federal Reserve's quantitative tightening to try to counter inflation. The bank raised its repurchase agreement rate by 25 basis points to 5.75 percent, and the rate of reverse repurchase agreement by 25 basis points to 5.25 percent. The



Fed's quarter-point interest rate hike follows months of larger increases, as

it hiked 25 basis points in February, 50 basis points in December, and 75 basis points in November, September, July and June. Rising interest rates increase the cost of borrowing for consumers, leading to more expensive mortgage bills and loan repayments — something that can lead to reduced spending on other items as people seek to cut outgoings.

Microsoft expands AI access despite tech fears

SAN FRANCISCO (Agencies): Microsoft on Thursday expanded public access to its generative artificial intelligence programmes, despite fears that tech firms are rushing ahead too quickly with potentially dangerous technology. The AI-enhanced features of the company's Bing search engine and Edge internet browser are now open for anyone to use, Yusuf Mehdi, corporate vice president, said in a blog post.



"This means that it will now be easier than ever for everyone to try the new Bing and Edge by simply signing into Bing with your Microsoft

Account," Mehdi said. The services have been enhanced with the ability to work with images as well as text, and Microsoft intends to add video to the mix, according to the executive. A Bing "Image Creator" was recently integrated into its AI chatbot's repertoire, allowing it to generate visual, as well as written, content, Mehdi said. "We are expanding Image Creator to all languages in Bing," he added.

Adidas faces pressure to find Yeezy fix as sales decline

LONDON (Agencies): Adidas is set to update investors on Friday about the unsold Yeezy shoes that have put the German sportswear giant in a predicament since it cut ties with Kanye West over his anti-Semitic comments late last year. Executives are expected to tackle the issue when the company reports first-quarter results on May 5 which will likely show a 4% decline in net sales to US\$5.07 billion, according to a company-compiled consensus. Investors have high hopes new CEO Bjorn Gulden can turn Adidas around: the stock has gained around 65% since Nov 4 when the former Puma CEO was first floated as a successor to Kasper Rorsted, despite Adidas warning it could make a US\$700 million



lion loss this year if it writes the Yeezy shoes off entirely. Investors have high hopes new CEO Bjorn Gulden can turn Adidas around: the stock has gained around 65% since Nov 4 when the former Puma CEO was first floated as a successor to Kasper Rorsted, despite Adidas warning it could make a US\$700 million loss this year if it writes the Yeezy shoes off entirely.

Tianqi weighs investing in Mercedes-Geely Smart venture

BEIJING (Agencies): China's Tianqi Lithium Corp is considering buying a minority stake in Smart Automobile Co as part of the iconic minicar maker's latest private funding round, according to people familiar with the matter. The Chinese miner is in advanced talks to invest US\$100 million to \$200 million in Smart, a joint venture between Germany's Mercedes-Benz Group AG and Chinese automaker Zhejiang Geely Holding Group Co, the people said. The transaction may value Smart at several billion dollars, the people said, asking not to be identified because the matter isn't public. An agreement could be reached as soon as in the next few weeks, the people said. While discussions are advanced, they could still be delayed or even fall apart, the



people said. A representative for Mercedes declined to comment, while representatives for Geely, Smart and Tianqi didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. While discussions are advanced, they could still be delayed or even fall apart, the people said. A representative for Mercedes declined to comment, while representatives for Geely, Smart and Tianqi didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

ECB to raise rates for 7th time in inflation fight

FRANKFURT (Agencies): The European Central Bank will raise interest rates for the seventh meeting in a row on Thursday as its long fight against stubborn inflation continues, with only the size of the move still open to debate. The central bank for the 20-country eurozone has already lifted rates by a record 350 basis points since July in the hope of stopping runaway price growth. But getting inflation back to its 2% target is still years away, leaving policymakers with no choice but to tighten policy again this month and beyond. A 25 basis point move, a slowdown after three straight 50 basis point hikes, appears the most likely outcome, although the bigger



increase is still a possibility at what is almost certainly not the end of a historic tightening cycle. The clincher could be a compromise among policymakers on what signals to send about future increases. Conservative "hawks", who hold a comfortable majority in the Governing Council, are leaning towards a bigger increase.

White House warns of economic fallout if US defaults

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The White House warned on Wednesday of a future of tumbling stocks and spiking unemployment if the US defaults on its debt payments, a looming possibility as Democrats and Republicans fight over national spending. The president's Council of Economic Advisers, a top federal consultative body, warned that if the US government stops meeting its financial obligations, the resulting economic shocks could cause eight million job losses this summer and a 6% drop in GDP. The stock market could drop 45% in the third quarter, the council added. Even a brief interruption in payments would increase unemployment as the econo-



my tumbles into a recession, the economists said. President Joe Biden is at odds with Republicans in the lower chamber of Congress, which they control, over national spending and public debt. The Democratic president has asked Republicans to raise the country's debt ceiling – the amount of debt it is legally allowed to take on.

Asian stocks whipsaw, dollar falls after Fed hike

HONG KONG (Agencies): Asian stocks were mixed Thursday after Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell played down the prospect of interest-rate cuts and as fresh turmoil in the US banking sector renewed fears of a credit squeeze. Chinese shares whipsawed as they reopened a three-

day break, while Hong Kong equities gained. Australian and South Korean shares fell. Futures contracts for the S&P 500 edged lower after the benchmark dropped on Wednesday following the Fed's 25 basis-point rate hike and commentary that played down expectations for cuts later in the year.

World Bank board elects US nominee Banga as president

WASHINGTON (Agencies): The World Bank's board of governors on Wednesday elected former Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga to a five-year term as president, ushering in an Indian-born finance and development expert to revamp the lender to tackle climate change and other global crises. Banga, 63, was nominated for the post by US president Joe Biden in late February and was the sole contender to replace departing World Bank chief David Malpass, an economist and former US Treasury official

who served in the Trump administration. He starts the new job on June 2. The election came after World Bank board members interviewed Banga for four hours on Monday. Malpass' last day at the bank will be June 1. The decision came in a vote by 24 of the board's members, with Russia abstaining, instead of the usual consensus-based process, a source familiar with the process said. Biden congratulated Banga on his "resounding approval" to run the World Bank.

Napoli wins 1st title since Maradona played for the club

ROME (Agencies): Napoli won its first Italian soccer league title since the days when Diego Maradona played for the club, sealing the trophy with a 1-1 draw at Udinese on Thursday. The “scudetto” (championship) set off wild scenes of celebrations throughout Naples, inside the stadium in Udine and beyond. Maradona led Napoli to its only previous Serie A titles in 1987 and 1990. League scoring leader Victor Osimhen equalized for Napoli early in the second half by redirecting



in a rebound after Sandi Lovric had put Udinese ahead early on. Napoli moved an insurmountable 16

points ahead of second-place Lazio with five matches still to play. When Lorenzo Insigne, Dries Mertens and Kalidou Koulibaly left Napoli after several years of near misses, many thought the likelihood of a first Serie A title since the days of Diego Maradona went out the door with them. Little did they know that an unknown winger from Georgia and a not-so famous striker from Nigeria were going to pick up the pieces and lead the team right to the top.

PSG to shift focus following likely exit of Lionel Messi

MANCHESTER (Agencies): Lionel Messi’s impending exit from Paris Saint-Germain could mark the beginning of the end of the French soccer club’s era of excess. The Argentina great’s departure after this season has the potential to be every bit as significant as the host of superstar signings since Qatari money transformed PSG into one of the richest clubs in the world. Barring a sudden change of heart from either side, Messi is set to leave when his current contract expires in a few weeks. While that paves the way for the



seven-time Ballon d’Or winner to earn a reported \$400 million a year in Saudi Arabia, it also gives PSG a chance to pivot away from a strategy that hasn’t

quite worked out and turn instead to developing local talent. Owned by Qatar Sports Investments since 2011, PSG have dominated French soccer and signed some of the biggest names in the sport, including Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and Messi. But the team have yet to win European club soccer’s biggest prize, the Champions League. If anything, PSG are slipping further away from the trophy they crave the most after back-to-back eliminations in the round of 16 over the past two seasons.

LIV’s Lee Westwood slams European golf for being ‘in bed’ with PGA Tour

LONDON (Agencies): Lee Westwood has hit out at the European Tour for being “fully in bed” with the US PGA Tour circuit, adding that it was now like a “feeder” for American golf. Westwood and fellow Ryder Cup stars Ian Poulter and Sergio Garcia resigned Wednesday from the European Tour and so will be ineligible to represent the continent in the latest edition of the biennial contest against the US in Rome later this year. The trio have all joined the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit. Last month, the European Tour won its legal battle with LIV players after they appealed against punish-



ments the tour wanted to impose on those who took part in the inaugural LIV event last year. Former world No. 1 Westwood, 2017 Masters champion Garcia and Poulter have 53 European Tour victories between them. Twelve

players, including Westwood, Poulter and Richard Bland, appealed against the sanctions imposed last year. The case arose when players requested releases to play in the LIV Golf event at the Centurion Club in England in June. Those requests were denied but the players competed regardless and were fined £100,000 (\$125,000) and suspended from the Scottish Open and two other events. Westwood, regarded as one of the best golfers of his generation never to have won one of the sport’s four major championships, said he had paid the fine and was keen to “move on.”

Napoli fans celebrate again in anticipation of soccer title

NAPLES (Agencies): Napoli fans are celebrating again in anticipation of sealing the Italian league soccer title later Thursday. Thousands of supporters turned up outside the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona in Naples hours before the team’s game at Udinese in northern Italy. Napoli can clinch their first Serie A title in more than three decades — since Maradona led the southern club to

the 1987 and 1990 championships — if it wins or draws at Udinese. Napoli missed out on a chance to clinch the title when they were held to a 1-1 draw by Salernitana on Sunday and then watched as second-place Lazio beat Sassuolo 2-0 on Wednesday to again delay the celebration. Still, Napoli hold a 15-point lead over Lazio with six matches to play and it’s seemingly only a matter of time be-

fore the title becomes official for the Partenopei. No team south of Milan or Turin have won the Italian league since Roma claimed the title in 2001. The stadium in Naples will be open for fans to watch the game against Udinese on giant screens and a capacity crowd of more than 50,000 is expected. Also, 11,000 Napoli fans are expected to follow the team in Udine.

First-ever women’s polo tournament in Saudi Arabia to take place in November

RIYADH (Agencies): The first-ever women’s polo tournament in the Kingdom will take place in November at Al-Ittihad Academy Stadiums at the Nofa Equestrian Club Resort, near Riyadh, the Saudi Polo Federation has announced. A Saudi women’s polo team will compete against Arab and international opposition for the first time at the event. The federation and Al-Hawafir Sports Company, the tournament’s offi-



cial partner, are working with leading stables in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam to help the Saudi play-

ers prepare for the tournament. Fashion shows featuring designers from the participating countries will take place on the sidelines of the tournament, organizers said. Omar Zaidan, the president of the federation, said it is working to promote women’s sports and raise awareness of polo in line with the federation’s own strategy and that of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

Nepal makes the headlines with Asia Premier Cup title

NEPAL (Agencies): At the beginning of the Asia Premier Cup, it looked like Nepal and the UAE were the strongest teams, the ones the others had to beat if they wished to claim the prize of progressing to the Asia Cup in September. This proved to be the case, the two teams resuming a fierce rivalry in a rain-affected final, which needed to be extended into the reserve day for a result to be achieved. Nepal emerged victorious to the delight of their fervent supporters. This delight was expressed not just at the ground but widely on social media. Two themes of the postings were clear. First, there were pointed references to the appearance of a match report on the International Cricket Council’s website. Second was the fear that the Asia Cup would not take place because of



political tensions between India and Pakistan. Both themes betray the emotion which cricket engenders in Nepal. It has to be assumed that the reference to the ICC report reflects a long-standing feeling in Nepal and, perhaps, among Associate Members, that the game’s governing body does not recognize and report on their matches and performances in sufficient depth. This would be a surprising accusation, if true, since one of the

ICC’s objectives is to grow and promote the game internationally, something that it can claim to be achieving. One aspect of this promotion was its collaboration with Emerging Cricket. This voluntary organization was started in late 2018 by a former CEO of Cricket Hong Kong as a WhatsApp chat group. The vision was to change the way that cricket beyond the Full Members was projected to the world. As part of its growing coverage via blogs, interviews, reports and commentary for live streams, Emerging Cricket established a partnership with the ICC to create a weekly Global Game column that was shared with the ICC’s 30-million plus social audience. Since late November 2021, the column no longer appears on the ICC website.

Brown scores 25, Celtics spoil Embiid’s return in 121-87 victory

BOSTON: The Celtics walked off the court angry and frustrated after giving up home-court advantage in their series-opening loss to the 76ers. Boston called on those emotions — and their defense — to dominate in Game 2. Jaylen Brown scored 25 points and the Celtics rolled past Philadelphia 121-87 on Wednesday night, spoiling the re-



turn of new league MVP Joel Em-

biid. The Celtics tied the series at one game apiece as the Eastern Conference semifinal series shifts to Philadelphia for Game 3 on Friday. “I think we’ve just got to take more pride in ourselves. That’s it,” Brown said. “I just feel like we underperformed last game. We wanted to come out and play to the best of our ability. And that’s what we did.”

Allana Slater at Sydney 2000: Spotting the two-inch error that threw an Olympic final into chaos



LONDON (BBC): Under the lights and amid the sparkling sequins, Allana Slater’s words hung in the air. Slater turned and looked at her rivals. No one answered her question. “I thought that maybe they don’t speak English, maybe they don’t understand me or maybe they are so focused on what they are doing and where they are in the moment,” she told BBC World Service’s Sporting Witness. Maybe they didn’t think Slater’s words even warranted a reply. Her question was certainly odd. Slater and 35 other gymnasts were halfway through the Olympic all-around final at the 2000 Sydney Games. It was the peak of their careers. For Slater, just 16 years old, the pressure came with added decibels. More than 15,000 fans in the Sydney Superdome roared every time their compatriot approached an apparatus. But, in the midst of it all, Slater had suggested the impossible. Could the biggest stage of all really have been set too small? Up until that moment, Slater’s gymnastics career had been marked by how fast she had risen, despite a loss that would have weighed down most others. She had started gymnastics as a toddler. “I was the kid that walked on the beam at 16 months old,” she said. “I would be like ‘no don’t hold my hand, I’m fine’. For me it was really a sense of joy and love. I got to explore my physicality and push the limits of my mind and what I could do as a person.” Slater pushed those limits all the way to the world’s elite. She made her national debut aged nine and competed internationally at 11. She was 13 when she travelled to one such youth-level competition - the Junior Pacific Alliance Championships in Colorado Springs in the United States. Her father had insisted that Slater’s mother accompany her on the long journey. His concern proved well founded, for reasons

he could never have expected. Slater’s mother, stricken with grief, was there to tell her that her father’s flight from Jakarta to Singapore had nose-dived to the ground. All 104 people on board had died. “His plane went down while I was competing and I actually had a moment in competition where I forgot how to run down the vault runway,” said Slater. “I have never been able to explain it. I have never done anything like that before or after and I literally forgot how to run. “We worked out from the timeframes that that was the moment his plane was going down. “That experience gave me so much perspective. I found an inner strength I didn’t know I had. It really helped shape the person I became, not only as a strong woman but also as a strong athlete.” Olympic competition is an extreme test for every athlete. The form Slater’s took though was unique. Slater was not expected to contest the medals in Sydney. She was too young and the competition too strong. Russia’s Svetlana Khorkina, the 1997 world champion and reigning European champion, was in hot form. She had been well ahead of her nearest rivals - a pair of Romanians - in qualification. But Khorkina’s campaign had rapidly and unexpectedly derailed. After a strong display on the floor - the first of the four disciplines - she went to the vault. She didn’t even get close to landing during her warm-up attempts, coming down on her knees. Trusting her hours of practice and polish though, she stuck to her routine for the competition. After a little shout of self-encouragement on the runway, she launched into the air, off the vault, twisting and spinning. Svetlana Khorkina falls while competing on the vault in the all-around final at Sydney 2000

DAILY HOROSCOPE: MAY 5, 2023



more going on in the world than you had thought just a few days ago. Find something new to enjoy and obsess over.

– **VIRGO**: You need to get moving, even though you’d probably rather just stay at home all day. You can force yourself, though, and you’ll be glad you did. There’s a lot of fun to be had out there!

– **LIBRA**: It’s pretty easy to get out of balance today, so make sure that you’re trying new things and reining yourself in if you go too far in any one direction. You can end the day feeling just right.

– **SCORPIO**: This might not be the best time to hang out with a crowd unless that crowd shows impeccable judgment! You’re much more in a following mood than usual. Who knows where you’ll end up?

– **SAGITTARIUS**: It’s a great time to acknowledge how happy you are with at least one aspect of your life. You’re feeling all fired up and enthusiastic about it, so it’s easy to get going and tell the world!

– **CAPRICORN**: Try not to let yourself slide into despair today, no matter what you’re worried about. As long as you keep fighting, you can succeed. Your ability to tolerate the long haul is incredibly valuable.

– **ACQUARIUS**: You feel more a part of your community than ever thanks to some little spark that links you with the values of the group. It may be new or a reminder of something you thought you’d lost.

– **PISCES**: Keep your eyes, ears, heart, and mind open today. There’s a lot going on that you don’t want to miss. If you can deal with it all as it happens, you should feel great about life.

Covid: China tourism rebounds above pre-pandemic levels

BEIJING (Agencies): China's domestic tourism rebounded above pre-pandemic levels during the five-day May Day break. Tourists made 274m trips within the country during the holiday period, China's Ministry of Tourism says. That was almost 20% higher than in 2019, before the outbreak of Covid-19 triggered lockdowns across the country. Official figures also show that tourists spent \$21bn (£16.7bn) during the period, more than twice the amount seen the same time last year. "This can be seen

Talking parrot reveals man's dirty secret



HANOI (Agencies): A Vietnamese man's adultery was exposed by a talking parrot, which witnessed his steamy love affair with a house maid, Vietnamnet reported on Tuesday. The man's wife told the outlet that she has filed for divorce. According to the woman, the outlet writes, she and her husband, who own a successful furniture business, had recently decided to hire a maid to help with the house-keeping. They chose a woman on the recommendations of an acquaintance and arranged for her to live in a spare room in the house, next to where the man kept his pet parrot. Six months later, however, the woman said she began to notice that both her husband and the maid were behaving suspiciously. At first, the man was shy and awkward around the maid and would avoid staying alone at home with her, his wife said, but after a few months, he started spending more time at home in the garden, with his parrot on the rooftop. One day, the woman returned home a bit earlier than usual and noticed that her husband and the maid seemed to be hiding something. She began to suspect that the two may be having an affair. Her suspicions were confirmed sometime later when she decided to hang the laundry on the rooftop. While making her way up, the woman heard her husband's parrot mimicking strange and explicit phrases. Certain that her husband would not have intentionally taught the bird these sounds, she concluded that the parrot must have learned the phrases as a result of indiscretions in the maid's bedroom. The woman then installed a hidden camera in the maid's room and within a week, was able to capture her husband's infidelity on tape. She also reportedly discovered that the maid had initially seduced her husband in order to get more money from him. The woman has now filed for divorce and presented the videos as evidence of her husband's betrayal, Vietnamnet writes. In March, it was reported that a parrot in India was the prime witness in a murder case. The bird's 'testimony' ultimately helped put two men behind bars for life for the gruesome killing of a woman in 2014.

F-16 shipment to Taiwan delayed – minister

TAIPEI CITY (Agencies): Delivery of 66 F-16V fighter jets from the US to Taiwan has been delayed due to pandemic-related production and supply-chain problems, the island's defense minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said on Thursday. The first batch of jets was supposed to be delivered in the fourth quarter of this year, but has been pushed to the third quarter of 2024. Chiu said authorities asked the US to "make up the deficiency," and were working with the de facto US embassy in Taipei and using other diplomatic channels. "We are minimizing the damage," the minister said, adding that the full order was still expected to be delivered before 2026. The Focus Taiwan news outlet quoted Chiu as saying that the \$8 billion contract signed in 2019 did not include financial penalties for late delivery and that the US promised to provide spare parts ahead of schedule.

as a turning point of China's tourism sector. The market performance has truly returned to its 2019 level," Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy told the official state news agency Xinhua. The May Day break, which ended on Wednesday, is one of China's most important national holidays. Travel and spending during the period was closely watched for indicators of the strength, or otherwise, of the post-pandemic recovery of the world's second largest economy. Officials are looking for signs that peo-

ple have started spending again after the country's tight Covid restrictions were lifted. Outside of China, the country's tourists could help support the recovery of the global travel industry. Before Covid, China was the most important source of international tourists, with more than 150m Chinese people taking trips overseas each year. During the May Day holiday an average of 1.2m Chinese people travelled abroad each day, according to state media. That was twice last year's figure.

Russia, Ukraine, Turkiye and UN to discuss grain deal on Friday

ANKARA (Agencies): Technical personnel from Turkiye, Russia, Ukraine and the United Nations will meet on Friday to discuss a deal that allows the exports of Ukrainian grains on the Black Sea, Turkish Defence Minister, Hulusi Akar, said, Reuters reports. The evacuation of Turkish-flagged ships and grain shipments from Black Sea ports as part of the deal will be discussed, Akar said. Ankara is working to extend the deal that will expire on 18 May. Friday's meeting would be technical and it would be followed up by a deputy ministers' meeting next week, a Turkish Defence Ministry statement cited Akar as saying.

"We continue our efforts to ensure that the grain initiative continues in a fast, safe and planned manner. We got the impression from discussions that these efforts will produce positive results," Akar said. The United Nations and Turkiye brokered what was described as a package deal in July last year – the safe resumption of Ukraine's Black Sea grain exports and a UN commitment to help Russian shipments of grain and fertiliser. Russia has a list of demands it wants met for continuation of the Black Sea pact, which the UN said helps tackle a global food crisis aggravated by Moscow's war in Ukraine.

UN fails to raise enough money for Yemen oil tanker operation

NEW YORK (Agencies): The United Nations, on Thursday, fell far short of raising the money it needs for an operation to salvage 1.1 million barrels of oil from a decaying vessel moored off Yemen's coast and avert an environmental disaster, Reuters reports. UN officials have been warning for years that the Red Sea and Yemen's coastline was at risk as the Safer tanker could spill four times as much oil as the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off Alaska. The war in Yemen suspended maintenance operations on the Safer in 2015. The UN has warned its structural integrity has significantly deteriorated and it is at risk of exploding. The United Nations has said the clean-up of a spill could cost \$20 billion, but yet it is struggling to raise the \$129 million

needed to remove the oil from the Safer and transfer it to a tanker, the Nautica, the UN bought for \$55 million. Around \$99 million has been raised from governments, private donors and crowd funding. A UN event, co-hosted by Britain and the Netherlands on Thursday hoped to raise the remaining \$29 million needed for the emergency phase, but deputy UN spokesperson, Farhan Haq, said only \$5.6 million was pledged. An additional \$19 million was required for a critical second phase, Haq said. "It is urgent that this gap is closed to successfully implement the operation. While we appreciate the contributions received so far, there is a crucial need for the funds to allow us to complete the task that we have begun," Haq said.

Biden issues new executive order to impose Sudan sanctions

US President, Joe Biden, on Thursday signed a new executive order to sanction those who threaten the "peace, security or stability" in Sudan, saying that the violence in the country "must end", Anadolu News Agency reports. "I join the peace-loving people of Sudan and leaders around the world in calling for a durable ceasefire between the belligerent parties," he said in a statement. "This violence, which has already stolen the lives of hundreds of civilians and began during the holy month of Ramadan, is unconscionable. It must end," he added. The US President said the sanctions will hold individuals responsible for "threatening the peace, security, and stability of Sudan; undermining Sudan's democratic transition; using violence against civilians; or committing serious human rights abuses." The statement did not identify the individuals who will be targeted by the sanctions. "The Sudanese people col-

lapsed thirty years under an authoritarian regime—but they never gave up on their commitment to or their hope for a better future," he said. "Their dedication brought down a dictator, only to endure a military takeover in October 2021, and now more violence among factions fighting for control," he added. The Sudanese capital, Khartoum, has been engulfed by violence for weeks with fighting between the Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group. A disagreement had been fomenting in recent months between the Army and RSF regarding the group's integration into the Armed Forces, a key condition of Sudan's transition agreement with political groups. Sudan has been without a functioning government since October 2021, when the military dismissed Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok's transitional government and declared a state of emergency in a move decried by political forces as a "coup".

Ukraine admits shooting down own drone over Kiev

KIEV (Agencies): The Ukrainian Air Force admitted on Thursday evening that a drone destroyed over Kiev earlier in the day had been one of their own, which operators had lost control of. "Since the uncontrolled presence of the UAV in the sky over the capital could lead to undesirable consequences, it was decided to deploy the mobile [missile] teams. This is unfortunate, but that's technology, these things happen," said a statement the military released to Ukrainian media. The admission came several hours after a video showing the drone being taken down by a shoulder-fired rocket made rounds on social media. The 30-second clip shows the drone slowly flying over Kiev, while small arms fire can be heard in the background, until it is hit by a missile and crashes to cheers from the onlookers. Kiev Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said that

the drone had crashed in the Pechersky district and started a fire, but that no one was injured. Pro-Ukrainian "open source intel" accounts quickly declared the UAV had been a Russian 'Corsair'. After several Western outlets – including the German tabloid Bild – reported otherwise, however, the Ukrainian military issued their admission. Bayraktar TB2 is a design of the Turkish company Baykar Makina. It saw extensive service with Azerbaijan in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which reportedly convinced Kiev to order a dozen. Several more were bought last year, some with money collected from the US and EU as charitable donations. The drones quickly fell prey to Russian air defenses, however, and have been largely absent from the front lines. Exactly how the Ukrainian Air Force "lost control" of a TB2 over Kiev remained unexplained.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari: Why Pakistan minister's rare Goa visit is not about India

WASHINGTON (Agencies): When Bilawal Bhutto Zardari arrives in Goa on Thursday to participate in a conference of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – a key regional summit – he will be the first Pakistani foreign minister to visit India since 2011. Hina Rabbani Khar met her Indian counterpart SM Krishna in Delhi 12 years ago, but circumstances were different then. India and Pakistan were experiencing a limited thaw, and trying to boost trade. Pakistan's relationship with the US was in a crisis. "The diplomatic moment back then was ripe for attempts at rapprochement. It's a different story today," Michael Kugelman of The Wilson Centre, an American think-tank, says. The countries have fought three wars since they became independent nations in 1947. All but

one were over Kashmir. In 2019, India launched strikes in Pakistani territory following a militant attack on Indian troops in Kashmir. After the attacks, the two countries had come "close" to a nuclear war, former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed in his recent memoir. But a new border truce concluded in 2021 has kept things under control. When India accidentally fired a supersonic missile into Pakistan last year, Islamabad issued a statement condemning the launch, without escalating the incident into a serious crisis. "But this isn't to say the relationship is in a safe place. It's always on tenterhooks, even at the best of times," says Mr Kugelman. "Today, it would only take one trigger, one provocation, to take the two sides back up the escalatory ladder."

'Beginning of the end': Google says goodbye to passwords with passkey technology



LONDON: Google began rolling out its passkey technology on Thursday, in what the tech giant calls the "beginning of the end" of passwords. The new security mechanism is designed to replace passwords entirely by allowing authentication with fingerprint ID, facial ID or pin on the phone or device you use for authentication. "We've taken a giant step forward on the journey towards a passwordless future," Google said on Wednesday. "We've begun rolling out support for passkeys across Google Accounts on all major platforms. This means users can now take advantage of passkeys across Google Services for a passwordless sign-in experience." Google said users can access their accounts with the same biometric authentication they use to unlock phones. A passkey can be created for each device used, or one key can be shared across multiple devices using an app. Each is unique to the service for which it is used, meaning if one account is hacked, others will be safe. The technology was developed by Google, Apple and Microsoft as part of the "Fido", or Fast Identity Online, industry group that pushes for alternative authentication methods. Apple has introduced the technology in iOS16 and the latest MacOS release, while Microsoft has begun using it through the Authenticator app. Google said the new technology makes sign-ins in any device "both easier to use and more secure than passwords."

Proud Boys: Ex-leader, three others found guilty in Jan 6 attack



WASHINGTON (Agencies): Enrique Tarrio, the former leader of the far-right Proud Boys, and three other members of the group have been found guilty of seditious conspiracy in an alleged plot to attack the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, and prevent a peaceful transfer of power. A jury in Washington, DC delivered the guilty verdict on Thursday against Tarrio, Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, and Zachary Rehl. However, the jurors were unable to reach a verdict on seditious conspiracy – a relatively rare charge that can carry up to 20 years in prison – against a fifth defendant, Dominic Pezzola. The jury could also not reach a verdict for Pezzola on a separate charge of conspiracy to obstruct the US Congress, despite finding the other four defendants guilty. All five men also were found guilty of an array of lesser crimes, including obstructing Congress, civil disorder and destroying government property.

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