



Saeed mocks US decision to designate his party as Foreign Terrorist Organisation

LAHORE, APRIL 8 /-/- Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed mocked the US decision to designate the political front of the Muslim League (MML) as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, saying the move has proved the party's "credibility. In a setback to Saeed's political ambition, the US on Tuesday designated the MML as a terrorist organisation, making it difficult for it to get registered with Pakistan's election commission. Pakistan is set to hold general elections this year. "Well, a party that is banned by the US is the one that actually holds some credibility," Saeed, who is the chief of the JUD, said at a rally to reaffirm his pledge to mobilise people from across Pakistan for the cause of Kashmir. The Americans, he added, understand that this is the political party they cannot be an ally with. Saeed also asked Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to dedicate the rest of his day in office for the cause of Kashmir. "The US will exclude your name from among its loyalists, but that will be a matter of honour," he said. He asked Abbasi to hold a sit-in outside the UN office along with his cabinet against the "Indian atrocities in Kashmir". Anti-India slogans were raised at the rally. Rallies were also held in Islamabad, in the port city of Karachi and elsewhere in the country to mark Kashmir solidarity day.

China to correct English on sign boards

BEIJING, APRIL 8 /-/- Beijing will correct English on posters and signboards to "improve the international language environment" in the city, as part of China's efforts to raise the international status of its capital, according to a media report. The campaign will be mainly carried out in the Central Business Districts (CBD) and Jinrongjie areas where multinational companies and research institutions are based and foreign citizens live, the city foreign affairs office said. The volunteers have been asked to spot incorrect English in these areas and report to the office. Public and media participation are also welcomed, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The campaign is aimed to raise the international appeal of the capital and prepare for important events such as the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. The Chinese capital started displaying English signboards for streets, metro and other transport stations all over the city since 2008 Olympics, introducing for the first time a foreign language other than Mandarin, the report said. Also, English is steadily catching up in China as most schools teach it as a subject besides efforts by parents to encourage their children to learn English to enhance their chances to study abroad, it said. (PTI)

US embassy car kills motorcyclist in Pak

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- A US embassy car hit a motorcycle here in Pakistan today, killing a man on the spot and injuring another. The US defence air attaché, who was driving the white Land Cruiser, hit the motorcyclists near Islamabad's Daman-e-Koh area. The US official was not arrested owing to their diplomatic immunity, however, the police took custody of the vehicle. A statement released by the US Embassy confirmed the accident. The embassy is in contact with the local authorities to probe into the incident, the statement added. The embassy has been cooperating in the investigation, a police official said. Police also said that the white color SUV was driven by Colonel Joseph Emanuel at the time of accident. In 2011, American intelligence operative Raymond Davis, 42, was arrested in Lahore on charges of killing two Pakistani citizens and thus kicked off a huge diplomatic crisis between the two countries. Pakistani authorities had charged him with murder, but the Obama administration insisted he is an "administrative and technical official" attached to its Lahore consulate and has diplomatic immunity. (PTI)

Pak's first-everschool for transgender community all set to welcome students

LAHORE, APRIL 8 /-/- After getting an anchor to become the country's first transgender news anchor, Pakistan is now all set to open doors to its first-ever school for the transgender community. According to a report in Pakistan-based Dawn, the school will begin operations from April 15 and will help members of the transgender community play a larger role in the development of society and enter the mainstream. Named The Gender Guardian, the school will offer complete 12 years of education from primary to higher levels, and then even at a college level. In addition, it would also offer technical courses in fields such as hair styling, fashion designing, mobile repairing and graphic designing. The first branch of the school will open in Lahore and 40 students have already registered. Founder Asif Shahzad has also confirmed that two more branches would be opened in the foreseeable future. The scheduled opening of the school for the transgender community has largely received a positive response in an otherwise conservative Muslim country. There is, however, a general consensus that changing social attitudes towards the community is an uphill struggle and that it will take time and effort to raise awareness and bring all on a level playing field.

Geo TV network faces blackout in Pak, Army role suspected

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- Pakistan-based news network Geo TV has claimed that its news channel has been completely blocked in most parts of the country. While many reports claim that the Pakistani Army is behind the blackout of the popular channel, there has been no official word on the same so far. Speaking to The New York Times, GEO TV chief executive Mir Ibrahim Rahman had said on Thursday, "We are off the air in 80 percent of the country." According to him, the crackdown on Pakistan's largest television network began in March with Geo News broadcast being prevented in cantonment areas. In April, even the sports and entertainment channels of the group were blocked in various parts of the country. The media group executive pointed that the broadcast was stopped in areas that are administered directly by the Pakistani Army. However, the group has not said categorically that the crackdown is being carried out by the Pakistani Army. The New York Times also quoted a statement in this regard by the Committee to Protect Journalists. It said, "The arbitrary suspension of Geo TV on cable TV is a direct assault on Pakistan's constitutionally guaranteed right to access information. It's outrageous that the authorities are either unable to find or too frightened to name those powerful enough to orchestrate the blocking of the news distribution." Meanwhile, the Jang Group, the parent group of Geo News, also issued a statement saying that the network has "always embarked upon the journalistic mission to not only furnish facts to the public in line with the principles encompassing the freedom of expression, but

also to abide by what is enshrined in the Constitution of the country. Pakistan's Constitution and law guarantees the fundamental right of access to information of the citizens of Pakistan". The statement further said, "The Jang Group requests its viewers/ readers that if they cannot watch Geo News on their TV screens or if four channels have somehow been shifted from their original numbers, or if they are deprived of receiving their copies of Daily Jang or/ and The News, they can lodge complaints at telephone number: 021-32271233 (daily between 9:00 am and 10:00 pm). They can also register their complaints (text only) through WhatsApp or SMS at the following numbers: 0312-8802222, 0312-2197855, and 0337-3160380. They can also write to geohelp@geo.tv"

Pak says Kabul accepted its offer to revive peace talks

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- Pakistan's prime minister says Afghanistan has accepted his offer to revive stalled peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said war is not the solution to the decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. His remarks today came a day after he visited Kabul and met with the Afghan leadership. Pakistan has praised Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani's overture to the Taliban in which he offered to recognize the radical religious group as a political party. The Taliban have not officially responded but have reiterated their demand to talk to the US before holding talks with Kabul. Pakistan hosted the first direct peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban in 2015 but those talks ended when Kabul announced the death of Taliban founder Mullah Mohammed Omar. (Agencies)



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres talks with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during their meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, China —REUTERS

US approves licence for Taiwan submarine plan

TAIPEI, APRIL 8 /-/- Washington has agreed to allow US defence contractors help Taiwan construct its own submarines, Taipei said, welcoming the breakthrough in long-standing ambitions to build up its fleet to counter the threat from China. Taiwan last year launched a plan to manufacture its own submarines amid deteriorating relations with China after its hopes of buying them from the US came to nothing. The US State Department has approved granting the licence necessary to sell Taiwan the technology needed for its submarine project. The approval was "breakthrough," Taiwan defence ministry spokesman Chen Chung-chi said today. "It is part of a process. We'll take it step by step," he told AFP, declining to provide further details. The agreement is likely to anger Beijing, which regards the island as part of its territory even though the two sides have been ruled separately since the end of a civil war in 1949. Washington's approval comes after President Donald Trump last month signed new rules allowing top-level US officials to travel to Taiwan, which has protested at the move, saying the US should stop official exchanges with Taiwan to avoid "damaging Sino-US relations." Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979 but maintains trade relations with the island and is its main arms supplier.

Pak eyeing T-90 tanks, Su-35 fighter jets from Russia: Report



ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- Pakistan is in direct talks with the Russia for the procurement of sophisticated military hardware, including air defence systems, fighter jets and battle tanks, a media report said on Saturday. Defence Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan confirmed that Islamabad was interested in buying weapons from Moscow in an interview to the Russian news agency Sputnik. The Express Tribune reported, "Air defence systems is a different kind of weapon we are interested. We are very much interested in a very wide range of the Russian weapons technology. We are in negotiations [on air defence systems] and once we conclude negotiations, we will be able to announce them," Khan said. The defence minister also outlined that Islamabad was interested in acquiring T-90 tanks from Moscow as part of a long-term deal rather than committing itself to a single purchase. "We are interested in tanks T-90 and it is not going to be a one-time purchase but it is going to be a long-term commitment," Khan was quoted as saying by the agency. He added that negotiations for the purchase of Russian Su-35 fighter jets are in their early stages, and an agreement in this regard may be reached "in the next few years," according to the Russian website. The defence minister noted that both Pakistan and Russia were interested in a stable and democratic Afghanistan.

Pak, Afghanistan to act against fugitives, irreconcilable militants

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to take action against fugitives and the irreconcilable militants under a bilateral agreement for regional peace and security, the Foreign Office said today. In a statement, it said that the two sides have agreed to "operationalise the working groups under Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS)" during Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's visit to Kabul on April 6. It said that Pakistan was committed to "support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation." "The two countries to undertake effective actions against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries," it further said. "Both countries commit to deny use of their respective territories by any country, network, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country," according to APAPPS. They agreed to put in place a joint supervision, coordination and confirmation mechanism through Liaison Officers for realisation of the agreed actions. The two countries vowed to avoid territorial and aerial violations of each other's territory. The two countries also agreed to avoid public blame game and instead use APAPPS cooperation mechanisms to respond to mutual issues of contention and concerns. They would establish Working Groups and necessary cooperation mechanisms for full implementation and the above mutually reinforcing principles. The APAPPS was agreed in February and the officials of the two countries held several high level meetings before it was decided to operationalize the agreement. (PTI)

Major political parties to flex muscles on Sunday

LAHORE, APRIL 8 /-/- The country's political temperature will go up several notches on Sunday as almost all major political parties are set to reveal their power show. According to details, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) will flex political muscle in Kamalia where Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif will address the party workers at Government Elementary School. Similarly, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan will address party's supporters in Rawalpindi, while Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhatto Zardari will meet party's leaders in Multan today. Bilawal is also expected to visit party's membership camp in Muzaffargarh in the evening. Meanwhile, arrangements have been finalized for power show of Jamaat-e-Islami at Minare-e-Pakistan where Sirajul Haq will address the participants. (PTI)

Pak economy set to surpass last year's decade-high growth

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 8 /-/- Pakistan's economy is set to surpass last year's decade-high growth of 6.9 per cent in the current fiscal year 2017-18 but would remain short of the target set by the government, the country's central bank said on Saturday. The economy will remain at risk of a widening current account deficit, which is a combination of exorbitant oil imports, significantly maturing external debt repayments and slightly lower worker remittances in the remaining three months of FY18, The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said. The SBP while announcing the reports on the second quarter economic growth also cautioned that the growth would remain short of the 6 per cent target due likely to lower wheat output and late sugarcane crushing. The Express Tribune reported. "Pakistan's economy surpassing last year's growth rate (5.3 per cent) appears strong GDP growth is likely to remain slightly below the target of 6 per cent (in fiscal year 2018)," the SBP said in the second quarterly report for FY18 on the state of Pakistan's economy. The deficit will continue to impact the foreign exchange reserves and economic managers engaged in making short-term international borrowing. "The risks to overall macroeconomic stability have increased due to widening imbalances in the country's balance of payments," the report said. "Reserves have already fallen to less than three months of the country's import bill," it said. The central bank predicted that inflation would remain in the range of 4.5-5.5 per cent against the target of 6 per cent mainly due to low food prices. It stood at 4.2 per cent last year. Pakistan may attract maximum remittances of USD 20.5 billion from overseas workers in FY18 that would be slightly lower than the target of USD 20.7 billion. Imports may shoot up to USD 54.3 billion against the target of USD 48.8 billion mainly due to heavy oil imports and imports of textile and steel inputs. At the same time, exports may also surpass the target of USD 29.1 billion to a maximum of USD 24.6 billion. However, the growth would remain insufficient to finance the gap in current account deficit. The credit flow to private sector recovered strongly from mid-January 2018 and increased by Rs 167.9 billion between January 12 and March 16 compared to credit expansion of Rs 80.3 billion in the corresponding period of previous year.