



Islamabad POST

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West Bank tensions 'obstacle' to peace, says EU's Borrell

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Siraj demands resignation of CEC Raja

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Babar Azam creates history in PSL-9

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PPP wants President, speaker slots

Govt formation talks 'successful'

The PML N leadership remains optimistic about the resolution of government formation at the federal level, anticipating an amicable resolution in collaboration with the PPP and other allies. However, there is ongoing debate regarding the sustainability of this arrangement

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The recent revelations by the Commissioner of Rawalpindi regarding suspected irregularities in the Rawalpindi division have significantly bolstered the contentions of PTI and other political parties that the 2024 election was marred by extensive rigging and flaws. Although the Commissioner's statements may be perceived with a certain intent, the gravity of the allegations gains credibility as they originate directly from the individual overseeing Returning Officers and District Returning Officers. His role positions him with a firsthand and nuanced understanding of the events unfolding within his division. We need to contextualize his revelations within the broader context of government formation at both the federal and provincial levels. Although the PML-N is poised to assume control of the Punjab government, it hesitates to lead the federal government independently due to an insufficient number of seats. Consequently, it must actively seek support from the PPP. However, the fruition of this alliance is still pending, with the PPP possibly making extensive demands in exchange for

its support to the PML-N. The PML N faces a stark reality as it receives a clear message from the authorities that it cannot selectively navigate between the Punjab and federal government responsibilities. The party finds itself in a challenging position, compelled to embrace both roles or relinquish them entirely. The recent revelations by the Commissioner seem to convey a subtle warning to the PML N leadership. If the 39 seats, encompassing both the national and Punjab assembly, within the Rawalpindi division undergo reexamination, there is a tangible risk of the party losing its majority in the Punjab assembly. Furthermore, such a reevaluation may also erode the party's standing in the national assembly, significantly impacting its overall political influence. Undoubtedly, whoever assumes control of the federal government will find themselves navigating treacherous waters due to formidable economic and political challenges. The PPP is prudent in its reluctance to engage with this fragile setup, recognizing the inherent risks that could ultimately sideline the party from the political landscape should it fail to meet the expectations of the public. Political analysts express reservations about nominating Maryam

Nawaz as the Punjab chief minister, citing concerns over the historical tensions between the Establishment and the PML-N, exacerbated by the assertive stances of both Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. Despite the PML-N's assertive desire to initiate a fresh chapter by leaving behind past conflicts, it is anticipated that the Establishment may require a considerable amount of time to come to terms with this shift in dynamics. The PML N leadership remains optimistic about the resolution of government formation at the federal level, anticipating an amicable resolution in collaboration with the PPP and other allies. However, there is ongoing debate regarding the sustainability of this arrangement, with uncertainties about whether it will endure in the long term or face a premature collapse. It is imperative for the PML N leadership to engage in proactive measures to strengthen the foundations of this coalition, fostering effective communication, mutual understanding, and shared goals among the involved parties. As per the arrangement being mulled, the PPP may get ministries in the federal and Punjab government while in Balochistan both PPP and PML N will form a coalition government with PPP getting the Punjab chief minister slot.

PTI candidates to join Sunni Ittehad Council

Now, the candidates join the MWM and would made alliance with Sunni Ittehad Council in center and Punjab

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: The Chief of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) has nodded to victorious PTI-backed independent candidates to join Sunni Ittehad Council, a religious political party. Earlier, PTI has decided to made alliance with Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan (MWM), but some candidates have reservation to join that party. Now, the candidates join the MWM and would made alliance with Sunni Ittehad Council in center and Punjab Province. As per sources, PTI has instructed its candidates to submit their document to Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) as soon as possible. The PTI-backed independent candidates would submit their documents to ECP tomorrow. PTI backed candidates contested the Feb 8 polls as independent candidates, it was necessary to join any party after winning the elections and made alliances to form government.



DOHA: Ambassador Asif Durrani, Pakistan envoy for Afghanistan held bilateral meetings with counterparts from the US, UK, and the Netherlands; also attended Quartet (China, Iran, Russia and Pakistan) meeting of SRAs. - DNA

PTI mulls merger with PTI-P

PTI secured 180 seats in national assembly: Gohar Leaders demand judicial probe sans CJP Qazi Faez Isa

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) demanded that an independent and empowered judicial commission should be instantly formed to probe the polls rigging allegations made by Liaquat Ali Chatha, former commissioner of Rawalpindi so as to punish the real characters involved in the historic electoral heist, 'which is mother of all riggings'. The PTI is expected to merge with PTI P to form government in the KP province. The PTI P chairman Pervez Khat-tak has already resigned from the post. Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan and PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan, who was the party's nominee for prime minister-post, demanded formation of a powerful judicial commission to investigate the polls robbery and the results of the inquiry should be shared with the public. Speaking on the occasion, Omar Ayub Khan dubbed the rigging against his party "the mother of all rigging".

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ECP notifies 37 KPK NA seat winners

Gandapur notification also issued on both seats

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has notified the winners for 36 National Assembly seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The ECP, in a notification issued here, has asked the returned candidates to affiliate with a political party of their choice within the next three days. Among the declared victors are Sibghatullah from NA-4 Upper Dir, Gohar Ali Khan from NA-10 Buner, and Umar Ayub from NA-18 Haripur. The notification affirmed Asad Qaiser's success in NA-19 Swabi and Shandana Gulzar's victory in NA-30 Peshawar.

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Briefs

PPP to form govt in Balochistan

Sarfraz Bugti says we will soon form our government with our allies

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Amid prevailing political uncertainty regarding the formation of government in the Centre, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Sarfraz Bugti Sunday claimed that the party would form its government in Balochistan with the support of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). "The PML-N would be our ally in Balochistan [as it has] given us a clear signal to form our government [in the province]," Bugti said while addressing a press conference in Islamabad along with party's parliamentary committee members Haji Malik Shah and Sardar Sarbuland Khan.

Rawalpindi RPO leaves Pakistan

RPO left Pakistan on leave for 15 days

FAISAL SHEIKH

RAWALPINDI: A day after startling revelations of Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chatha regarding alleged rigging in the elections, a high-level police official from the same city left Pakistan on a 15-day leave. As per the details, Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali left Pakistan on leave for 15 days. A day earlier, commissioner has accused CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja of being complicit in the rigging and asserted that he, along with the CEC and Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa, deserved punishment, even the death penalty, for their injustice. Chatha said that he was responsible for election rigging in 13 constituencies of National Assembly in his division and therefore he must be punished.

Warns against martial law

Bilawal warns of protest if 'justice not given'

Rejects PML-N's offer of rotational sharing of prime ministership



BUREAU REPORT

THATTA: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Sunday disclosed that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had offered him to be the prime minister for two years but he refused to take the offer. Addressing party supporters in Thatta, where Bilawal delivered a passionate speech, he said: "The PML-N told him that they will retain the prime minister's slot for the initial three years and he should take the seat for the next (last) two years of the coalition government, but he refused the offer."

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PML-N fears another May 9-like incident

Malik Ahmad says Rawalpindi commissioner should have shown evidence if he had any

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Malik Ahmad Khan on Sunday said that the government should stop Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) before another May 9-like incident happens in the country. Malik made these comments just a day after former Rawalpindi commissioner Liaquat Ali Chatha admitted rigging under his watch and resigned from his post. On the other hand, PTI and other parties have been staging

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Missing persons IHC summons PM Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued on Sunday a written order following its directives to caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, as well as secretaries of ministries concerned to personally appear in the next hearing tomorrow (Monday) of the missing Baloch students case. The 4-page written order, issued by the IHC's Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, stated that the prime minister of Pakistan, defence, human rights, and interior ministries along with the secretaries of the ministries concerned should ensure their physical appearance in the February 19 hearing at 10am.

Nasser Hospital 'completely out of service' amid Israeli siege

Israel strikes across Gaza as US says it will block another ceasefire resolution at UN

NEWS DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 135 on Sunday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods, homes and shelter centers and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza, killing and injuring dozens of citizens. According to local media sources, five civilians were martyred and many others were injured when the Israeli army bombed citizens as they were waiting for aid trucks in al-Rushd street in the south of Gaza City. The Israeli army also bombed a house belonging to the family of Baraka in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, killing five civilians and injuring others. Meanwhile, Israeli occupation forces converted the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis into a military barracks after taking it out of service. They have arrested dozens of medical staff and patients. Dr. Ashraf al-Qudra, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said on Sunday that the Israeli occupation has turned the Nasser Medical Complex into a military barracks and taken it out of service.

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Lula compares Israel's action to Hitler's regime

"What's happening in the Gaza Strip isn't a war, it's a genocide,"

FOREIGN DESK

ADIS ABABA: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Sunday accused Israel of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's regime during World War II. "What's happening in the Gaza Strip isn't a war, it's a genocide," Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa where he was attending an African Union summit. "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared army and women and children," added the Brazilian President.

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Experts demand action against illegal tobacco sales

Dr. Zia also said the tobacco control cell of the Ministry of National Health Services has become ineffective and not taking any action on such promotional activities

DNA

ISLAMABAD: National laws, WHO guidelines violated as cheap cigarettes flood market. Multinational companies have flagrantly violated the Federal Excise Act and introduced a low-priced cigarette product with an aim to boost its sales at the cost of health hazards, Capital Calling warned. Malik Imran, representative of Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids stated that the Federal Excise Act, 2005 says, "No manufacturer or importer of cigarette can introduce or sell a new cigarette brand variant at the same existing brand family at a price lower than the lowest actual price of the existing variant of the same brand family. For the purposes of this restriction, the current minimum price variant of the existing brand means the lowest price of a brand variation on the day of the announcement of Budget". He said it has been observed that Pakistan Tobacco Company, a multinational subsidiary of British American Tobacco, has introduced a new product, Capstan International, at the price of Rs164. "This, prima facie, is a clear violation of the law. The exist-

ing brand is by the name of Capstan by Pall Mall, sold at Rs. 212," he said. He said no company is allowed to sell any product below the price set by the government in the Federal Excise Act 2005. Similarly, said Malik, Philip Morris International, another multinational is flagrantly violating not only the above restriction imposed under the law, but also another restriction which states: "For the purpose of levy, collection and payment of duty at the rates specified in column 4, against serial number 9 and 10, no cigarette manufacturer shall reduce retail price from the level adopted on the day of the announcement of the latest budget." Marlboro brand belonging to Philip Morris International falls in serial number 9. However, they have introduced "Crafted by Marlboro" in serial number 10 (which attracts lower tax levy). This is specifically prohibited under the law and any attempt to use fanciful labels to bypass the law is a direct violation of the laws of Pakistan, aimed at increasing smoker numbers. The principle behind increasing taxation is to make cigarettes more expensive; whilst these two multinationals are finding new ways of abusing Paki-

stani laws. Dr Hassan Shehzad, from IIUI, said, seemingly, these actions run counter to WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to which Pakistan is a signatory. The WHO guidelines, he said, mentions that "Parties (countries) should require the tobacco industry and those working to further its interests to operate and act in a manner that is accountable and transparent. The tobacco industry should be required to provide Parties with information for effective implementation of these guidelines." Malik Imran said it is illegal because it is avoiding tax. Tobacco expert Dr. Muhammad Zia said such introduction and dissemination/marketing of the products falls in the category of promotion of the tobacco product, which is completely illegal and ban in Pakistan by law. This is an additional violation of the law. "Neither a company, nor any retailer can sell cigarettes by violating federal excise law. Dr. Zia also said the tobacco control cell of the Ministry of National Health Services has become ineffective and not taking any action on such promotional activities.



ISLAMABAD: Former Interior Minister and PPP leader Sarfraz Bugti addressing a press conference. —Photo Mudassar Raja

169 news bulletins broadcast through ICP Web TV

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Under the special directives of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) broadcast 169 news bulletins through its Web TV, which was formally launched in August 2023. An ICP public relations officer said that, since its inception, not only news bulletins but traffic-related awareness videos were also regularly released on web TV for the awareness of the citizens of Islamabad. Moreover, 169 news bulletins have been aired on Web TV, while 30 road safety programs have also been aired to educate citizens about road safety, which plays an important role in educating citizens about the rules and regulations of road safety.

As Islamabad Capital Police is responsible for the protection of life and property of the citizens, it also provides opportunities to keep them fully aware of the regular situations and events of Islamabad Capital Police. In order to provide awareness to the citizens about traffic rules and road safety, special teams are providing awareness to the public in different areas of the city. Citizens are requested to dial Pucar-15 or report via the "ICT-15 App" regarding any suspicious person or activity.

FRIA seeks need for raising country's export base

LAHORE: Raising serious concern over the constant falling trend of Pakistan exports the Ferrozpur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has said that the country's exports declined by around 2.99 percent during the first seven months of July-Jan of the current fiscal year and stood at \$9.738 billion compared to \$10.038 billion during the same period of 2022-23. The FRIA Senior vice chairman and PIAF EC member Shahbaz Aslam advocated the need for raising the country's export base so that tax-to-GDP ratio improves from current poor level. He urged the trade officers to explore opportunities to diversify exports of goods and services in their respective areas, asking them to meet the challenges faced by Pakistan in European markets. He also suggested the ministry to devise strategies for promotion of Pakistani products, calling upon trade officers to take advantage of opportunities offered by

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Shahbaz Aslam said that the country's overall exports during July-January 2023-24 totaled \$17.778 billion (provisional) against \$16.481 billion during the corresponding period of last year showing an increase of 7.87 percent. The exports in January 2024 were \$2.792 billion (provisional) as compared to \$2.822 billion in December 2023 showing a decrease of 1.06 percent over December 2023 but increased by 24.81 percent as compared to \$2.237 billion in January 2023. The data on exports and imports released by PBS revealed that on a month-on-month basis, textile exports registered 3.98 percent growth in January 2024 and stood at \$1.455 billion compared to \$1.399 billion in December 2023. On a year-on-year basis, textile exports increased by 10.10 percent in January 2024 when compared to \$1.321 billion in Jan 2023. Cotton yarn exports increased by

49.04 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year as it stood at \$669.824 million compared to \$449.418 million during the same period of the last fiscal year. On a year-on-year basis, cotton yarn exports registered 19.78 percent growth and stood at \$81.295 million when compared to \$67.873 million in January 2023, while on a MoM basis, it registered 14.65 percent negative growth when compared to \$95.252 million in December 2023. Rice exports increased by 95.26 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year and stood at \$2.115 billion when compared to \$1.083 billion during the same period of the last fiscal year. Food group exports increased by 57.66 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year and stood at \$4.267 billion when compared to \$2.706 billion during the same period of the last fiscal year. —Agencies

Govt achieves 13 goals: Dr. Saif

ISLAMABAD, Feb 18 (APP). Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif has said the caretaker government had successfully achieved 13 goals, out of 15, set to promote the IT sector and increase its exports within a brief period of 5 months under the caretaker setup. In a video message, he said, "We have achieved 13 out of 15 important targets for the promotion of the IT & telecom sector in a short period of 5 months in the caretaker set-up. The forum of SIFC will prove to be a great support for the upcoming elected government in the process of building and developing the country, and the elected government will also reap the benefits of the measures we have taken during the caretaker period." "We worked with the SIFC and the State Bank to make a significant policy intervention, allowing IT companies to keep 50% of their export revenue in dollars in an account in Pakistan and make their international expenses without any restrictions from this amount," he further explained. He said that with this decision, allowing the retention of 50 percent in dollars, the country's IT exports have increased by 32 percent in the last 60 days. Dr. Umar Saif highlighted that the establishment of the Telecom Tribunal fulfills a longstanding demand of the telecom sector. The specialized Tribunal will now handle telecom sector disputes and cases instead of the High Courts, aiming to expedite the resolution of legal issues and facilitate rapid progress in the telecom sector. According to the minister, the Ministry of Law will nominate the chairperson and members of the Tribunal. —DNA

Pakistan's earns \$1,454 million from IT services' export in 6 months

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan earned US \$1,454.881 million by providing different Information Technology (IT) services to various countries during the first six months of the current fiscal year 2023-24. This shows a growth of 8.98 per cent as compared with the US \$1,334.969 million earned through the provision of services during the corresponding months of the last fiscal year 2022-23, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. During the months under review, the export of computer services grew by 10.32 per cent as it surged from US \$1,064.579 million last year to US \$1,174.481 million during July-December 2023-24. Among the computer services, the exports of software consultancy services witnessed

a nominal decrease of 180 per cent, from US \$3.394 million to US \$3.333 million this year while the export of hardware consultancy services surged by 3.401 per cent, from US \$391.570 million to US \$404.875 million. The export of repair and maintenance services however decreased by 39.15 per cent from US \$1.530 million to US \$0.930 million whereas the export and imports of computer software services surged by 2.79 per cent, from \$302.376 million to \$310.807 million. Meanwhile, the export of information services during the months under review dipped by 19.72 per cent from US \$2.180 million to US \$1.750 million. Among the information services, the exports of information-related services increased by 3.64 per

cent, from US \$0.687 million to US \$0.712 million whereas the exports of news agency services however decreased by 30.48 per cent, from US \$1.493 million to US \$1.038 million. The export of telecommunication services increased by 3.89 per cent as these went down from US \$268.0210 million to US \$278.650 million, the data revealed. Among the telecommunication services, the export of call centres services increased by 12.14 per cent during the months as its exports increased from US \$107,006 million to US \$119,994 million whereas the export of other telecommunication services witnessed a decrease of 1.58 per cent, from US \$161.204 million to US \$158.656 million during this year, the PBS data revealed. —DNA

Railways set to open Railway station platform

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has almost completed the upgradation and rehabilitation work of the Shahdapur Railway Station platform and set to open it for the passengers of the area very soon. "The government has already allocated around Rs 2 million more funds for completing the renovation of the platform of Shahdapur Railway Station, official sources in the Ministry told APP. They said Shahdapur Railway Station, operating with three platforms, is one of the important stations situated on the mainline where most of the mail and express trains have their stoppages. The sources said the contractor had stopped the construction work due to non-payment of bills and funds but now the funds have been arranged for the remaining rehabilitation work. They said the platform condition on the downside was dilapidated and therefore it was decided to carry out its repair under the head of improvement and welfare expenditure. To a question, the official said Pakistan Railways was a big organization comprising around 63,000 employees and its network stretched across the country. They said the employees are well-cared under the welfare activities like health facilities through a wide network of hospitals, dispensaries and child healthcare units. Elaborating, the sources said the provision of government accommodation according to entitlement and priority list, staff benevolent funds, benefits and incentives were provided through the Prime Minister's Family Assistance Package policy for families of deceased employees. They said the other welfare activities included benefits and incentives provided through policy for disabled employees' families, monthly grants to widows scale-wise, the establishment of primary and high schools, industrial schools to teach handicrafts, sports activities through the constitution of Pakistan and pick and drop facility for schools/offices. The sources said the installation of water filtration plants, a special provision of five medical seats in Riphah Islamic Universities with a reduction of 50 percent in admission and tuition fees, loans on easy instalments, availability of all recreational facilities, payment for burial and ambulance charges, marriage grant, farewell grant, free passes and concession in railways fares. —APP

Two start-ups of SSKIC IoBM win at Idea Bank

Moreover, the Co-Founder of Digibook, Rida Zehra, is also an IoBM alumna. Accompanying IoBM's start-ups at the ceremony was Mr. Raza Abbas, Focal Person, National Idea Bank at IoBM, and the Head of Incubation, SSKIC-IoBM

DNA

KARACHI: Digibook and Creative 3D, two start-ups at the Institute of Business Management's Shahjehan S. Karim Incubation Centre (SSKIC) emerged as the top ideas at the third edition of the National Idea Bank (NIB). They were presented with the awards by the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, at a ceremony held at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Thursday, February 15, 2024. The NIB was organized by the National University of Technology (NUTECH) in collaboration with ASPIRE Pakistan. While addressing the occasion, President Dr Arif Alvi called for providing an enabling environment for youth to nurture their intellectual

abilities and benefit from their innovative ideas for the country's prosperity. He added that the Pakistani youth who is blessed with enormous potential need a platform to transform their ideas into competitive and quality products to increase the country's ex-

ports and reduce imports. Digibook and Creative 3D have been selected, out of over two thousand entries from across Pakistan, to visit Silicon Valley to engage in mentorship and networking sessions. The awards were presented to the Founder of Digibook,

Aurangzaib Alamgir, who is an Entrepreneur in Residence at the SSKIC-IoBM; and to the Co-Founder and CEO of Creative 3D, Bilal Afridi. Creative 3D is an alumni start-up at SSKIC's Cohort-I. Founder and Director of Creative3D, Atif Baig, an IoBM alumnus,

was also present. Moreover, the Co-Founder of Digibook, Rida Zehra, is also an IoBM alumna. Accompanying IoBM's start-ups at the ceremony was Mr. Raza Abbas, Focal Person, National Idea Bank at IoBM, and the Head of Incubation, SSKIC-IoBM.



CTP advises caution for Murree snow visitors to enjoy snowfall

RAWALPINDI: The City Traffic Police (CTP) in Rawalpindi has issued a traffic advisory for tourists coming to Murree to enjoy snowfall. According to the CTP news release issued here, Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Taimur Khan appealed to all road users to exercise extreme caution and follow the instructions for their own safety. "Drivers are advised to keep their speed as low as possible and maintain a safe distance. Do not over-

take other vehicles unless absolutely necessary." He also exhorted the masses to check the weather forecast and road conditions before setting off on their journey. "Plan your journey accordingly, and if conditions worsen, consider unnecessary travel delays. Follow traffic signals, road signs, and lines strictly. These become even more important in the short term, helping to maintain order on the roads," he said.

The City Traffic Police in Rawalpindi emphasized the importance of responsible driving during severe weather conditions. "By following these guidelines, drivers can contribute to creating a safer road environment for themselves and others. For any emergency assistance or to report traffic-related issues, please contact the City Traffic Police Rawalpindi Helpline (051-9269200). Be safe and drive responsibly," he concluded. —APP



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

FEBRUARY

Feb 04/Sri Lanka	National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand	National Day
Feb 06/Uganda	Army Day
Feb 11/Iran	Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea	National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania	National Day
Feb 18/Gambia	National Day
Feb 19/Nepal	Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan	National Day
Feb 23/Brunei	National Day
Feb 23/Guyana	National Day
Feb 23/Russia	National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan	Armed Forces Day
Feb 25/Kuwait	National Day

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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
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Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

ICCI, KCCI show concerns over further hike in gas tariff

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, ICCI said that the economy of Pakistan is in deep trouble as the manufacturing sector is still struggling to recover, exports of the textile sector have declined by around 3% during July-January 2023-24, foreign exchange reserves of US\$ 8 billion are insufficient to cover only 6 weeks of imports and Pakistan needs US\$ 22 billion in external financing during 2024-25 to meet its financing needs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), and Iftikhar Ahmed Sheikh, President, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) during a meeting at ICCI have shown great concerns over the federal cabinet's approval of 67 percent increase in gas tariffs as it would increase production cost, reduce industrial activities and badly hurt exports. They demanded that the government should reconsider this decision and take solid measures to ensure competitive energy tariffs for the industry to boost industrialization and exports.

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, ICCI said that the economy of Pakistan is in deep trouble as the manufacturing sector is still struggling to recover, exports of the textile sector have declined by around 3% during July-January 2023-24, foreign exchange reserves of US\$ 8 billion are insufficient to cover only 6 weeks of imports and Pakistan needs US\$ 22 billion in external financing during 2024-25 to meet its financing needs. He said that to cope with these challenges,



Pakistan urgently needs to boost industrialization and exports. However, the repeated hikes in electricity and gas tariffs have made the cost of doing business very high, hurting production activities and making our exports uncompetitive in the international market. He stressed that the government should reconsider its decision to

further hike gas prices to save the private sector from further problems. Iftikhar Ahmed Sheikh, President, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the industry of Karachi was demanding a reduction in gas tariffs to improve industrial activities, but instead of meeting their demand, the government has further in-

creased the gas tariffs, creating more problems for the industry that would slow down the economic growth of the country. He urged that the new government in consultation with the private sector should fix the utility tariffs for the next 10 years to enable the better growth of business activities and revive the economy. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG stressed that the government should privatize all loss-making utility companies to reduce their burden on the national exchequer and improve their performance. Both Chambers called for political stability in the country, which is the key requirement to achieve economic stability. They urged that the new government should give top priority to promoting ease of doing business to make Pakistan a hub of business and investment activities and enable it to emerge as a strong economy. Both chambers agreed to work in close cooperation to address the key issues of the business community and create a conducive business environment. Muhammad Ejaz Abbasi former President ICCI, Maqsood Tabish, Khalid Chaudhry, and others were present on the occasion

Met office predicts snowfall in Murree

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Sunday predicted snowfall and torrential rain in Murree from today, whereas cold grips northern and upper regions of the country. "As of today, there is a 70 percent chance of snowfall in Murree, and the weather conditions are expected to remain uncertain until February 22," said the weather forecasting officer. He said tourist spots in Neelum Valley have been hit by heavy snowfall and continuous rainfall, causing slippery conditions on Neelum Highway and connecting roads, disrupting traffic flow. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has urged that administrative measures are in place in Murree to address the prevailing situation. The PDMA stated that today, there is a partial cloud cover in Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the possibility of rain as well.--APP

Citizens urged to save water during Khanpur canal de-silting

RAWALPINDI: The citizens have been urged to use water carefully as the supply of water from Khanpur dam to Rawalpindi city and Cantonment areas has been reduced due to the ongoing de-silting project which started on February 12 and may lead to a shortage of water in many localities. According to Managing Director (MD) of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Muhammad Saleem Ashraf, the Khanpur dam canal de-silting project will be completed by Feb 21. He urged the residents to use water judiciously in their daily routine to avoid shortage as water supply to city areas from the Khanpur dam had decreased due to the de-silting project. He informed that the water supply had decreased to 6 million gallons from 8 million gallons per day and that WASA was trying to meet water demand through tube wells. The agency was also taking all possible measures to ensure supply from bowlers and tube wells to fulfill the needs of the locals while the citizens could use the toll-free number 1334 or get registered their complaints at the nearest.--APP

Experts urge inclusive economic reforms implementation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: An inclusive political economy shall be the top priority of the Pakistan government without any political fiddling by any of the stakeholders. Politicians shall sit in the parliament to do the legislation and ensure its implementation in letter and spirit. Whatever party comes into power shall limit the federal ministries count to ten. The ministers shall pass on the vision and mandate to the teams of the technocrats as they know their job well. The performance of the governments world over depends on the technocrats based on 'right person for the right job'. The IMF is not a villain but a fiscal regulator. We need to listen to their proposed measures and take them accordingly. All the political parties and other stakeholders shall come together to handle the budget deficit, increase tax base, to get rid of the subsidies and reduce the state expenses. Shrinking the bureaucracy and implementation of civil

service reforms is a must to reduce burden on the national exchequer. The sluggishness and red-tapism are the hallmark of Pakistan's bureaucracy. The other one is the politics of agitation that shall come to an end. Public at large shall say no to such protests that are carried out for the vested interests of the political figures. The webinar on the subject "The Prospects of Charter of Economy for the new government and the new IMF deal" was organized by the Devcom-Pakistan (Development Communications Network) and DTN. The keynote speakers included former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of Pakistan and Vice Chancellor Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) Dr. Nadeem ul Haq, and the former Senior Economist at US Treasury Department's Office of Economic Policy. Others who spoke on the occasion included Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director Munir Ahmed, political activist Amina Sadaf, Anousha Iftikhar, Ateeqa Mazhar and Esha Bashir. Dr. Nasir Khilji said

Pakistan is a victim of generosity of friends such as the USA, China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. Their support has been misunderstood and misused in Pakistan. The country has also been a victim of vested interest of leadership across the board where, in many cases, the integrity lacked and reigned over the motivated objectives. Pakistan is a library of recommendations but no implementation of any proposed frameworks. Dr. Khilji said: All the stakeholders of the country have to take the responsibility of inclusive economic reforms and their true implementation. The reforms shall include a comprehensive strategy to handle the budget deficit and reduce the non-productive and operational costs. Pakistan has to broaden its tax, wipe off subsidies and reduce the financial burden of bureaucracy that produces hurdles only. Some major surgery is required for Pakistan's entire financial management and governance system. It is not possible without having all the

stakeholders on the same page. They have to come on the same page if they care about 250 million people. Dr. Nadeem ul Haq said: Pakistan is facing the brunt of political immaturity, inefficient governance system, bureaucratic negligence and stagnancy. Public expenses are huge for no output. The economic crisis cannot be addressed without addressing the cartel of banks, stock market malpractices, and the absence of technocrats in the governance decision-making. There is a crisis of social contract and distrust among the politicians and other stakeholders. Pakistan's economic issues cannot be resolved without a larger consensus on an economic framework. This will not be done by the politicians alone. Dr. Haq said we need to talk about the foundation issues for a larger national interest. Transparent and inclusive deregulation and an open market policy perhaps would help a lot to attract domestic and foreign investment in the soaring infrastructure.

Renowned Pashto poet Amir Hamza remembered

ISLAMABAD: The 29th death anniversary of renowned Pashto poet, writer, novelist, translator and the father of Pashto ghazal Amir Hamza Khan Shinwari was observed on Sunday. Shinwari was born in Landi Kotal. After matriculation, he became inclined towards the literary arts. In 1935, he wrote the first Pashto drama, 'Zamindar', for All India Radio Peshawar, followed by scripting the story, dialogues, and lyrics for the first Pashto film, 'Laila Majnoon', released from Bombay in 1941. Apart from writing, he also directed and performed playback singing duties. Following the establishment of Pakistan, Hamza Shinwari penned numerous dramas, features, and speeches for Radio Pakistan Peshawar. As a translator, he rendered translation of Rahman Baba's 204 ghazals into Urdu, while translating Allama Iqbal's 'Javid Nama' and 'Armughan-e-Hijaz' into Pashto. He also translated 'Najul Balagha' into Pashto. Amir Hamza Shinwari contributed to every genre of Pashto literature, leaving behind a rich legacy in mysticism, poetry, psychology, and culture through numerous prose and poetic works. His work 'Tajalliyat-e-Mohammadiya' is considered as a seminal work in Pashto Sufi literature. He is respectfully remembered as 'Hamza Baba' or the 'Father of Pashto Poetry'. It is believed that he introduced the ghazal in Pashto poetry. Amir Hamza Shinwari also served as the editor of the Pashto page of the English newspaper 'Khyber Mail', where he contributed daily columns under the title 'Zhor Fikrona' (Deep Thoughts) on various social and literary topics. In recognition of his literary services, the Government of Pakistan conferred upon him the 'President's Award for Pride of Performance' and the 'Sitara-i-Imtiaz'. Amir Hamza Shinwari passed away on February 18, 1994, and was laid to rest in his ancestral area. Even today, thousands of people gather at his shrine annually to pay tribute to this great Sufi poet.

RDA gears up operation against illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has geared up its ongoing operation against illegal housing schemes. According to RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate of RDA had issued notices to Malik Tassarwar, Zakir, Malik Riyasat, Asim Aziz, Sheikh Maisam, Idress Awan, Master Zaheer, Syed Samar Shah, Ch Aslam Bani, Qazi Naveed, Haji Abrar, Ch. Hameed, Malik Aslam, Malik Ibrar, Khuram Qayum, Ch. Abid, Raja

Tahir, Ch. Yasir, Mr. Kosar, Badar, Anjum Kiyani and Tahir Madni, the owners of two private illegal housing schemes and 11 illegal subdivisions of the land namely Ittehad Town at Mouza Harnal on Mandra Chakwal Road Gujar Khan, Aziz Builders & Developers Pvt. Ltd at Mouza Jarary on Jorian to Gahi Syedan Road Rawalpindi, Land Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mankiyala Stupa Road, Land Subdivision Nazimabad at Mouza Louni Kallar Bypass Road Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Louni Tehsil Kallar Syedan and Land

Subdivision at Mouza Kallar Budhal Tehsil Kallar Syedan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Bagga Sheikh Khan, Land Subdivision at Mouza Chak Bhatta, Dharmial and Bishandot, Land Subdivision at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo, Land Subdivision at Mouza Mera Sangal and two more Land Subdivisions at Mouza Khabal and Sukhoo. He said the DG had also directed the Director MP&TE that action should be taken against illegal advertisements and marketing and First Information Report should also be lodged against the owners of illegal housing schemes. Moreover, the sponsors of illegal housing schemes were di-

rected to immediately stop the marketing of their unapproved and illegal housing schemes and contact RDA for getting NOC/approval of the scheme as per law, otherwise, strict legal action would be taken against the rules violators, he added. The citizens had also been requested not to invest in illegal and unauthorized housing schemes, he said adding, they were advised to check status of the housing projects on RDA official website www.rda.gop.pk. He said that the owners and sponsors of illegal housing schemes were misleading the public through illegal advertisements.--APP



ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins interacts with the dynamic and impressive women leaders gearing up for a Women in Executive Leadership Development course in Australia, alongside participants in a Climate Finance course, supported by Australian Awards.-- DNA



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Briefs

APHC
expresses
concern over
continued
operations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has expressed deep concern over the continued cordon and search operations and house raids on the peace and freedom-loving people and activists by the Indian troops and other intelligence agencies in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC in a statement issued in Srinagar said the continued operations were aimed at terrorizing the freedom and peace-loving people in the territory. The statement said the youth are being continuously arrested and summoned to police stations, adding all these pressure tactics have failed to deter the freedom-loving people of Kashmir from pursuing their legitimate demand for right to self-determination. The APHC said Jammu and Kashmir is neither a law and order problem nor a land dispute that can be resolved by military and brutal acts. Contrary to this, it added, Kashmir is purely a political dispute that has been recognized by the United Nations and its Security Council as an issue of right to self-determination. The statement, taking a dig at the so-called and puppet Hindutva Bharatiya Janata Party regime for its heinous criminal record in IOJK, said the freedom and peace-loving people of Jammu and Kashmir only want their political and birthright to self-determination, which is a peaceful and democratic formula for settlement of the lingering Kashmir dispute. The statement appealed to the United Nation's Secretary General, António Guterres, to help settle the Kashmir dispute according to the resolutions of the World Body and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and put pressure on India to stop human rights violations in IOJK.

Read Pakistan successfully concludes reader's moot

The Winners of the 50 Bay Competition were awarded. Yasir Nawab and Wafa Batool from Wah University were awarded the prestigious Read Pakistan 50 Books A Year Award, while almost 30 other winners from more than 15 partner universities received appreciation certificates

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Read Pakistan, a distinguished organisation committed to promoting literacy and fostering a passion for reading nationwide, held the National Reader's Conference on the 16th of February at Kehkashan Hall, Serena.

Read Pakistan has been at the forefront of initiating numerous campaigns and projects over a decade. The organization's largest campaign for school libraries in the country has already established 54 libraries.

The National Reader's Conference, hosted by Read Pakistan, is a flagship occasion in the organization's annual calendar. Every year, it brings together luminaries and intellectuals from diverse fields to celebrate the importance of reading and its profound impact on society. This year's conference featured distinguished speakers who had made substantial contributions to their respective fields. Among the honoured speakers were Miss Nigar Nazar, a renowned artist and female cartoonist, and Mr Rashidally Soobadar from the Mauritius High Commission in the most e, memorable way highlighted the importance of reading. Mr Zia Ur Rehman, a notable author who has received a Lifetime Achievement Award and served in civil services for 36 years, spoke passionately about the importance of inculcating reading habits among the youth. Senator Fauwzia Arshad appreciated the cause of Read Pakistan in a very modest way. In addition to the esteemed speakers, the conference hosted a compelling panel discussion with prominent participants, including Muhammad Rafique Tahir, Former



Joint Educational Advisor, Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, Dr. Waqar Azeem, a multi-talented individual with expertise in playwrighting, directing, and acting, discussed "The Joy of Reading Plays", Sumbhal Naveed, Founder and CEO of the Institute of Learning for a Better Tomorrow (ILFABET), delved into the "Pedagogy of Reading Habit in Pakistan", Munir Ahmed explored the theme of "Storytelling to Inculcate Reading

Interest," while published author Madiha Arsalan discussed the "Role of Language in Literature SDGs 2030." Miss Sadaf Raza who is a poet, mystic, and healer and has authored three collections of poems, moderated the whole panel discussion. The event was concluded by CEO Read Pakistan, Miss Syeda Fatima Hasan Gilani a passionate philanthropist who has dedicated herself to promoting reading

and love for books in Pakistan has authored more than ten children books. In a grand culmination, the Winners of the 50 Bay Competition were awarded. Yasir Nawab and Wafa Batool from Wah University were awarded the prestigious Read Pakistan 50 Books A Year Award, while almost 30 other winners from more than 15 partner universities received appreciation certificates.

India denying justice to families of Samjhauta Express attack victims

ISLAMABAD: Despite the lapse of 17 years, the Indian government continues to deny justice to the families of victims of the Samjhauta Express terrorist attack despite the availability of evidence. On February 18, 2007, 68 persons, mostly Pakistanis, were killed in bomb blasts in Samjhauta Express, a cross-border train service between Pakistan and India, said a report released, on Sunday by Kashmir Media Service. The report maintained that the bombs were planted by Hindutva terrorists with the connivance of Indian secret agencies. The report deplored that the Indian government continues to deny justice to the families of victims of the heinous act despite the availability of evidence. It said that the bombs were planted by Hindutva terrorists in connivance with the Indian secret agencies to malign Pakistan. The report maintained that the acquittal of those involved in blasts showed Hindutva extremists enjoy impunity under Modi-led BJP/RSS/VHP and Bajrang Dal govt in India and that the Indian court decision in this regard was a reflection of Indian state policy to protect the Hindutva terrorists.—APP

APTMA urges enhanced collaboration with China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The All-Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has called for greater collaboration with China to help Pakistan achieve its ambitious export target of \$50 billion per annum by 2029. Representing more than 223 textile companies, the association believes that strengthened ties with China, a leading player in the global textile industry, can significantly boost Pakistan's export earnings. In an interview with Gwadar Pro, APTMA Secretary General Shahid Sattar highlighted

the cooperation between China and Pakistan in the textile industry to showcase complementary advantages across various categories, presenting a robust framework for mutual growth and development. This strategic partnership, bolstered by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has a profound impact on Pakistani firms gaining access to the Chinese market. Pakistan's export of goods and services to China witnessed a 40.01 percent increase during the first six months of the current fiscal

year (2023-24) compared to the exports of the corresponding period last year, announced the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). This signifies a major achievement and highlights the growing economic ties between the two nations. To seize export opportunities for Pakistan's textile and apparel industry, APTMA recently published a comprehensive report covering the entire value chain. The report presents a 41-point policy roadmap designed to meet ambitious targets, such as increasing sector exports to more than \$50 billion annually by 2029.

Citizens urged not to allow children to fly kites; 356 arrested with 48000 kites

RAWALPINDI: The district administration and Rawalpindi District Police have urged the citizens to ensure that their children do not violate the ban on kite flying imposed by the provincial government otherwise strict action would be taken against the violators in accordance with the law. According to a police spokesman, over 356 kite flyers and sellers were rounded up during this season and nearly 48,000 kites and 800 string rolls were recovered from their possession. He informed that Potohar division police netted 147 violators with 5300 kites, 200 string rolls, 326 liquor bottles, two pistols, sound system and other items. Similarly, Rawal Division police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and netted 18 accused with 438 kites and 15 string rolls while Saddar Division police held 23 kite flyers and sellers and seized 630 kites, 18 string rolls and other items. He said, separate cases had been registered against all the violators. The spokesman said that on the special directives of City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani, police were taking strict action in accordance with the law.—APP

Gwadar's land record computerization reached 82%

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Gwadar's land record computerization has reached 82% due to continuous efforts of the revenue staff and computerization teams while the land settlement is also in process, said Deputy Commissioner Gwadar Aurangzeb Badini. Talking to Gwadar Pro, he said the Board of Revenue has been approached to give its final verdict in a technical matter so that 100% progress is achieved. Residents of Gwadar can now get all digitized land record-related services of 32 Mouzas/Wards from Markaz-e-Sahooliat Centre at Tehsil Office Gwadar, he added. He stressed that the computerized land record would be immune to forgery, fraud, and corruption, as well as malfunction-free. This measure will enhance transparency, efficiency, and security, thereby supporting sustainable development and economic growth. Highlighting the significance of

land settlement for equitable and unrestricted ownership, the Deputy Commissioner of Gwadar stated that once the settlement process concludes, residents of Gwadar City will have the freedom to buy, sell, and utilize their land for both personal and commercial purposes. In Baluchistan, a significant portion of land remains unclaimed and is held collectively by tribes rather than individual ownership. Once proper settlement occurs, individuals will have the opportunity to acquire land in their names, facilitating straightforward transactions for personal residences, commercial ventures, or agricultural purposes. In 2013, the government revoked an ongoing land settlement process for Gwadar district's Panni subdivision. The decision created confusion regarding state-owned versus privately held land. The abrupt halt to the settlement process raised questions about transparency and fairness. The land settlement process in Gwa-

dar remained a complex and contentious issue, marked by various challenges and controversies. Gwadar's land ownership has been a subject of dispute for many years. Individuals and families claim ownership of specific parcels, leading to conflicts over boundaries and rights. The government's efforts to establish clear ownership have faced hurdles due to competing claims in the past. The quest for clarity and fairness in land settlement continued impacting the district's development and stability. But recently the Pakistani administration has implemented several measures to facilitate land settlement procedures, aiming to establish clear ownership rights and allocate land for diverse purposes. These efforts will standardize land titles, address disputes, and will play a crucial role in enhancing regional connectivity, ensuring economic stability, and fostering sustainable growth.

Nepal's Ambassador arrives at Pir House Bari Imam Sarkar

Meeting with Bari Imam Sarkar Pir Syed Haider Ali Gilani

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan His Excellency Mr Tapas Adikari called on Sajjada Nasheen Hazrat Bari Imam Sarkar at Pir House. Bilateral and regional issues were discussed besides religious and spiritual matters in the meeting. On this occasion, inter-faith harmony was discussed in great detail in addition to Sufism, the

identity of Auliya Allah. Sajjada Nasheen also expressed that Islam stresses on human dignity above

any division and Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) has been symbol of mercy and blessings to whole of world

and that facet was carried to generations by followers of the Prophet(PBUH) and amply highlighted by the Saints.



Decoding Pakistan's political ballot: An insightful overview

MUHAMMAD HANAN

The current political atmosphere is charged with anticipation as the nation gears up for nationwide general elections. However, amidst the excitement, it's crucial to reflect on the significance of these electoral processes. Elections are not merely exercises in choosing a favourite political party or leader; they form the cornerstone of a robust democracy. They empower the public to shape the direction of the country by selecting officials to govern and determine national priorities. Pakistan's electoral history is bruised by tragedy and instability. The inaugural general elections in 1970 led to the fracturing of the state into Pakistan and Bangladesh, precipitating a tumultuous era. Subsequent periods of dictatorship, notably under Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq, cast shadows over Pakistan's reputation and democracy. These authoritarian regimes eroded the nation's commitment to democratic principles, painting Pakistan as an unstable entity incapable of upholding basic human rights and freedoms. Moreover, the prevalence of corruption, nepotism, and injustice during these periods undermined public trust in the government's ability to govern effectively and raised questions about the trans-

parency of the electoral process. The resurgence of elections in the 1980s saw General Zia introducing the concept of "Party-Less Elections" as a strategy to facilitate their restoration. In this unique approach, candidates ran independently, although affiliations with various parties were widely perceived. The controversial move, criticized as undemocratic, involved a ban on political parties. Despite the critique, the 1985 elections played a pivotal role in the restoration of civilian rule, resulting in the formation of a government led by Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo. Notably, General Zia retained the presidency, wielding significant power in the political landscape. Following the demise of General Zia ul Haq, party-based elections resumed in 1988, leading to the ascendancy of the Pakistan People's Party under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto. However, the stability of this government proved elusive. By 1990, a confluence of factors, including Article 58-2(b), a vote of no confidence, corruption allegations, and mismanagement cases, brought about its conclusion. The subsequent elections in 1990 saw the rise of the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (JI) coalition, with Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif assuming the role of Prime Minister.

The political landscape witnessed a repetition of events in 1993 and 1997, resulting in the alternating leadership of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif during these tumultuous years. The return of military rule occurred under General Pervez Musharraf, and the landscape shifted significantly after the events of 9/11, ushering in a period of instability for democracy. This turbulence persisted until the pivotal elections of 2008. These elections were crucial, marking the end of nearly a decade of military governance. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto played a profound role, paving the way for the Pakistan People's Party's triumph, with Asif Ali Zardari assuming the position of head of state. In the subsequent elections of 2013, held as per schedule, Nawaz Sharif made a return to the position of Prime Minister, shaping the political trajectory of the country once again. The 2013 elections faced widespread allegations of rigging, particularly from the political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which emerged as a significant opposition force challenging the election's credibility. This discontent laid the groundwork for the rise of Imran Khan, who rode a wave of popular support, often referred to as a "tsunami," leading to his elec-

tion as the new Prime Minister in 2018. However, the 2018 elections were not without controversy, with claims of rigging surfacing once again. These concerns prompted the formation of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in 2020. After two years of concerted efforts, the PDM succeeded in overthrowing the government of Imran Khan on April 10, 2022, with Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif assuming the role of Prime Minister. The ensuing political instability had repercussions on the country's reputation and economy, resulting in inflation and an economic crisis. The 2024 elections are already mired in controversy, highlighting the need for fair and transparent processes. Elections are vital for a stable government and democracy in Pakistan. Yet, many citizens may not fully grasp the importance of their vote. If the 2024 elections encounter similar issues, it will challenge the incoming government's legitimacy and ability to govern effectively. Therefore, every citizen must value their vote and use it responsibly. Through active participation, we can safeguard our democracy and ensure that the people's voices are heard. Let's strive for fair and inclusive elections, ensuring Pakistan's democracy thrives for generations.

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Why 'Israel's' existence is controversial

IN arguably the most scandalous conflict of the decade, many from around the world were only made aware of the Israeli-Arab conflict on October 7, 2023. Unlike the residents of the Arab part of the world, many foreign citizens from all around the globe were not exposed to the complexity of the over 70 years of Israeli occupation. An occupation not limited to Palestinian land, but an occupying force that (even up until today) still occupies several parts of other sovereign countries, including Lebanon and Syria, and plans to occupy much more. This article will focus on why "Israel's" existence in the Middle East, and specifically, what many refer to as "the Levant", is controversial. If you are an active social media user, you are bound to have been exposed to various comments and remarks made by Zionists and anti-Zionists on the historical and religious significance of the Israeli-Arab conflict. First and foremost, you have probably seen your average Zionist claim religious entitlement to the land, as in it was promised to the Jews by God. But the subject of the potential legal and moral entitlement to the land is often dismissed and swept under the rug. Judaism itself forbids the Jews from having their own sovereign country until their believed Messiah returns. The founding fathers of "Israel", such as Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion, are in fact atheists, which brings any reasonable person to the conclusion that religion was most probably used as a pretext to situate the West's biggest ally and proxy very strategically in the Middle East to guard the interests of its western allies such as the UK and other European nations, and later on the USA. According to Zionist prophecies, the rightful owners of the land of Palestine, and various other parts of sovereign Levantine countries, are the Jews. Believe it or not, these religious prophecies are utilized as a sole sufficient argument by Zionists in justifying the mass displacement of millions of Arabs in their own land. This particular claim is dangerous and problematic for various reasons.

In the West Bank, which is legal Palestinian territory under international law since the "1967 borders agreement", settlers have invaded the territory, illegally. They are funded and supported by the "democratic state" of "Israel". As a matter of fact, Jews in the West Bank have different colour license plates from the Arabs so that the Israeli authority can distinguish them easily. Not to mention that there are several areas and roads that are accessible exclusively to Jewish people, and are off limits to the non-Jews, specifically, the Arabs, who are not allowed to use these roads. These are just a few of many special rights the Jews have over the Arabs, making the Jews self-proclaimed first-class citizens among the Arabs in their own legal land. What many from the non-Arab parts of the world don't know is that "Israel's" claim to what it refers to as its Jewish homeland, under its extremist prophecies, is not limited to Palestine alone. "Israel" has never declared its borders, and this was not done by accident. What Zionists refer to as "greater Israel" includes southern parts of Lebanon, western parts of Jordan, southern parts of Syria (including the already occupied Golan Heights), and even the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

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Where should MSC look for 'security'?

ON the other side of the Eurasian continent, it is also during these days that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced a piece of data: It is expected that 18 NATO member countries will reach the target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense this year. Stoltenberg made the statement before his departure for the Munich Security Conference (MSC), with a certain element of "testing the waters." Although he personally "welcomes" the changes among NATO member countries, in the eyes of the international community, this certainly does not imply "peace" or "harmony," but rather more vigilance and concern. As an important annual forum for international strategic and security policies with significant global influence, this year's MSC opened on February 16 and will last for three days. Over 180 government officials, defense and military personnel, as well as security experts from around the world are attending. At the time of the conference, the current round of Israel-Palestine conflict has been dragging on for over four months, and the Ukraine crisis is approaching its two-year mark. The security anxieties plaguing the Western world have become even more pronounced. This is evident from the changing tones of the MSC over the past three years: In 2022, it was "Unlearning Helplessness"; in 2023, it was "Revision"; and this year, it is "Lose-Lose?". The explanation provided in the pre-conference report released by the organizers of the MSC is that the geopolitical and economic optimism of the post-Cold War era has vanished and at the moment, there is thus a real risk that more and more countries end up in a lose-lose situation. The MSC is a place for "dialogue" rather than "action," but it advocates for the "Munich Rule" - "engage and interact with each other: don't lecture or ignore one another," providing a useful dialogue platform for the field of security, where different countries often find it difficult to compromise yet urgently need to cooperate. This is also the reason why the influence of the MSC is growing. In general, the MSC, known as the "Davos of defense," has some valuable observations and reflections on the current international security situation. For example, the report of this year's conference points out that some countries adhere to zero-sum thinking and prioritize relative payoffs, leading to a "lose-lose" dilemma for the world, which is reasonable. However, the solutions proposed in the report, including suggesting that the transatlantic partners and like-minded states "invest in defense and deterrence while selectively restricting the pursuit of mutual benefits to politically like-minded states," are narrow-minded and limited, contradicting the goal of resolving the "lose-lose" dilemma. In recent years, the Western world has become increasingly anxious about security, but the focus of the US and Europe is different. The US is mainly concerned about the decline of its hegemony, and its security concerns are relatively "illusory," while Europe is relatively more "realistic." This anxiety in Europe has been exaggerated and exploited by some "Cold War enthusiasts" and other ulterior forces, leading to a paradox where the more security is pursued, the less secure it becomes.

"Chatta's Statement and Pakistan's Deepening Instability"

Qamar Bashir



In the intricate web of power dynamics during elections, the Election Commission emerges as the second force or institution with some semblance of authority over District Returning Officers (DROs). However, having been ingrained within the civil bureaucracy for over three decades, I can attest with absolute certainty that the Election Commission, despite its perceived power, lacked the influence or clout to compel the civil administration—the most potent institution within the civilian sector—to perpetrate such a heinous and outrageously shameful act of election rigging. The third potential force in this intricate power play could indeed be PML(N), envisioned as the assured victor poised to govern...

AS the political landscape unfolds, the challenges of forming a government in the center become starkly apparent. PML(N) faces the dilemma of compromising its principles by aligning with PPP, leading to its refusal to accept the premiership. Similarly, PPP shows reluctance in vying for the top position. Despite PTI's claim to over 170 seats, reduced to 93 amid allegations of rigging, it finds itself sidelined, allegedly due to the establishment's hostility towards Chairman PTI. This unprecedented situation sees no party willing to seize power at the center, focusing instead on provincial governance. Both PML(N) and PPP hesitate to lead due to political uncertainty and economic challenges. While concerns about inflation, balance of payments, and trade persist, the elephant in the room—that is, the underlying political instability—casts a long shadow over the nation's future. The call of nationwide protest against alleged massive and rampant rigging across the country, by a formidable alliance of PTI, JUL, JI, and GDA, has added another thick layer to the already complex and highly unstable political scenario. At this critical juncture, the public statement from Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaqat Ali Chatta, added yet another layer of turmoil to the country's already unstable political landscape. His shocking admission of forcing subordinate officers and staff to engage in large-scale election rigging during the 2024 elections in Rawalpindi division sent shockwaves throughout the nation. Chatta revealed how he allegedly aided thirteen candidates by unlawfully securing their victories, even resorting to adding 50,000 forged votes and declaring rightful winners as losers with a lead of 70,000 votes. Driven by his troubled conscience, nights of restless sleep compelled him to step forward and publicly confess to his role in the mass rigging.

This revelation marks the fourth resignation in as many months by individuals who dared to defy the oppressive might of the state. Their courage to stand up for justice and truth, despite the personal sacrifices of their careers, privileges, and prestige, highlights a deeper struggle against the looming threat of economic, financial, and political collapse. Each resignation serves as a testament to the enduring battle for integrity and accountability in a nation teetering on the brink of crisis. The recent spate of resignations, including those of two Supreme Court judges, one Lahore High Court judge, and now a top bureaucrat like the Commissioner of Rawalpindi Division, has plunged the nation into turmoil. In a startling press statement, the Commissioner admitted to committing heinous crimes that destabilized the country, likening it to a betrayal of one's own nation. He revealed how many of his subordinates, despite their reluctance, were coerced into participating in these nefarious activities. The glaring question that arises is why the perpetrators who pressured him into these actions remain untouched while he bears the brunt of the consequences. It prompts deep reflection on the motivations, compulsions, and thought processes of those masterminding such despicable acts. What drives them to manipulate elections, undermine democracy, and strip the people of Pakistan of their rightful voice and power? These are questions that demand answers and shed light on the darker underbelly of our political system. There are four power bases which could have leverage,

means and weapons to force the entire administration of the country to allegedly do disservice to the country to the extent of jeopardizing the very soul of the country and pushing the country to the brink of internal chaos, economic and financial collapse and political instability. These four bases of power are: the Interim government, Election Commission of Pakistan, PML(N) and the establishment. The blame for the alleged rampant, audacious, and shameless acts of election rigging, which have robbed a political party of its rightful mandate and undermined the sanctity of votes, falls squarely on the interim government, bearing approximately 90% of the responsibility. Under the constitution and the law of the land, the entire bureaucracy, whether civilian or military, is subordinate to the interim government, granting it significant leverage over civil servants. The interim government possesses the authority to transfer, sideline, or suspend civil servants, thereby depriving them of their duties and benefits. They can subject them to inquiries, suspension, or even dismissal from service. Yet, despite these intimidations, the interim government does not yield enough power to coerce civil servants into unwillingly committing such egregious acts of betrayal against the nation. strike at the very heart of democracy and undermine the collective will of 250 million people.

In the intricate web of power dynamics during elections, the Election Commission emerges as the second force or institution with some semblance of authority over District Returning Officers (DROs). However, having been ingrained within the civil bureaucracy for over three decades, I can attest with absolute certainty that the Election Commission, despite its perceived power, lacked the influence or clout to compel the civil administration—the most potent institution within the civilian sector—to perpetrate such a heinous and outrageously shameful act of election rigging. The third potential force in this intricate power play could indeed be PML(N), envisioned as the assured victor poised to govern both at the center and in Punjab. Drawing from personal experience, I've witnessed the subtle alignment of the bureaucracy with the prospective government, offering support overtly or covertly. PML(N), renowned for its skill in fostering enduring loyalties within the civil bureaucracy, holds the capacity to reward its supporters once in power. However, despite these influences, they are insufficient to coerce or compel the civil bureaucracy into perpetrating such a heinous crime, one that has dangerously edged the country toward civil strife.

The other potential force at play in this intricate power play is the establishment, known for its history of acting independently, disregarding civilian command and control and rendering them immaterial, toothless, and inconsequential. Allegedly, the establishment has asserted its dominance over the civilian government, parliament, and judiciary, making it clear that their power extends only within the confines of civil domains and holds no sway over the establishment's decisions and actions. They have effectively communicated that the application of the constitution and the law of the land ceases to operate once within the limits of cantonment. Furthermore, they have asserted that all pillars of the state and civilian institutions are subordinate to them, allowing civilian institutions to

act only within the limits set by the establishment. Allegedly, in the weak and fragile democracies, the establishment wields its control through a combination of lethal force and superior kinetic means, surpassing those possessed by civilian security agencies. They leverage their dominance by setting aside legal constraints and act with impunity. In weak democracies, where public awareness and collective will are lacking, civilians lack the means to enforce their authority over the armed forces. This imbalance enables the establishment to flout oaths, disregard the constitution, and perpetrate acts of violence against civilians unchecked. This stands in stark contrast to established democracies, where collective empowerment enables civilians to enforce civilian control over the armed forces and security agencies, ensuring adherence to legal frameworks and protection of civil liberties.

The establishment exercises its leverage over civilian administration through sheer force and intimidation, exploiting its impunity to employ a range of unlawful tactics. Including but not limited to intimidation, harassment, abductions, and character assassinations with impunity. These tactics extend beyond the target to their families, subjected to humiliation, threats, and physical, emotional, and mental torture until they capitulate. Mr. Chatta's cunning acknowledgment of responsibility, shifting blame away from the armed forces, underscores this reality, highlighting the lengths to which individuals are coerced to conform to orchestrated agendas.

The first counter and rubbish the statement of Chatta was the spokesperson of Punjab government who declared Chatta as lunatic, insane, driven by his vicious desire to create political space after his retirement. The second was Maryam Orangzeb who termed him a part of a large conspiracy against the nation and demanded a deep down check on him to unearth the actual vicious purpose of his malicious assertion. Third in line was none other than the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in his unofficial and informal and unprecedented media statement that said that it is easy to blame but difficult to prove. PTI, JI and JUI termed it vindication of their claims of massive rigging in the elections which turned many loser winners and vice versa. PTI's call for an independent inquiry to uncover the truth and restore their stolen seats raises a crucial question: Who will lead this investigation? Will it be conducted by police officers, FIA or IB teams, a JIT, or the judiciary? However, in all these scenarios, the members of the inquiry body are either civil servants or judges, all ultimately subordinate to the incumbent government and the superior judiciary. This raises concerns that the inquiry report may lack substance or truth, as it could be influenced to favor certain interests. Hence, it is crucial for the interim government to either incorporate representatives from all contesting political parties into the inquiry committee or enlist the assistance of independent international experts. This strategy is vital to guarantee a transparent and unbiased investigation that can hold accountable those responsible for betraying the trust of Pakistan's 250 million citizens. By restoring the true mandate and rightfully awarding victory to the deserving candidates, we can pave the way for sustainable political, economic, and financial stability in the country.

Security and Economic Recovery in Mexico

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



These criminal groups now control significant parts of both the formal and informal economies. While they still engage in illegal activities such as human, arms, and narcotics trafficking, they also function like multinational...

IN Mexico, the issues of security and economic recovery are closely connected. People in power and regular citizens both know that criminal groups in the country pose threats to both these aspects. While there is a general agreement that something needs to be done, there's no consensus on the best way forward. This is partly due to the geography of Mexico, with its mountains, deserts, peninsulas and other features creating divisions that make it challenging for the central government in Mexico City to effectively govern all regions. This has led to power vacuums, giving rise to independence movements, warlords and even parallel governments throughout history. The current organized criminal groups, like the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels are seen as a modern expression of this historical reality. The federal government faces a challenge in dealing with the power these criminal groups have accumulated. One factor contributing to their strength is the significant number of defections from the Mexican armed forces. When Vicente Fox took office in 2000, his government changed its relationship with the military, leading to a loss of privileges, operational freedom, financial benefits and social status for the servicemen. This shift empowered the cartels, as they gained capabilities comparable to the forces meant to combat them. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

cartels expanded their local influence at a low cost by providing essential goods in remote areas where the national government struggled. This allowed organized crime to deepen its presence in communities across the country.

These criminal groups now control significant parts of both the formal and informal economies. While they still engage in illegal activities such as human, arms, and narcotics trafficking, they also function like multinational corporations. Their leaders have business steps; they control all aspects of their operations, collaborate with subsidiaries and have strong connections with criminal groups in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the formal economy, they act as if they are part of government services, monopolizing local control of internet providers, pharmaceuticals and engaging in legal businesses like manufacturing and selling their own cigarette brands. Nationally, they impose taxes and quotas on industries like avocado and lime, and they have even made inroads into the beer market.

There's a big problem in Mexico because criminal groups are getting more powerful in places where businesses usually operate. This is a threat to the country. In the past, their presence scared away foreign investors or made it more expensive to keep things safe. Now, it is a question of who controls different parts of the country's economy. This is es-

pecially important as Mexico tries to recover from the pandemic. However, there is a disagreement among politicians on how to deal with this. One idea is to make deals with these criminal groups so they don't cause trouble. The government would let them operate as long as they follow some rules. The benefit is that it might avoid violence, but the problem is it gives power to these criminal groups and weakens the government. Some people, especially in security and defense, don't like this idea. The other idea is to take a strong action against these criminal groups, trying to eliminate their power and corruption. This would need a lot of money and effort, and it might cause problems in the short term. It was tried before with not much success. Both ideas have pros and cons. The first might reduce violence but harm businesses and make it hard for foreign investors to trust the situation. The second could bring long-term gains but needs a lot of money and might scare away investors in the short term. Either way, implementing these ideas will face political challenges. On a bigger scale, this issue is about whether the government can control its territory and economy despite challenges from geography and history. One strategy wants to work within these challenges, while the other believes Mexico can overcome them if it's willing to pay the price.

Briefs

Nasser Hospital
'completely
out of...'

FROM PAGE 01
He pointed out that the Israeli occupation forces kept medical personnel for hours in the maternity building, handcuffed them, beat them, and stripped them of their clothes. He pointed out that the occupation army arrested 70 healthcare workers in the medical complex. He said that there are now only 25 medical personnel left in the Nasser Medical Complex who are unable to handle cases in need of critical care. He warned that the occupation army has arrested the intensive care doctor and there is no doctor to follow up on critical cases. He noted that the Israeli occupation forces have arrested dozens of immobile patients who are receiving treatment and placed them in military beds, loaded them onto trucks, and taken them to an unknown location, putting their lives at risk. He added that the electricity has been cut off from the Nasser Medical Complex for three days, resulting in lack of oxygen for the patients. This has led to the death of seven patients so far, with fears of the death of dozens of critical cases.

Lula
compares
Israel's
action to...

FROM PAGE 01
"What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews," he said. Meanwhile, bil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for President Mahmoud Abbas, declared that the continuous Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem will not bring security or stability to anyone in the region or the world. In a press statement, Abu Rudeineh stated that the genocidal war waged by Israeli occupation authorities on Gaza has resulted in the killing and injury of over one hundred thousand Palestinians. He described the daily Israeli incursions into cities, villages, and refugee camps in the West Bank, coupled with the policies of killing, arrests, and settler terrorism, and the Israeli attempts to undermine the UNRWA and to impose restrictions on worshippers during the upcoming month of Ramadan, as futile attempts that will only bring about destruction, violence, and instability. He continued, "Everyone should know that Jerusalem and Palestine constitute the key to the solution and the future and stability of the region. Without the State of Palestine obtaining its full membership in the United Nations, realizing its independence on Palestinian land with East Jerusalem as its capital... the region will remain in constant turmoil, enduring endless wars."

PTI secured
180 seats
in national
assembly...

FROM PAGE 01
He said that PTI rejected this mega poll fraud in the strongest possible terms because the nation's mandate was pilfered, which they given to their beloved leader PTI Chairman-for-life Imran Khan and PTI. He called upon that there should be a judicial inquiry with independent judges and those named by the Pindi commissioner should not be part of the probe commission so as to ensure conducting a fair and transparent inquiry in this regard. Omar Ayub stated that since the top judge had been named by the commissioner, the party would request that he should not become a part of the bench. He stressed that PTI was not demanding the annulment of the recent general elections but wanted the real mandate to be recognized, adding that the results of the February 8 polls should reflect the actual votes cast by people.

Dutch hockey club arrives
to promote sports tourism

LAHORE: Players of renowned Dutch hockey club OHC Bully arrives in Lahore for friendly matches. The Club will arrive in Islamabad on February 22 and hosted by the Dutch ambassador to Pakistan. – DNA

The OHC Bully's visit is historic in the sense that it is after a long interval of 22 years that a European hockey club is visiting Pakistan and the Bully's visit is one of the small steps towards the goal of revival of hockey in the country

DNA

LAHORE: The OHC Bully Hockey Club, Netherlands, arrived in Lahore on Saturday night to play three friendly games in Lahore and Islamabad during a week-long visit. Hockey Olympian Khawaja Junaid, Junaid Chattha and Higher Education Commission officials received the visiting Dutch club at the Allama Iqbal International airport. The Oldenzaal Hockey Club "Bully", commonly known as OHC Bully, is visiting Pakistan on the invitation of Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy (KJHA) and will play three games in all with two at the historic National Hockey Stadium, Lahore, and one at the Naseer Bunda Stadium, Islamabad. The

Bully hockey club will play games against the Higher Education Commission (HEC) hockey team picked from the Prime Minister's Youth Talent Hunt Program. The OHC Bully's visit is historic in the sense that it is after a long interval of 22 years that a European hockey club is visiting Pakistan and the Bully's visit is one of the small steps towards the goal of revival of hockey in the country. The visit may also encourage other European hockey clubs to visit Pakistan every year during the winters. Former Olympian Khawaja Junaid, talking to APP here on Saturday, said that he was thankful to the OHC Bully for accepting the invitation to visit Pakistan for friendlies, adding that Khawaja Junaid Hockey club was

committed to revival of hockey by nurturing talent at the grassroots level. He said the OHC Bully's visit is part of the efforts to restore prestige of the national sport. Khawaja Junaid further said that he was grooming raw hockey talent through coaching from the tender age of seven years, adding that the HEC team was selected by him after trials of 25,000 budding players under the Youth Talent Hunt Program. Acknowledging role of former hockey Olympian Fareed Ahmed, who happens to be the coach of OHC Bully, in arranging the visit to Pakistan, he said, "I am also connecting with the outside world to provide the right exposure to these young lads at an early age." He said this will be a discovery

visit for the youth being foreign to Pakistan's rich hockey traditions and hospitality, expressing the hope that Pakistan will soon become annual rendezvous for the European clubs and teams. Former World Champion Khawaja Junaid further said field hockey comes to a standstill during harsh winters in Europe and European clubs visit the nearby countries like Spain to play hockey, adding that it is the time when European teams may be invited to make Pakistan their destination as the country boasts of a mild weather during this period. Responding to a query, he said visit of a European hockey club will also help promote the country's tourism through sports, adding that this is also a good opportunity

for showcase cultural heritage and historical ancestry to the world. Khawaja Junaid also shared that OHC Bully is almost a century-old club which was founded in 1935. Khawaja Junaid thanked Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar and Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed for their support in making this visit of a European hockey club possible. Captain OHC Bully Ruben Kattier, upon arrival in Lahore, said that it is a pride to visit and play at Pakistani soil rich in hockey tradition. He said he was immensely pleased to lead a team to the iconic National Hockey Stadium in Lahore, adding that Pakistan has played a distinctive role in promotion of hockey across the globe.

PSL 9: Gladiators beat
Zalmi in thrilling encounter

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: Quetta Gladiators began their Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 9 journey with a 16-run win against Peshawar Zalmi at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore on Sunday. The Zalmi side led by Babar Azam failed to chase the 207-run target as Quetta's bowlers put in a remarkable effort in the death overs to ensure their hard-fought win. Azam top scored for his side by scoring 68 runs on 42 balls courtesy of eight boundaries but his efforts went in vain as his side fell 17 runs short of the total target set by the Gladiators. Zalmi had a thrilling start, Saim Ayub and Azam were well set on the crease as they were heading towards

100 for no loss. However, in the ninth over, a misunderstanding between the two batters cost them a big blow. Saim lost his wicket after scoring 42 runs after getting run out leaving his side 91-1 in 8.4 overs. Mohammad Harris came in after the left-handed batter's departure but he too walked back to the pavilion shortly after scoring just 7 runs. Azam stayed on the crease as he continued to score for his side, but the Zalmi skipper mistimed his shot on mystery spinner's Abrar Ahmed ball and was caught by Mohammad Wasim Jr. The wickets kept falling and the outstanding effort by the Gladiators' bowlers restricted Zalmi to 190 for six wickets, winning the match by 16 runs.

Earlier in the first innings, Jason Roy and Saud Shakeel wreaked havoc as they thrashed Zalmi's bowler all over the ground and built a 157-run partnership. Shakeel departed after scoring a brilliant 74 off 47, laced with ten boundaries, which included four sixes as well. Gladiators' skipper Rilee Rossouw joined the party and hit the six off the first ball, followed by a boundary two balls later, but Mohammad Zeeshan castled him in the next over to end his brief stay. Roy was departed by Salman Irshad in the 18th over with 185 runs on the board after playing a clinical knock of 75 runs from 48 balls, featuring nine boundaries and two sixes. Sherfane Rutherford played a 20-run cameo off 13 balls before getting out in the last over, followed by Mohammad Wasim who scored a boundary and departed on the next ball. Khawaja Nafay (6) hit the last ball for four to lift the team's total to 206 in their allocated 20 overs. Irshad led the bowling charts for the Peshawar Zalmi with figures of 3-38, while Wood and Zeeshan contributed with one wicket each.

Xavi
addresses
Araujo,
Pedri injury
concerns

BARCELONA: Barcelona manager Xavi reassured that neither Ronald Araujo nor Pedri sustained injuries during Sunday's La Liga encounter against Celta Vigo. Araujo was substituted at halftime during their 2-1 victory, with Inigo Martinez coming on, while Pedri was replaced by Fermin Lopez in the 75th minute. There were concerns over the duo's fitness ahead of next week's Champions League last-16 first leg against Napoli, but Xavi confirmed that neither player is sidelined with injuries. "There were no injuries today. Neither Araujo nor Pedri are injured. They're fine," Xavi told reporters following the narrow success over Celta in Spain's top flight. "Football is unfair in general. Celta made a great effort without any reward to show from it. However, if we didn't win today it would also be unfair. I really think we deserved the three points." Despite Iago Aspas leveling the score after Robert Lewandowski's opener, the Polish's second goal secured victory for Barcelona late in the game. – Agencies

Blind cricket:
Pak-India clash
sets on Feb 22

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Arch-rivals Pakistan and India will be again in action on February 22 in the Triangular Blind cricket series at the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket Academy Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to Chairman Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) Syed Sultan Shah, besides Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka will take part in the Triangular cricket series, which will get underway from February 21 with the opening ceremony. As per the schedule, the opening match of which will be played between arch-rivals Pakistan and India on February 22 while India will play with Sri Lanka on February 23 and Pakistan will play against Sri Lanka on February 24 in single round, while the final between the top two teams will be played on February 25. Syed Sultan Shah said that the training camp of the national blind team is in full swing at Lahore for the preparation of the triangular series. He said that green shirts will again defeat India in the international event and we are very hopeful to win the series as well. Nisar Ali will lead the 15 members Pakistan blind cricket team in series and other players include Zafar Iqbal, Riayat Khan, Mohammad Shahzaib, Fakhar Abbas, Mohammad Salman (B1), Badar Munir (Vice Captain), Shahzeb Haider, Moain Aslam, Babar Ali (B2), Matiullah, Mohammad Rashid, Mohammad Safdar, Kamran Akhter, Akmal Hayyat (B3) while Mohammad Jameel will act as head coach and Tahir Mehmood Butt act trainer with the team.

Bilawal
warns of
protest
if 'justice
not given'

FROM PAGE 01

"We have decided that I will not nominate myself for the slot of prime minister. Pakistan is in turmoil, with fires raging in all four provinces. We need to extinguish these fires. We do not want any federal ministry or the prime minister's chair. We only want to solve Pakistan's problems," he affirmed. "We have been in coalition with Mian Sahib for over 18 months. The promises made to us regarding development projects were not fulfilled. I am not seeking ministries for myself; I am seeking work for the people. I was told to give them (PML-N) three years, and then you can become prime minister. I have rejected the idea of becoming prime minister under such circumstances," he said. Bilawal urged all Pakistanis to prioritize the country's interests over personal gains and warned against attempts to divide society along sectarian lines. He vowed to thwart any such efforts and appealed for unity to save Pakistan from further turmoil. He said: "For the past few months, the PPP has been actively campaigning throughout Pakistan. Our party's caravans have traversed all four provinces, igniting the spirit of democracy." Expressing gratitude to the people for their support, Bilawal said, "Once again, we have proven that the PPP is the binding force (cabin) of all four provinces. This election wasn't about my personal aspirations to sit on the (PM) chair in Islamabad. I fought this election for you, for my brothers. Pakistan is grappling with economic and political crises; society has been divided. Therefore, I contested this election so that there could be a politician who speaks about Pakistan's issues." He highlighted the widespread poverty, inflation, and unemployment plaguing the nation, asserting, "All political parties should prioritize the interests of the people over personal gain." "Some politicians may be big in stature, but they do not think about the people."

PML-N fears
another
May 9-like
incident

FROM PAGE 01

protests against the alleged rigging in the February 8 polls with the former ruling party claiming that its mandate has been stolen. "Another May 9 will happen on Pakistan's structure. They [PTI] should be stopped or they will cause great damage to the state of Pakistan. There isn't an incident as horrific as May 9 in my memory," said Malik, while speaking in a presser in Lahore, flanked by PML-N leaders Azma Bukhari and Attaulah Tarar. Recalling the incident, the PML-N leader said that the Imran Khan-founded PTI conspired against the state and Pakistan Army, adding that they haven't learned any lesson from the May 9 incident. Malik said that a campaign is being run from PTI's accounts, adding that the propaganda is not being spread without any reason. "This is a continuation of the same conspiracy that we have been seeing before," he added. He said that PTI had started another "scary" campaign by uploading pictures of various DROs and their children on social media. "These people are not stopping their anarchic behaviour at all," he claimed. "They are [now] threatening government employees," the PML-N leader said while calling on the caretaker prime minister and Punjab chief minister to play their role in this regard.

ECP notifies
37 KPK NA
seat winners

FROM PAGE 01

Shehryar Afridi clinched victory in NA-35 Kohat, while Sher Afzal Marwat secured success in NA-41 Lakki Marwat. Additionally, the notification underscored the victories of a member each from the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and MWM in KP. The province contributed 45 seats to the National Assembly, including 10 reserved for women.



ISLAMABAD: Charge d Affaires of Afghanistan Ahmed Shakaib shakes hands with Afghan futsal team that won the Futsal Diplomatic League. – DNA

Briefs

Thailand's
Thaksin:
20 years of
triumphs and
tribulation

BANGKOK: Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra left police hospital on Sunday in the latest twist in a dramatic career that has seen electoral success, a military coup, self-exile and criminal charges. Here are some of the key moments in the 74-year-old billionaire's career over the past two decades. - 2001: rise to power - Thaksin, a former policeman who made a fortune in telecoms, sweeps to power in a general election as leader of his Thai Rak Thai (Thais love Thais) party, promising social welfare schemes. 2005: second victory - Thaksin leads the first civilian administration to complete a four-year term in a history marked by army takeovers, then secures a landslide second election win. - 2006: coup - Amid mounting criticism of his financial dealings, Thaksin calls another election, which is boycotted by opposition parties. Months of instability follow until in September the military topples Thaksin in a bloodless coup while he is at the UN in New York. - 2007: Man City buyout - Despite his ouster and growing legal worries, Thaksin buys a 75-percent stake in Manchester City football club for \$162.6 million, selling it little more than a year later to an Abu Dhabi-backed group. - 2008-10: convictions and colour protests Thaksin is convicted in absentia in 2008 on corruption charges he says are politically motivated, and flees into self-exile. Anti-Thaksin protesters known as "Yellow Shirts" storm Bangkok's airports, shutting them down to protest against a Thaksin ally serving as premier - who is soon removed. In 2010, pro-Thaksin "Red Shirts" stage vast protests in Bangkok which end in bloodshed when the army opens fire, killing more than 90 people. - 2011-14: sister act - Thaksin's younger sister Yingluck Shinawatra is elected as Thailand's first female prime minister. But she is dogged by claims she is a puppet for her brother, and once again protesters take to the streets. An election in 2014 is annulled and the military - led by General Prayut Chan-O-Cha - seizes power. 2019-22: the Tony Woodsome years - Prayut switches from junta chief to prime minister after an election in 2019, with Thaksin's Pheu Thai party shut out of government despite winning the most seats. Thaksin, now living mostly in Dubai, regularly addresses his supporters back home through the social media platform Clubhouse, under the alias Tony Woodsome. He frequently speaks of his intention to return to Thailand but, with his old foes in the military running the country, shows little sign of acting. - 2023: the return - Pheu Thai comes second in a general election but ends up forming a government in coalition with military-linked parties that were once Thaksin's bitter adversaries. He returns to the kingdom on the day Pheu Thai's PM candidate is approved by parliament, touching down to a hero's welcome from his supporters. —DNA

Kyrgyzstan's
foreign trade
up 29.9 pct
in 2023

BISHKEK: In 2023, Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade turnover increased by 29.9 percent compared to the previous year and amounted to 15.7 billion U.S. dollars, the country's National Statistics Committee reported Friday. The committee said the exports reached 3.3 billion dollars, a 46.8-percent increase compared to 2022, while the imports grew by 26 percent to 12.4 billion dollars. China was Kyrgyzstan's top trading partner in 2023, accounting for 34.7 percent of Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade, said the committee. It added that trade with the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union accounted for 27.8 percent of the country's total trade volume. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Bulgaria to Pakistan hosted female heads of various missions in Islamabad. Seen in the picture are Ambassador of Italy, Ambassador of Philippines, High Commissioners of Canada and Kenya, Ambassador of European Union, Charge d Affaires of India and High Commissioner of United Kingdom. —DNA

US election: What if Biden
or Trump leaves the race?

Although neither has reported any serious health issues, statistics suggest that both face heightened risk of mortality or serious medical incident because of their advancing years

WASHINGTON: Biden versus Trump: The lineup in the 2024 US election has long been a foregone conclusion, with a rematch between the two presidents appearing all but certain. But what would happen if, for any number of reasons, one of the two contenders does not end up taking part in the November vote? Apart from immense political confusion, here is what would happen, according to the rules and experts: What would cause President Joe Biden, an 81-year-old Democrat, or ex-president Donald Trump, the 77-year-old Republican, not to be on the ballot? Age for one. Either candidate would enter office in January 2025 as the oldest US president ever. Although neither has reported any serious health issues, statistics suggest that both face heightened risk of mortality or serious

medical incident because of their advancing years. What about a voluntary withdrawal? "It's a fabulously ridiculous fantasy," said Rachel Bitecofer, a Democratic political strategist. Even if Republicans wanted to change their rules and switch candidates - if, for example, polls took a disastrous turn following a Trump legal conviction - "they still wouldn't, because it'd cause a total meltdown in their base." Biden regularly asserts that he is the best qualified candidate, despite polls that indicate that his age is off-putting to voters. "What are you supposed to say - 'Oh, he's fine, he's going to run a triathlon tomorrow'? I mean, he's 81 years old," said Democratic congressman Adam Smith. Still, "nobody of note decided to run against him, so here we are." Trump meanwhile insists he will

run despite possible criminal conviction before the election which theoretically could see him face decades in prison. - If a candidate leaves - To designate a party's formal nominee, delegates from each state attend their party's summer nominating convention to officially anoint a candidate based on primary voting. If Biden or Trump were to exit the race before the end of the primaries, final say would go to the delegates at the convention. And those delegates, Elaine Kamarck of the Brookings Institution said in a recent note, are "8,567 people you've never heard of," ordinary Americans who happen to be political active. This has not happened since President Lyndon B. Johnson made the shock announcement on March 31, 1968 - in the middle of the Vietnam War - that he would not seek reelection. Since then,

conventions have been well-oiled affairs, whose outcomes have been known in advance since they are determined by the primaries. But this year, the departure of a candidate could result in "a convention where the result may not be known ahead of time ... the kind of no-holds-barred event that nominating conventions held between 1831 and 1968," said Kamarck. And what if something happens to one of the candidates after being officially nominated at the convention? One of the parties' formal governing bodies, the Democratic National Committee or the Republican National Committee, would nominate a new candidate in an extraordinary session. On the Republican side, the RNC is undergoing a reshuffle and Trump has suggested placing his daughter-in-law Lara in a leadership role, which would give his

camp enormous influence in choosing a replacement. - Who might fill in? - A strong - but not automatic - candidate to take Biden's place would be his vice president, Kamala Harris, who is already part of his campaign. Otherwise, any of a number of strong Democratic politicians - Governors Gavin Newsom of California, Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania are mentioned - might be called on. But Trump has not yet announced his choice for VP. And as Hans Noel, professor of government at Georgetown University, pointed out, Trump has belittled his party's other heavy hitters throughout the primaries. Chief among them is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who was relentlessly targeted by Trump before ending his candidacy. Also at the top of the list is Nikki Haley, the lone serious candidate apart

from Trump to remain in the Republican primaries - but who is hated by Trump's loyal followers. "Nikki Haley might have been well-positioned to be an alternative before," Noel said, but by continuing to battle against the party favorite she has lost support from "anybody who likes Trump." Meanwhile, could a strong third-party candidate emerge? So far, no independent candidate is posing any danger to America's dominant two-party system. In 1992, Texas billionaire Ross Perot, running as an independent, managed to win nearly 19 percent of the popular vote. But in the end, because of the vagaries of the American electoral system, he did not receive a single one of the votes that matter most: those of the 538 members of the Electoral College that ultimately decide the winner. —Agencis

UN court to weight
consequences of
Israeli occupation

NEWS DESK

THE HAGUE: The UN's top court will from Monday hold hearings on the legal consequences of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, with an unprecedented 52 countries expected to give evidence. Nations including the United States, Russia, and China will address judges in a week-long session at the Peace Palace in The Hague, seat of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In December 2022, the UN General Assembly asked the ICJ for a non-binding "advisory opinion" on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem." While any ICJ opinion would be non-binding, it comes amid mounting international legal pressure on Israel over the war in Gaza sparked by the brutal October 7 Hamas attacks. The hearings are separate from a high-profile case brought by South Africa alleging that Israel is committing genocidal acts during the current Gaza offensive. The ICJ ruled in that case in January that Israel must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, but stopped short of ordering a ceasefire. On Friday, it rejected South Africa's bid to impose additional measures on Israel, but reiterated the need to carry out the ruling in full. The General Assembly has asked the ICJ to consider two questions. Firstly, the court should examine the legal consequences of what the UN called "the ongoing violation by Israel of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination." —DNA

More than 400 detained in
Russia since Navalny death

NEWS DESK

ST PETERSBURG, Russia: More than 400 people have been detained at events across 32 Russian cities since the death of Alexei Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most formidable opponent, according to rights group OVD-Info, as Russians continued to gather and lay flowers. It has been the largest wave of arrests at political events in Russia since Sept. 2022, when more than 1,300 were arrested at demonstrations against a "partial mobilization" of reservists for Putin's military campaign in Ukraine. Navalny, a 47-year-old former lawyer, fell unconscious and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony where he was serving a three-decade sentence, the prison service said. OVD-Info,

which reports on freedom of assembly in Russia, said the largest numbers of arrests occurred in St. Petersburg and Moscow, where Navalny's support had traditionally been strong. As of 2000 GMT on Saturday, more than 200 people were detained in St. Petersburg. But there was no mention of the events on Russian state news agencies, which are under full Kremlin control. There was also no stories about the hundreds of people across Russia who have continued to defy authorities to lay flowers at impromptu Navalny memorials. The death of Navalny robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most prominent leader as Putin prepares for the March presidential election - a rubber-stamp vote set to keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030. Footage filmed by Reuters on Saturday in St. Petersburg showed dozens gathering by

a monument to the victims of repression. Protesters laid flowers and candles, while some sang hymns and others hugged each other, shedding tears. "I felt very sorry for him and for our country," said an 83-year-old woman attending the vigil who declined to give her name. "I'm scared." A Reuters reporter at the scene said some 30 people were arrested shortly after the singing finished. OVD-Info also reported in smaller cities across Russia, from the border city of Belgorod, where seven were killed in a Ukrainian missile strike on Thursday, to Vorkuta, an Arctic mining outpost once a center of the Stalin-era gulag labor camps. The online news outlet SOTA reported that in Luhansk, an Ukrainian territory now under Russian control, residents laid flowers in Navalny's honor at a monument com-

memorating the victims of the Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin. In another city, flowers were laid at a monument to the heroes of the early 20th century Russian Revolution. "Despite the authorities' attempts to remove the flowers, they keep appearing," SOTA reported. Footage filmed by Reuters in Moscow showed law enforcement bundling people to the ground in the snow, close to a spot where mourners had left flowers and messages in support of the dead opposition leader. "In each police department there may be more detainees than in the published lists," OVD-Info said. "We publish only the names of those people about whom we have reliable knowledge and whose names we can publish." Reuters could not immediately verify the count. Police declined to comment. —Agencis

Over 8.3m
cotton
bales reach
ginneries

DNA

MULTAN: Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to over 8.3 million or exactly 83,78,179 bales have reached ginning factories across the country till February 15, this year. According to a fortnightly report of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) released on Sunday, over 8.3 million or 83,59,144 bales have undergone the ginning process i.e. converted into bales. Cotton arrivals in Punjab were recorded at over 4.2 million or 42,64,560 bales. Sindh generated over 4.1 million or 41,13,672 bales. The textile sector bought 77,85,668 bales while exporters purchased 2,92,726 bales and the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) didn't buy during the cotton season 2023-24. The Sanghar district of Sindh topped with a cotton arrival figure of 16,94,691 bales followed by Bahawalnagar district of Punjab with 11,58,275 bales. A total of 86 ginning factories were operational in the country. Exactly 2,99,785 cotton bales of unsold stock were available in ginning factories.

Qatar
inflation dips

RIYADH: Qatar experienced a 1.3 percent decline in inflation in January compared to December 2023, driven by decreased prices for communication and recreation, official data showed. According to the report released by the country's Planning and Statistics Authority, the consumer price index, a comprehensive measure of inflation, reached 108.55 points. Compared to December, expenses for communication slid by 11.92 percent in January, while prices for recreation and culture witnessed a decline of 8.80 percent during the same period. Similarly, costs for clothing and footwear, as well as furniture and household equipment, decreased by 2.45 percent and 0.54 percent, respectively, in January compared to the previous month. Expenses for healthcare also witnessed a marginal fall of 0.14 percent in January. On the other hand, prices for restaurants and hotels increased by 3.63 percent in January, followed by expenses for transport, which went up by 1.90 percent. Additionally, food and beverage prices edged up by 0.76 percent in January compared to the previous month, while charges for miscellaneous goods and services rose by 0.70 percent. —APP

Berlin film
fest grapples
with Nazi
past

DNA

BERLIN: This week's Berlin international film festival is wrestling on- and off-screen with the weight of the Nazi past and the menace of a resurgent far right. The 74th Berlinale, as the event is known, has a reputation for confronting political realities head-on with high-profile movies and hot-tempered debates. German director Julia von Heinz brought together an unlikely pair, US actor Lena Dunham and Britain's Stephen Fry, for her drama "Treasure" about a Holocaust survivor who returns to Poland with his journalist daughter. Inspired by a true story, the film shows their journey following the fall of the Iron Curtain, after decades of family silence about the Nazi period. Fry plays the seemingly jovial Edek searching for a connection with his uptight daughter Ruth (Dunham). Their travels take them to Edek's childhood home in Lodz, where they make the chilling discovery that a family living in his old flat is still using his parents' porcelain tea service, silverware and a green velvet sofa they abandoned when they were deported. Fearful it is the last chance to record his memories, Ruth convinces Edek to return to Auschwitz.

London Fashion Week celebrates multiculturalism

The show featured rigid and structured jackets with pronounced shoulders, in dark colours with flashy accessories, from XXL silver hoop earrings to rings covering every finger

LONDON: The cultural richness brought by migrations across the world, familial nostalgia and the frenetic pace of London life marked the second day of the city's Fashion Week on Saturday as up-and-coming designers showed off their styles for the season ahead. Some 60 designers, ranging from rising talents to renowned brands like Burberry, are exhibiting their new designs over five days, hoping to draw the interest of buyers and fashion influencers. The 40th anniversary edition of the event is also introducing greater diversity and inclusivity in terms of body shapes, ages, and skin colours of the models, as well as in the designers'

collections. Multiculturalism in spotlight - Sierra Leone-born designer Foday Dumbuya's Labrum London brand closed the day with its "Journey Through Colour" collection, celebrating the diversity of cultures brought by immigrants. The winner of the 2023 Elizabeth II Award for British Design focused on texture plays, newspaper patterns or monogram patterns on more classic cuts. There were as many tones of colour - from royal blue to black, orange, brown, yellow and green - as there were "inspiring stories" from immigrants. Some models wore suitcases as headgear, a reference to people fleeing conflict taking their belongings with

them. "People move for different reasons, and when they move, they move their culture with them. And we wanted to celebrate that tonight," Dumbuya told AFP. One of the models carried on his back a large frame with dozens of flags of "countries that have been involved in key migration throughout history", including the Palestinian flag. It was a political message and a call for tolerance, argued the creator. "It's just to showcase you got to support each other. Where we are does not matter. People's life is what is important," Dumbuya said. "Wherever you are... Palestinian, Jewish, whatever it is, that world belong to us. It's just saying don't just demonise these people." - Old

photographs - In her show, Dublin-born menswear designer Robyn Lynch drew inspiration from her sister's career as a Gaelic dancer, using old photographs of high kicks, spangled costumes and passionate spectators for inspiration. "I vividly remember spending all these weekends in sports halls at competitions seeing all the glitz and drama that happened on and off stage," said the designer, who used Celtic knots and monograms in her designs. Lynch's designs featured diamante encrusted hoodies (jean shorts), a long line of jorties with elastic toggle belts and laser-cut jeans with a colour palette of hickory brown, screen blue, matte black and oat milk white. - Life in the metrop-

olis - Earlier, models paraded in London's famous red double-decker buses in outfits inspired by traditional dance. British designer Ricky Wesley Harriott kicked off his brand SRVC's show with a collection named "Human Resource", inspired by modern "professional women's outfits". The designer had his models, all perched on vertiginous heels, parade on the iconic red double-decker buses of London to "celebrate life in the metropolis". The show featured rigid and structured jackets with pronounced shoulders, in dark colours with flashy accessories, from XXL silver hoop earrings to rings covering every finger. —Agencies

Briefs

President summons senate session

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi has summoned a session of the Senate to be held on February 19 (Monday) at 3 PM. The president summoned the session of the Senate in the exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 54 of the Constitution, said a notification issued by the Senate Secretariat. The Senate is likely to take up questions, calling attention to notices, legislative business, and matters of public importance.

Saudi delegation meets Nawaz

DNA

LAHORE: A delegation of the Saudi Embassy on Sunday met the Pakistan Muslim League (N) leader Nawaz Sharif at Jati Umra on Sunday. The delegation discussed bilateral relations with the PML-N leader during the meeting. The Saudi delegation said that Saudi Arabia stands with Pakistan for economic stability. On this occasion, Nawaz Sharif said that Saudi Arabia helped Pakistan in difficult times.

FAFEN urges ECP to audit election 2024 results

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has proposed a three-stage methodology for the audit of election results, urging the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to scrutinize the results of constituencies that have been duly challenged by political parties and candidates at the appropriate legal fora using data analytics and forensics to establish the legitimacy of the outcome of General Election 2024. Such an audit must include representatives nominated by the political parties concerned as well as independent observers to ensure the transparency and credibility of the process.

X once again goes down in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The X-service, formerly known as Twitter, has been suspended once again in Pakistan, causing inconvenience to Pakistani consumers. The service was suspended across Pakistan at 10 pm last night, and although it was restored around 6 pm, it was suspended shortly afterwards. The PTA, responsible for regulating internet access in the country, has remained silent on the reason for these disruptions. This lack of transparency has fueled frustration and speculation among Twitter users in Pakistan, many of whom rely on the platform for communication, news, and business.

Euro Village events evoke mixed response from public, diplomats

Although it was supposed be an entry with family only, stags in large numbers easily got through the scanner gate installed and managed jointly by the EU and private security personnel; many had to return simply because there were not enough parking facilities



AB KHAN

THE tin walls erected around the grounds of the Convention Center Islamabad depicted a sight of a citadel. Islooties and Pindi boys thronged the venue in large numbers to see what was all the hype of "Euro Village 2024" was about. Although it was supposed to be an entry with family only, stags in large numbers easily got through the scanner gate installed and managed jointly by the EU and private security personnel. Stall bearing European Union signs were right at the entrance of the ground where 10 to 15 stalls from different EU member countries in the likes of Austria, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Hungary, Greece, Germany, Finland, Romania, Poland could be spotted with a naked eye.

To being with, most of the stalls were empty and free giveaways like T-shirts, shopping bags, Mugs etc were all gone within first two hours according to the Spanish councillor who was giving explanations to the visitors that we were not expecting so many people so early. Moreover, many visitors had to return because there were not enough parking facilities available. The scarcity of parking spaces led to significant traffic congestion on the main roads connecting Rawalpindi and Murree, creating challenges for individuals unrelated to the Euro Village festivities. This issue not only inconvenienced residents and commuters but also impacted the overall flow of traffic, exacerbating the already bustling nature of these key thoroughfares.

Although the Dutch stall was busy putting mixed flour to make truffles in the electric oven, the other Dutch delicacies were long gone. As the EU member State pegged their stalls in a "L" shape formation, local stalls of food vendors were seen selling in the other corner. Cakes, Waffles, Channa chat, fries and other munches were being sold like hot cakes as vendors looked quite busy doing good business. The highlight of the evening was the live performance by Qurat ul Aain Baluch also known as QB of drama Humsafar theme song. The idea to hold EU Village event started off a few years ago with great fanfare bring-

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ing together EU member states to showcase their food, artefacts and local traditional culture with foreign musical bands mesmerizing the audience as the most rigged in the country's history. Addressing a press conference in Mansoor, Siraj announced plans to protest against rigging in Peshawar on Feb 23 and to hold a conference in Islamabad on Feb 25. The Jamaat chief stated that while governments were typically formed after elections worldwide, in Pakistan, the government was formed first, followed by decisions about elections. This unique process contributed to an increase in corruption after elections, a phenomenon observed only in Pakistan, he added. Siraj pointed out that the elections held in 1970 were not accepted, and similarly, this trend persisted today. Despite widespread rigging, there had been a noticeable silence from those who benefitted

rather than an EU presentation of their culture and traditions. It would be nice to see, stalls with traditional food to taste, ceramics and artefacts to buy and hosts in their traditional attires to fascinate the Pakistani visitors with their fashion haute couture. Interestingly, the diplomatic corps excluding the European missions expressed mixed

reaction over Euro Village festivities. A majority of such diplomats, especially the ambassadors, wanted to be part of the event however they could not do so simply because they were not invited. Most of them even did not know about the event at all. The best thing nevertheless about this event was that EU Village was visa free!

DROs reject Chattha's allegations as baseless

They claimed the elections were transparent and organised

RAWALPINDI: Newly-appointed Rawalpindi commissioner and Rawalpindi Division District Returning Officers (DROs) have rejected allegations that the elections were rigged and manipulated. They held a press conference to refute the rigging allegations and demand an investigation into the matter. They claimed the elections were transparent and organised in a transparent manner, adding there was no pressure on them to commit rigging. Commissioner Saif Anwar Jhappa vehemently denied all allegations leveled by his predecessor, Liaquat Ali Chattha. At the press conference, Jhappa was accompanied by the District Returning Officers (DROs) of all four districts under Rawalpindi Division - Hasan Waqar Cheema (Rawalpindi), Qurtaul Ain (Chakwal), Rao Atif Raza (Attock), and Captain Sami (Jhelum). DRO Rawalpindi Hasan Waqar Cheema emphasised that the elections were conducted transparently, denying all allegations and calling for an investigation into the claims made by the former commissioner. DRO Chakwal Qurat ul Aain supported Cheema's stance, stating that elections in Chakwal were conducted under the Election Act, and all processes adhered to the oath. She demanded an independent investigation into the allegations. Similarly, DROs Attock and Jhelum, Rao Atif Raza, and Captain Sami also denied any pressure during the February 8 polls, asserting that the elections in their respective districts were conducted transparently. DRO Talagang Khawar Bashir stated that they conducted transparent elections in Talagang and called for an independent investigation into Chattha's allegations. Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Qaiser said on Sunday that it was up to the masses to elect the representatives at will. Addressing the public gathering in Swabi, Qaiser said: "The masses should be provided with their mandate according to Form 45." He urged the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to hold a judicial investigation on the statement of the Rawalpindi commissioner. - DNA

Sirajul Haq demands immediate resignation of CEC Raja

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami chief Sirajul Haq has demanded the immediate resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, referring to the Feb 8 elections as the most rigged in the country's history. Addressing a press conference in Mansoor, Siraj announced plans to protest against rigging in Peshawar on Feb 23 and to hold a conference in Islamabad on Feb 25. The Jamaat chief stated that while governments were typically formed after elections worldwide, in Pakistan, the government was formed first, followed by decisions about elections. This unique process contributed to an increase in corruption after elections, a phenomenon observed only in Pakistan, he added. Siraj pointed out that the elections held in 1970 were not accepted, and similarly, this trend persisted today. Despite widespread rigging, there had been a noticeable silence from those who benefitted

from it, he added. The Jamaat chief criticised the role of former Rawalpindi commissioner Liaquat Ali Chattha, describing him as a mere pawn, suggesting that all commissioners were similar in this regard. He expressed regret that returning officers were appointed from within the administration instead of the courts, lamenting that democracy in Pakistan was buried beneath the results of the Feb 8 elections. Siraj voiced concern that the issues arising from this election would hinder the country's progress for a period of five years. He also highlighted reservations regarding the delimitations and the rushed closure of cases in the courts. Siraj called for unity to address the country's crises, warning that accepting temporary happiness would hinder the nation's path to achieving true democracy. The JI chief also stressed the importance of adhering to the rule of law and the constitution, stating that a government formed as a result of fraudulent elections would be unsustainable.

West Bank tensions 'obstacle' to peace

AGENCIES

MUNICH: EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday said the situation in the Israel-occupied West Bank posed a major obstacle to finding a long-term solution for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. "The West Bank is the real obstacle for the two-state solution," Borrell said at the Munich Security Conference. "The West Bank is at boiling... we could be on the eve of a greater explosion," he said. Around 490,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, in dozens of settlements that are deemed illegal under international law. The settlers live alongside around three million Palestinians in the territory.

HRCP terms post-polling process unsatisfactory

Suspension of internet, mobile services jeopardised voters' ability to locate polling stations

DNA

LAHORE: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has raised concerns about the reliability and trustworthiness of the general elections held on February 8, especially the post-polling process. According to observations made by HRCP's election monitors, who conducted on-site inspections in 51 constituencies, the nationwide suspension of internet and mobile services on the day of the polls, along with unplanned alterations in polling information, jeopardised voters' ability to locate polling stations. The HRCP in its report released on Saturday said, this situation particularly affected women facing mobility constraints, individuals with disabilities, senior citizens, and voters with limited financial means. Of particular concern is the protracted delay in the announcement of election results by the returning officers. Broadly speaking, the polling process itself remained transparent and peaceful.

Polling staff were generally well-prepared and well-equipped. In almost all cases, polling agents and candidates were shown the empty ballot boxes before polling, and the presiding officer was observed stamping and signing the back of each ballot paper before giving it to the voter. The ballot box was in everyone's sight at all times, and voters were allowed to stamp their ballot papers in secret. However, the post-polling process was unsatisfactory. In a fifth of all polling stations observed by the HRCP, the presiding officer did not affix the statement of the count in a conspicuous place for public display or was not seen transmitting a photograph of the result to the returning officer and the ECP. It was alleged in many instances that the returning officer's announcement did not tally with the presiding officer's count. Worryingly, reports of candidates, polling agents, and observers being denied permission to witness the provisional consolidation of results also surfaced. The HRCP recommends an independent audit of the 2024 elections under the supervision of a parliamentary body. Security and intelligence agencies should play no role in managing the electoral process or its outcomes. Parliament must also debate the utility of the caretaker government scheme.

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