



Sunday, March 23, 2025

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

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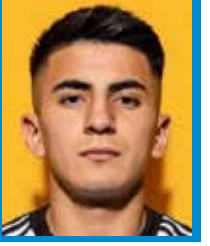
Detailed News On Page-08

Japan awards 11 scholarships to Pakistanis

Detailed News On Page-03

Thumping victory for Argentina as Almada shines

Detailed News On Page-06



Insurgencies pose serious threat

Fazl: war with Afghanistan to multiply problems

Maulana Fazl emphasized that engaging in war with Afghanistan would not resolve Pakistan's problems. Instead, it would only multiply them. He argued that dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan were necessary to address any existing issues, rather than resorting to conflict

ANSAR M BHATTI/DNA

ISLAMABAD: Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), expressed strong concerns about the potential for war with Afghanistan, highlighting how such an escalation would only worsen Pakistan's existing issues, especially in relation to its western border. He expressed these views in his recent TV interview. Maulana Fazl emphasized that engaging in war with Afghanistan would not resolve Pakistan's problems. Instead, it would only multiply them. He argued that dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan were necessary to address any existing issues, rather than resorting to conflict. Fazl voiced his concerns following a recent in-camera session, where security officials had given a presentation to the government. According to him, there were indications that both the government and the military establishment might be contemplating military action against Afghanistan, which he believed would be disastrous. The JUI leader pointed out that Pakistan's western border stretches from Baluchistan to Chitral and includes regions where insurgencies are already active. In these areas, the Pakistani government and military are facing significant challenges from militant groups and separatists. Therefore, he argued that initiating a war with Afghanistan would only intensify these existing problems. Maulana Fazl mentioned his previous efforts to engage with the Afghan Taliban, especially on issues like the

Tehraki-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Daesh (ISIS). He clarified that he had visited Afghanistan with the consent of Pakistan's government and military and had managed to facilitate discussions with the Taliban. However, he noted that despite these efforts, Pakistan had failed to honor its commitments to the Taliban government, which led to strained relations between the two countries. Regarding the TTP issue, Maulana Fazl reflected on the past when Pakistan had supported the United States and its allies during the Afghan war. At the same time, Pakistan had also provided refuge to Afghan militants and displaced people. This complicated legacy was one of the factors that contributed to the rise of militant groups like the TTP, which now pose a significant challenge to Pakistan's internal security. Maulana Fazl was also critical of the 2024 elections, alleging that they were rigged, and that his party, along with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), was deprived of their mandate. He called for fresh elections, arguing that unless there was a new, fair election process, Pakistan would continue to face political and governance challenges. Maulana Fazlur Rehman's interview presents a strong critique of the government's stance towards Afghanistan, calling for a more diplomatic and peaceful resolution to the issues at hand. His position reflects the broader concern that military conflict would exacerbate Pakistan's internal and external difficulties, particularly in regions already dealing with insurgencies and militancy. He also stresses the need for a political resolution, including fresh elections, to address the growing political discontent within Pakistan.

Rana Sana predicts

Imran's release possible if he offers May 9 apology

PTI founder has pushed country into political deadlock, believing he can bring about revolution, says PM's aide

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah has stated that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's release is possible if he offers a wholehearted apology for the events of May 9, 2023 – which saw military installations being vandalised across the country in riots triggered after his arrest in a graft case. The then Pakistan Development Movement (PDM) government as well as the current one have held PTI responsible for the riots – something which the former ruling party vehemently denies. Speaking on a TV program Sanaullah said Khan had pushed the country into a political deadlock, believing he could bring about a revolution through his actions. "But no, there are no chances of a revolution. Only political struggles will lead to victory here," he asserted. He ruled out any possibility of success through Khan's methods, particularly referencing the events of November 24-26, 2024, when PTI marched towards Islamabad. When asked whether Khan's release was possible if he apologised for May 9, Sanaullah responded: "I think that if he apologises

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No governance in the country, says Omar Ayub

He also criticised the government for repeatedly imposing internet restrictions

FAISAL SHEIKH

PESHAWAR: Opposition leader Omar Ayub has criticised the government's performance, stating that there is no governance in the country. He highlighted various issues, claiming that industries were non-functional, two million people have left the country, and farmers in Punjab have not been able to sell their wheat. He also criticised the government for repeatedly imposing internet restrictions, which he said has deterred investment in the IT sector. Ayub further lamented the non-compliance of the constitution and the law,

Continued on Page 06

US-Taliban re-engagement on multiple fronts a signal of regional struggles

SHAMIM SHAHID

WHILE the covert engagements between the United States and the Taliban have been ongoing in Doha for the past two years, the recent high-level, direct meeting in Kabul marks a significant shift. This unprecedented encounter between senior U.S. officials and Taliban representatives suggests a new phase in the geopolitical and strategic contest that has shaped the region since the early 1970s. The evolving U.S.-Afghan relations could create unease within Pakistan's political and military establishment, particularly regarding engagements in Kabul. The outcomes of these interactions might run counter to Islamabad's strategic ambitions, especially on matters concerning the Durand Line and Afghanistan's relations with India. The meeting in Kabul was the first open, direct discussion between Washington and the Taliban since August 15, 2021, when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan following the Doha Agreement. This highly confidential, day-long visit was led by Ambassador Adam Boehler and culminated in the release and airlifting of George Glezzmann, an American airline mechanic, to the United States via Doha. The meeting was a result of high-level negotiations between the two nations, facilitated by Qatar and the UAE, following the return of Donald Trump to power on January 20, 2025. Notably, former U.S. diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad was part of the delegation. Historically, Khalilzad's presence in diplomatic engagements has often signalled imminent changes in Afghanistan's political land-

scape. The United States has been maneuvering on Afghan fronts independently of Pakistan since Afghanistan's second presidential elections in 2009. However, Thursday's engagement in Kabul is particularly significant for Islamabad's power circles, which have long been monitoring regional shifts, conflicts, and power struggles across the Durand Line. Unlike the post-Vietnam era of the 1960s and 1970s, when the U.S. was reeling from its defeat, the present geopolitical landscape is vastly different. In previous decades, U.S. strategies heavily relied on Pakistan, which then played a critical role in Afghanistan under the influence of the now-defunct USSR. Today, however, Pakistan's role in Afghanistan has diminished due to what many perceive as flawed policies. With Donald Trump's return to the White House after a four-year hiatus, tensions between Washington and Moscow are also undergoing recalibration. Prior to Glezzmann's release, two other Americans—Ryan Corbett and William Wallace McKenty—were freed in exchange for an Afghan national, Khan Muhammad, who was serving a life sentence for drug trafficking and was believed to have financed the Taliban during the War on Terror. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio acknowledged Glezzmann's release while emphasizing that other Americans remain detained in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's foreign ministry, in a statement on X (formerly Twitter), highlighted that the deal demonstrated Kabul's willingness to engage constructively with all parties, particularly the United States, based on mutual respect and interests.

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MAKKAH: Governor of Makkah H.R.H. Prince Saud bin Abdullah bin Jalawi bids Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif farewell after the completion of his visit to Saudi Arabia, in Jeddah on March 22, 2025. – DNA

Iran extends felicitations on Pak Day

Over the decades, Pakistan has demonstrated unwavering resilience, courage, and faith, overcoming challenges

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran extends its heartfelt congratulations to the Government and the People of Pakistan on the auspicious occasion of Pakistan National Day. On this significant day, as the Great Nation of Pakistan proudly commemorates its journey towards independence, the Embassy and its staff express their profound solidarity and best wishes for the continued peace, progress, and prosperity of Pakistan. We take this opportunity to pay tribute to Quaid-i-Azam

Continued on Page 06

4 Punjabi labourers shot dead in Kalat

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack

STAFF REPORT

QUETTA: Four labourers from Punjab were shot dead by unknown assailants in Balochistan's Kalat district on Saturday, according to the deputy commissioner (DC). A statement from Kalat DC retired Captain Jamil Baloch said "unknown assailants opened fire and killed four laborers" in the Malangzai area of Kalat's Mangochar city around 2:30pm. It said there was one survivor and the five individuals, residents of Sadqabad,

Continued on Page 06

Promoting nature-based agriculture

PM hails Recharge Pakistan initiative to mitigate risks

We are witnessing accelerating impact of climate change, population pressures, premier highlights on Water Day

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the government's Recharge Pakistan initiative was working to mitigate climate-induced flood risks and reduce drought impacts through ecosystem-based adaptation. In a message on World Water Day observed on March 22, he said: "Meanwhile, through our Living Indus initiative we are implementing 25 priority interventions—from promoting nature-based agriculture and restoring the Indus delta to curbing industrial pollution and investing in green infrastructure." He said: "Today, as the world marks World Water Day 2025 under the theme 'Glacier Preservation', we are reminded of the critical role glaciers play in sustaining our planet's freshwater supplies and of the grave challenges we face in protecting this essential resource."

Continued on Page 06

Appointment of new CEC, members delayed

A parliamentary committee for the appointments has not been formed yet

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The appointment of the new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two members has been delayed, as the constitutional 45-day deadline has passed without any progress from the government. Despite the National Assembly Speaker's announcement, a

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Quetta shuts down on BYC's call

BYC leader Dr Mahrang Baloch and others being arrested by the police

DNA

QUETTA: Quetta and other parts of Balochistan observed a shutter-down strike on Saturday in response to the Baloch Yakjehi Committee's (BYC) call, a day after its members in the provincial capital faced a police crackdown as they protested against alleged enforced disappearances. There were reports of BYC leader Dr Mahrang Baloch and others being arrested by the police which the authorities have yet to confirm. A day earlier, the police used tear gas and water cannon and fired blank shots to disperse BYC protesters, who had staged a sit-in on the Sariab Road near University of Balochistan, against some arrests, including its leaders.

Karachi reports first mpox case

Authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant as they continue to monitor the situation closely

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Sindh health authorities confirmed on Saturday the city's first case of mpox after a 28-year-old resident of Shah Latif Town tested positive. According to the health department, the patient contracted the virus after his wife, who recently travelled abroad, developed symptoms. The man has been placed in an isolation ward, and strict precautionary measures have been implemented. In response, health officials have intensified screening at airports and border entry points to curb further spread. Authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant as they continue to monitor the situation closely.

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CM Maryam Nawaz said that the initiative will allow rural women to start freelancing, establish tech firms, or run online businesses from home, removing traditional barriers of distance and mobility

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has taken a groundbreaking step toward the economic empowerment of rural women by launching Punjab's first comprehensive IT and digital skills training programme. Under this initiative, 27,000 rural women will receive scholarships covering their online training, along with desktop computers and free Wi-Fi devices upon completion. The Punjab Skills Development Department (PSDF) will provide six months of online training, and rural women can apply from home through the official website (psdf.org.pk). The program will cover IT, web development, coding, digital marketing, e-commerce, social media management, graphic design, freelancing, remote work, data entry, office automation, and

MULTAN: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle Multan on Saturday has carried out a major operation, arresting a suspect involved in creating and disseminating AI-generated images and videos targeting government officials and state institutions. According to a spokesperson, the accused identified as Ghulam Nabi, was apprehended during a raid in Sadiqabad. FIA officials said that the arrested suspect was engaged in an anti-state campaign, unlawfully using artificial intelligence to manipulate images and videos of political and government figures with the intent to damage their reputation. The suspect was accused of generating and sharing content on social media, depicting high-ranking government officials in a misleading manner. A case has been registered against the suspect and FIA has seized his social media accounts and other digital evidence. Further investigations are underway. —APP

LAHORE, The Pakistan Railways has announced a special Eid-ul-Fitr gift for passengers by offering a 20 percent discount on train fares. The initiative aims to facilitate travelers and promote rail travel during the festive season. According to an official notification issued on Saturday, the discounted fares will be applicable on all mail, express and intercity trains for the first three days of Eid-ul-Fitr. Passengers making advance bookings will also be eligible for the reduced fares. However, the discount will not apply to Eid Special trains. The Pakistan Railways has directed all booking offices to strictly implement the fare reduction to ensure passengers benefit from the offer. The initiative was expected to provide financial relief and convenience to those traveling to their hometowns to celebrate Eid with their families.—APP

DNA

ISLAMABAD. Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) organised special exhibition, "Tribute to Qaid on Pakistan Day," to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the Pakistan Resolution.

The exhibition, which will run from today Saturday to March 25, 2025, at the National Art Gallery, Islamabad, features a unique collection of portraits of Qaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah created by renowned Pakistani artists, including Master Artists Asmaul Gulgee, Colin David, and Saad Akhtar. This exhibition is a tribute to the Qaid's vision, leadership,

Randhawa stresses water conservation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, emphasized the critical importance of water conservation during a high-level meeting held via Zoom to mark World Water Day. The meeting was attended by CDA Board Members and senior officers, who discussed strategies to address water-related challenges and ensure sustainable water management in the federal capital. World Water Day, observed annually on March 22, is a United Nations initiative aimed at raising awareness about the importance of freshwater and advocating for the sustainable management of water resources. This year's theme aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Chairman

DERA ISMAIL KHAN The University of Agriculture Dera Ismail Khan's Registrar, Abdul Basit Khan has said that the University is the center of development of modern sciences in the region and the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur is taking special interest for the development and betterment of the University. He revealed that Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has allocated 400 kanals of land for the university's new building, along with a budget of three billion rupees for its construction. While talking to media, Abdul Basit Khan discussed the university's establishment, growth, and the challenges it faces. According to Abdul Basit Khan, the university was established in 2018 and has been operating out of a rented building for the past seven years. Thanks to the special interest and initiatives of Chief Minister Gandapur, 400 kanals of land have now been designated at Ratta Kulachi, merely five kilometers from the city. This new location will not only ease commuting for students and staff but also provide suitable land for agricultural research. Khan highlighted that the new site's proximity to the Agricultural Extension Department would offer students ample opportunities for hands-on learning and research activities. Although the construction project had been previously approved, the Chief Minister recently directed the C&W Department and contractors to expedite the process. The site has been handed over to the contractor and revisions of the master plan and PC-1 are currently underway. Discussing the financial aspects, he mentioned that the initial project was estimated at around three billion rupees but faced delays due to lack of funds. However, with the renewed interest of the Chief Minister, funds are expected to be released soon. Previously, only 40 to 50 million rupees were allocated, which were used to build an 1,800-foot boundary wall at the old location. With the relocation finalized, construction at the new site is expected to commence shortly.—DNA

and unwavering commitment to the cause of Pakistan. The artworks and photographs on display offer a glimpse into the life and times of our Quaid and serve as a reminder of

the importance of unity, perseverance, and dedication to our nation. "We are honored to celebrate Pakistan Day with this special tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali

Jinnah," said M. Ayoub Jamali, Director General, PNCA. "This exhibition is a testament to the Quaid's enduring legacy and a celebration of Pakistani history, art and culture."



ISLAMABAD: Water level in Rawal Dam decreasing due to less rain in capital.

SUKKUR: In a significant step towards promoting sustainable energy solutions, the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) has successfully distributed 320 Solar Home Systems in all six talukas of Khairpur district under the Sindh Solar Energy Project (SSEP).

According to the SRSO Media Consultant, Jamil Ahmed on Saturday, the distribution ceremony was attended by various dignitaries, including Saleem Gadani, Assistant Commissioner Thari Mirwah, and Masroor Bijarani, Assistant Commissioner Faiz Gunj. The Solar Home Systems were distributed among low-income beneficiary families of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

The Sindh Government's initiative aims to provide sustainable energy solutions to marginalized communities. The distributed Solar Home Systems will not only provide electricity to these families but also promote responsible energy usage. This project is part of the Sindh Government's broader efforts to increase solar power generation and access to electricity in the province. The Sindh Solar Energy Project (SSEP) aims to provide 200,000 solar home systems in rural areas, with the World Bank providing \$100 million in funding.—APP

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has emphasised the escalating water crisis in the province and called for urgent action to safeguard water resources for future generations.

"Water is life, and its conservation is our collective responsibility," he stressed on the occasion of World Water Day.

He urged the public to prevent water waste and ensure a sustainable future. The CM Murad expressed profound concern regarding Sindh's severe water shortage, warning that agriculture and the economy are at serious risk due to diminishing water availability. "The crisis has significantly impacted farmers and fishermen, whose livelihoods depend on the Indus River," he stated.

Murad Ali Shah pointed out that the reduced water flow in the Indus River has jeopardized millions of jobs. He attributed the threat to the river's existence to climate change and inequitable water distribution.



"The drying waves of the Indus River are a warning sign for life and agriculture," he declared, reaffirming that Sindh will not compromise on its water rights.

Expressing strong concerns about the construction of new canals on the Indus, the Chief Minister cautioned that such projects could worsen the water crisis in Sindh and lead to drought-like conditions.

"How can new canals be constructed when Sindh's fertile lands are already deprived of water?" he asked, demanding immediate ac-

tion to prevent a potential famine in the province. The Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah also highlighted the importance of protecting the Indus Delta, asserting that its preservation is vital for Pakistan's survival. "The Indus River's waters have not reached the Indus Delta for years, resulting in the submergence of millions of acres of land into the sea," he lamented. He assured that his government had formulated a robust strategy to address the water crisis and called for a collective effort to conserve every drop of water. "Life is impossible without water, let us pledge today to protect every drop," he urged, emphasizing the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) longstanding commitment to defending Sindh's water rights.—DNA

MULTAN: Water and Sanitation Authority (WASA) on Saturday organized an awareness walk on "World Water Day" to highlight the importance of water conservation. The walk was led by WASA Managing Director Khalid Raza Khan and started from the WASA Head Office, concluded at Qamar Abbas Shaheed Chowk. The primary objective of the walk was to educate the public about the effective use of water and the importance of its preservation. "Every drop of water is precious, and we must use it responsibly," said MD WASA Khalid Raza Khan during the event. He appealed to the public to change their habits to prevent water wastage and adopt modern methods of saving water. "Adopting the habit of saving water is the need of the hour," he emphasized. He added that water conservation was not just the responsibility of one institution but a collective duty of the entire nation. A large number of WASA officers, employees and citizens participated. Participants carried placards and banners in support of water conservation. The attendees pledged to continue their efforts to prevent water wastage and ensure the efficient use of water in their daily lives.—APP

	<div> <div> “SAY NO TO CORRUPTION” </div> <div> GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS </div> </div> <div> NATIONAL HIGHWAY AUTHORITY </div>																																					
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In exercise of power conferred under Section 10 (2) vii of NHA Act -1991 as amended in 2001, National Highway Authority is pleased to notify the following Revised Toll Rates For National Highways & Motorways Network, effective from April 01, 2025:																																						
A). NATIONAL HIGHWAYS:	Amount is Rs. (Per Crossing on National Highway)																																					
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National Days and Armed Forces Days

- MARCH
- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12 /Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
- March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

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Emergency Ambulance.1122
& Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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Edhi Ambulance.....115
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TMA.....5770886
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Water Tank

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Japan awards MEXT research scholarships to Pakistani students

The Japanese government continues to offer fully funded undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate scholarships, as well as short-term training programs, to Pakistani students throughout the year

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan has awarded eleven (11) outstanding Pakistani students the esteemed MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan) Research Scholarships for the 2025academic year. These scholarships will enable the students to pursue Master's and Doctoral degrees at leading Japanese universities, fostering academic excellence and strengthening bilateral ties. The MEXT Research Scholarship, a flagship program of the Japanese government, provides fully funded opportunities for graduate/post-graduate studies globally, including Pakistan. Besides the scholarships granted through the Embassy, numerous Pakistani students also secure MEXT scholarships annually through direct applications to Japanese universities.

On Friday, March 21st, the Embassy of Japan organized a pre-departure orientation session for the scholarship grantees. The orientation session included detailed briefings on the program, along with invaluable insights and personal experiences shared by Pakistani



alumni of Japanese universities. These alumni offered practical advice and guidance to the new scholars embarking on their academic journey in Japan. Following the orientation, H.E. Mr. AKAMATSU Shuichi, the Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, hosted an iftar reception at his official residence to hon-

or the members of MEXT Alumni Association of Pakistan (MAAP) as well as to bid farewell to the departing scholarship grantees. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador AKAMATSU congratulated the students on their remarkable achievement and extended best wishes for their studies in Japan's prestigious institutions. He emphasized that the MEXT Research Scholarship offers a transformative experience, combining world-class education with the opportunity to immerse themselves in Japanese culture and society. The Ambassador expressed his hope that the scholars would return to Pakistan acquired advanced knowledge and enriching experiences, and also contribute to the nation's progress and serve as bridges of friendship between Japan and Pakistan, in collaboration with MAAP alumni. He acknowledged and appreciated MAAP's ongoing efforts in promoting Japanese educational and cultural activities, thereby reinforcing the strong bond between the two countries. Established in 1954, the MEXT Research Scholarship program has benefited numerous Pakistani students since the first recipient traveled to Japan in 1963.

IRSA releases 53,000 cusecs water

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 53,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 55,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, River Indus stood at dead level of 1402 feet at Tarbela Dam. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,300 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1063.75 feet, which was 13.75 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 20,000 cusecs and 17,200 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 27,200, 26,400, 17,100 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,900 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala

Water conservation national obligation: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal, while describing water conservation as the national responsibility of every individual, Saturday said it was essential to effectively tackle environmental challenges and achieve the development goals set under the 5Es framework. In a message on the World Water Day, he linked water conservation to the country's broader goals of energy sustainability, equity and export-oriented growth. = "Energy generation, agricultural exports, and social justice all depend on the wise use of water," he said reinforcing the interconnectedness of water with the nation's long-term economic and social aspirations. He stressed that water was not only "the soul of life" but also a cornerstone for building prosperous and developed economies. "Water is the lifeblood of agriculture, industry, energy and daily life. However, Pakistan is grappling with two starkly contrasting realities: increasing flood risks due to climate change, and the rapidly depleting water reserves that threaten the foundations of our development," he remarked. Highlighting the government's commitment to sustainable development, Ahsan Iqbal outlined the key components of the country's 5Es vision under the "URAAN PAKISTAN" initiative. "Environment is a vital pillar of this vision," he said adding that the government was taking multifaceted actions to manage water resources more effectively. These measures include the construction of new dams, the implementation of modern irrigation systems, the promotion of water recycling, and the adoption of smart water management technologies. In a call to action, the minister urged citizens to adopt responsible water usage practices in their daily lives. "On this World Water Day, I appeal to every Pakistani to avoid wastage and to conserve water at home, in offices, factories, and on farms. Let us all make water conservation a national duty," he added.—DNA

CDA intensifies action against encroachments

DNA
ISLAMABAD: On the directions of Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, The Building Control Section (BCS) of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) confined its strict enforcement drive in the city, taking across the board actions against unauthorized and illegal structures and encroachments that hinder public convenience and urban planning standards as well as causing millions of rupees loss to national exchequer for not paying various taxes including charges of CDA regarding approval of building

maps, structural designs as per law. In a recent derive against illegal encroachments, BCS conducted clean up operation in F-10 Markaz, against 29 illegal workshops that had encroached upon public land on a large scale. These unauthorized establishments had created multiple obstructions on the main link road, causing significant public nuisance, traffic congestion, and disruption to designated parking spaces. The operation was aimed at restoring the area's planned functionality and ensuring smooth traffic flow. Furthermore, CDA's Building Control Section (BCS) also launched enforcement actions against illegal rooftop constructions in F-7 Markaz. Unauthorized structures on Plot No. 1-D and Plot No. 13-Y were dismantled, and further construction activities were halted to prevent additional violations. CDA remains committed to strictly regulating building violations and ensuring the effective implementation of Building Control Regulations across Islamabad. These operations are part of an ongoing drive to uphold the city's master plan, protect public spaces, and maintain an organized urban environment. The authority urges all businesses and property owners to comply with building regulations to avoid legal action and contribute to the city's sustainable development.

Eid shopping frenzy at peak: Report

DNA
ISLAMABAD :As Ramazan' s final phase has begun, country elsewhere is on the cusp of the Eid shopping frenzy, where citizens of all ages will eagerly participate in festive preparations, witnessing a surge in shoppers after iftar. In a report aired by a private news channel, it was revealed that markets and shopping centers across major cities, including Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad are witnessing a massive influx of customers after iftar. The report showcased footage of crowded streets, bustling markets and long queues outside popular shopping destinations. Shopkeepers and vendors were seen arranging their merchandise, decorating their stalls and offering attractive discounts to lure in customers, said a citizen of Islamabad. The report highlighted that

the iftar rush has brought a significant surge in sales, with people eagerly buying new clothes, shoes, accessories and gifts for their loved ones. According to shopkeepers, women in particular were seen thronging markets, searching for the perfect outfit, jewelry and cosmetics to adorn themselves on Eid day. Children too were seen accompanying their parents, eagerly selecting their favorite toys, chocolates, and other treats for eid gifts. The atmosphere was electric, with the sound of laughter, chatter and festive music filling the air, said a resident of Lahore city. "We have been preparing for this moment for weeks," said a shopkeeper at a popular clothing store in Lahore. "Our shelves are stocked with the latest designs and trends, and we're offering unbeatable discounts to attract customers." "I love Eid shopping," exclaimed a young shopper browsing through a market in

23rd March

Pakistan Resolution Day

On the auspicious occasion of Pakistan Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings to all citizens of Pakistan.

Certainly, 23rd March marks a significant milestone in our glorious history, reminding us of the relentless struggle, determination and sacrifice by the Muslims of subcontinent for an independent State. No doubt, they stood united under the visionary and charismatic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and eventually achieved their goal of a separate homeland. While celebrating this momentous day, we pay rich tributes to our illustrious forefathers for transforming a much-longed-for dream into reality.

My Dear Countrymen! The rapidly changing global and regional dynamics have a profound impact not only on Pakistan but also the world at large. More so, recent conflicts reveal dramatic changes in the pattern of warfighting. Cognizant of such developments, Pakistan Air Force has recently modernized itself based on the imperative of self-reliance, which is indeed the need of the hour. In this connection, PAF has made enormous strides in technological advancement through induction and operationalisation of cost-effective niche technologies in shortest possible time, besides vigorously pursuing a comprehensive indigenization strategy. Upholding Quaid's vision of PAF being Second to None, we have pledged to continue unabated on the same path, Insha Allah. On this day of national pride, I assure the nation that, as always, PAF in perfect synergy with Sister Services, will live up to the Nation's expectations in defence of our Motherland. On this occasion, we also reiterate support to Kashmiri brethren in their just struggle for self-determination.

May Allah Almighty guide our efforts and grant us strength to safeguard our aerial frontiers. Aameen!

Pakistan Air Force Zindabad!
Pakistan Paidnabad!

Air Chief Marshal
Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, NI (M)
Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force

PAKISTAN AIR FORCE
A SYMBOL OF PRIDE FOR THE NATION

Briefs

Jamal stresses quality education for social uplift

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Former caretaker minister for health and population welfare Punjab, Dr. Jamal Nasir Jamal has called for providing quality education to the students saying it is vital for progress. He underlined the significance of quality education in combating future challenges being faced by the country. Addressing a graduation ceremony at a private preschool, Dr. Nasir highlighted efforts in all developed countries to gain modern and scientific knowledge in all fields of education. He urged the parents to play their role in grooming the students by acquiring a better education. He said that Pakistani students are talented and have a quest for knowledge. "They have a bright future in Pakistan", he added. Dr. Nasir also encouraged students to participate in a tree plantation campaign and contribute to maintaining a clean and green environment. The ceremony was attended by Chairman and Principal Dr. Obaidullah, Director Faizan Ahmed, and Coordinator Farwa Naveed.

Drug paddler jailed for 9 years

DNA

RAWALPINDI: A court has sentenced a drug supplier to 9 years imprisonment along with a fine. The criminal named Samar Abbas was arrested in 2024. According to the details the court sentenced him to 9 years in prison and a fine of Rs. 80,000.0. The criminal was arrested by Civil Lines Police in September 2024 after 1500 grams of hashish was recovered from him. CPO Syed Khalid Hamdani appreciated the investigation and legal teams.

Death anniversary of 'Nisar Bazmi' observed

ISLAMABAD: The 18th death anniversary of iconic music director and composer 'Nisar Bazmi' was observed on Saturday. Nisar Ahmed Bazmi was born in Mumbai in 1924. He changed his last name to Bazmi to embark on a film music career. He was hired by the 'All India Radio' in 1939 as an artist and his first composed song was broadcast on the Bombay Radio Station in 1944. His first film, 'Jumna Paar', was released in 1946 and immediately established him as a first-rate composer. — APP

Kiyani assures railway services resumption

He also underscored the importance of national unity, emphasizing that the country's strength and resilience lie in its ability to stand together as one, united against any threat or challenge and that unity is the key to overcoming adversity and achieving a brighter future

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Railways Bilal Azhar Kayani Saturday assured that railway services in Balochistan will resume promptly with significantly enhanced security protocols in place following the Jaffar Express incident and that damages to tracks and bogies are being fully restored to guarantee the safety and well-being of all passengers. In an exclusive interview with a private news channel, the Minister of Railway categorically stated that every possible step is being taken to eliminate security risks and assured that railway services will resume only after these risks are mitigated, adding that services will resume soon once these measures are in place. The Minister reiterated that the safety and security of



ISLAMABAD: Nordic countries Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland celebrated shared history & all things Nordic: innovation, sustainability, human rights, nature, gender equality, midnight sun, skiing, northern lights, sauna, ikea, lego and so much more. Ambassadors of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Charge d Affaires of Finland holding their flags on this occasion. —DNA

Pakistan's textile boom: apparel exports surge 19%

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As a part of his regular engagement to fortnightly review the sectoral performances and undertake pragmatic interventions to boost national exports, Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan held an internal meeting at Ministry of Commerce with Shakeel Ahmed Mangnejo, Special Secretary, Commerce and Mudassar Raza Siddiqi, Director General (Textile). Mr. Siddiqi apprised the Minister that Pakistan's textiles and apparel industry, a cornerstone of the nation's economy, has showcased remarkable resilience in the face of global economic headwinds

and domestic challenges, and regained its lost momentum with a growth rate of 9.3 percent in first eight months of current financial year 2024-25 as compared to the corresponding period of last financial year. He further underscored that the exports of apparel witnessed double digit growth of around 19 percent and achieved historical high level of US\$ 6.2 billion in the same period. The Federal Minister acknowledged that export performance reflects the commitment of Government of Pakistan to focusing more on exports of value-added finished products while maximizing utilization of input materials available in the country. DG (Textile) shared that Pakistan, once ranked as

third largest producer of cotton, has been dropped down to sixth position globally. Comparing the case of Pakistan with Brazil, he highlighted that both countries have almost the same crop acreages, however yield per hectare of Brazil is three times higher than that of Pakistan due to adoption of high technology seed varieties, precision agriculture, mechanized harvesting, rainfed irrigation and use of renewable energy. The Federal Minister for Commerce emphasized that latest disease resistant and climate resilient seed varieties, prohibition of uncertified seeds and chemicals in the local market along-with adoption of good agricultural practices will certainly help to reviving local

cotton production and profitability of farmers. After a thorough appraisal of key barriers to trade in comparison with regional competitors, market insights, global sales forecasting and evolving geopolitical situation, Mr. Siddiqi presented a Short to Medium to Long Term Work Plan to the Commerce Minister to boost exports of Pakistan's textiles and apparel sector by opting pragmatic interventions to reducing cost of manufacturing, enhancing economies of scales, targeted marketing events, diversifying to high value-added finished products including technical textiles, expanding to non-traditional markets, simplifying the non-tariff and technical barriers to trade, get-

ting access of potential markets, developing and implementing national action plan on sustainability and circularity, facilitating export-centric R&D projects at firm level, aligning academic activities with industrial needs, and most important developing national Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) development program. Minister Jam Kamal further noted that Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world with a complete textile and apparel value chain and contributing in socio-economic development of the country. Mr. Khan emphasized on the implementation of strategic interventions to address key challenges and unlock the sector's full potential.

ICCI President calls for unity to overcome challenges

"Our nation is facing significant economic challenges that demand a unified approach," said Mr. Qureshi

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, has emphasized the urgent need for greater harmony among political and religious forces to steer the country out of its current economic crisis. In a statement issued on Saturday, President Qureshi highlighted that the country's economic stability and prosperity depend on collective efforts from all sectors of society. He urged leaders from diverse political and religious backgrounds to set aside differences and work together for national progress. "Our nation is facing significant economic challenges that demand a unified approach," said

Mr. Qureshi. "All stakeholders must join, heads, hearts, and hands in pursuing political and economic stability, which is essential for ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity." The ICCI President stressed that political stability and policy consistency are vital for economic growth. He noted that long-term, well-structured policies create an environment conducive to investment, innovation, and sustainable development. He further stated that fostering unity would restore investor confidence, improve the business climate, and unlock opportunities for economic advancement. He reaffirmed ICCI's dedication to promoting dialogue and cooperation to support economic revival and urged policymakers, business leaders, and community representatives to collaborate in building a stable and thriving Pakistan.

Punjab CM distributes Eid bags among special children

CHINIOT: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif distributed special Eid bags among special children. Assistant Commissioners Ashfaq Rasool, Shazia Rehman, Sadia Jamal visited the special education centers established in Chiniot, Lalian and Bhawana and wished special children a happy Eid with many prayers. — APP

AIIOU, VU students included in PM laptop scheme

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has included the students of Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University in the Prime Minister's laptop scheme. This initiative aims to integrate distance learning students with modern technology and promote digital learning, said a press release on Saturday. Under this scheme, deserving and merit-based students will be provided with laptops to enhance and facilitate their academic activities. This step will not only improve students' educational capabilities but also offer them global-standard online learning opportunities. Students are advised to visit the official website of the Higher Education Commission or contact their respective universities for further details and the application process. Expressing their views on this important initiative, the Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University and the Acting Rector of Virtual University, Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood, termed this decision a positive step toward an educational revolution and thanked the Higher Education Commission. —APP

23 March

پاکستان

دیکھ رہی ہے دنیا

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SEA’s new arms race

IS Southeast Asia losing its cool? That might seem like an odd question to ask about a region that straddles the equator and which, like everywhere else, is suffering from the effects of climate change. Yet the defence and neutrality debate within and beyond the region is undoubtedly heating up. It may be too soon to speak of a drumbeat of war among the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – but there is growing talk of potential conflicts and the need for “defence” rather than dialogue and defusing differences. If anything, under the Joe Biden administration, the United States added to Southeast Asian tensions by encouraging regional alliances between nations there, especially amid Washington’s attempts to counter Chinese influence in the region. It is unclear whether these potentially divisive policies will be continued under the Donald Trump administration but Asean members would be wise to hammer out joint policies to prevent any attempt to align them too closely with the interests of either Washington or Beijing. Strength in unity has been their policy up to now. Since its founding by five members – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – in 1967, during the height of the US war in Vietnam, Asean has been seen as an island of relative political stability and a sort of “buffer region.” Even as the group has grown in size to encompass more members – its population is almost 700 million strong and its combined gross domestic product stands at around US\$3.8 trillion – Asean has been viewed as a model of stability and calm. It has offered a model for the world as a whole to emulate. Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad perhaps encapsulated Asean’s ethos best by remarking that Southeast Asian countries prefer to settle disputes by negotiation while Western nations tend to go to war. But could this be changing now as the emphasis on economic development and integration within Asean gives way to a narrower focus on security issues – as is also the case in Europe and other parts of the world? At the Asean Defence Ministers’ Meeting Retreat in Penang, Malaysia, last month, views were reportedly exchanged on strengthening regional cooperation in addressing emerging security challenges. Until now, Asean has arguably prioritised trade liberalisation, sustainable development and attracting foreign investment over deepening political integration or security cooperation. This priority has served the region well in terms of advancing economic development. Last April, the US signalled its evolving military posture in the Indo-Pacific region during a summit with Japan and the Philippines. This aimed to “advance the security and prosperity” of the region by presenting the US and Japan as positive alternatives to Chinese investment in Southeast Asia. For some, however, this might raise concerns about Asean’s traditional non-alignment. Philippines races to upgrade its degrading military in the face of maritime disputes There has been much analysis published about the changing situation, including by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and the East Asia Forum. Among the most compelling arguments is that competition between the US and China for influence in the otherwise neutral Southeast Asian region is pushing nations to take sides and to rearm accordingly, thus sowing division at the expense of harmony and cooperation.

Pakistan’s First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 05 Issue: 281

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China’s warring states period

CHINESE strategists love to draw lessons from the country’s rich history, just as Cesare Borgia inspired Niccolò Machiavelli in Renaissance Italy. The downfall of Viscount Xiang of Zhi (Zhi Bo) in the fourth century BC was often told as a cautionary tale and an example of diplomacy over force. Such a dramatic story bears retelling, and 2,473 years later, we can still learn a thing or two from it. The powerful central kingdom of Jin, one of the hegemonic powers in the late Zhou dynasty, was on the brink of collapse. The ruler was a mere figurehead, with the kingdom in the hands of six powerful houses, or the Group of 6 of Jin if you like. The House of Zhi was the most prominent among them. The young Viscount Zhi Bo was as dashing, charismatic and decisive as he was greedy, arrogant and forceful. He coerced the other three houses to gang up on the two weakest ones, gobbling up their land and wealth. Before the dust had settled, he turned to his former allies. “First, he approached Viscount Huan of Wei for land. Lord Wei was angry, but his minister persuaded him with this advice: [Zhi Bo] demanded land from you without reason. Such action will arouse fear and distrust among others. If you concede, he would become even more greedy and arrogant. Such arrogance will create enemies ... Then the days of the House of Zhi will be numbered.” All this was recorded in The Strategies of the Warring States, written around 195BC [Translation my own]. As the minister foretold, Zhi Bo next asked Viscount Kang of Han to do the same. Han also complied. With his appetite whetted, Zhi Bo turned to Viscount Xiang of Zhao. Lord Zhao was a principled leader with firm views. He refused. Incensed, Zhi Bo forced the two other houses to join him to besiege Zhao in 455BC. The House of Zhao marshalled a heroic resistance for two years. Zhi Bo then diverted the nearby Fen River to flood Jinyang, causing widespread death and starvation. With victory in sight, Zhi Bo boasted, “I did not know before that water could be such a powerful weapon. I seem to recall there are rivers near Anyi and Pingyang.” Anyi and Pingyang were the seats of power for Wei and Han. Standing nearby, Viscounts Wei and Han exchanged meaningful glances. Wei quietly elbowed Han and Han stepped on Wei. But Zhi Bo’s minister observed all this and advised Zhi Bo to either attack Wei and Han immediately or increase their shares in the spoils of war to placate them. Zhi Bo shrugged off the advice, believing the two houses were too weak to challenge him. That night, Lords Wei and Han conspired with a spy sent by Lord Zhao. They collapsed the river banks to flood the camp of the Zhi army and killed Zhi Bo in a surprise attack. “The fate of the House of Zhi was thus sealed over the fearful glances and the nudging of elbows and heels [of its allies],” as The Strategies of the Warring States records. Zhao, Han, and Wei cast off the pretence of being Jin’s vassals and established their own kingdoms. These acts initiated China’s Warring States Period (around 475-221BC). Ancient strategists saw Zhi Bo’s downfall as a lesson in the abusive use of power and self-assured hubris. The Strategies of the Warring States recorded Su Qin (3rd century BC), China’s Machiavelli, as saying: “Whoever prefers force [to diplomacy] will arouse fear in others. Whoever strives to dominate over others in an alliance will end up isolated.

Trump dismantles education department

Qamar Bashir



The federal government stepped in gradually but decisively. The GI Bill in 1944 opened college doors to returning veterans. The landmark Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954 declared school segregation unconstitutional. In 1965, Elementary and Secondary Education Act brought large-scale federal funding to disadvantaged districts as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975 ensured that children with disabilities had equal access to public education

IN a stunning policy shift that has sent shockwaves through the education sector, President Donald J. Trump has dismantled the U.S. Department of Education. Framing the move as an overdue return of control to the states, Trump described it as a step toward “freedom of choice,” empowering families and communities to decide what’s best for their children’s education without interference from Washington. The now-defunct Department, which oversaw national education standards, civil rights protections, and billions in federal funding, has been stripped of its authority. In its place, states are being asked to take full ownership of their education systems—designing their own curricula, setting standards, managing teacher certification, and overseeing accountability. While advocates of decentralization celebrate this as a chance to innovate, critics warn that it is a recipe for chaos. Wealthier states with robust education infrastructure may thrive under local control, continuing to produce competitive students. But under-resourced states—especially in the South and rural Midwest—may struggle to sustain even basic levels of quality without federal funding or guidance. The result could be an educational patchwork where opportunity and excellence depend not on merit, but on geography. The immediate fallout includes the layoff of over 4,400 federal employees and the withdrawal of more than \$82 billion in federal funding that supported everything from early education to college access. Among the most affected are programs like Title I Grants, which provided over \$16 billion annually to schools serving low-income communities, and Pell Grants, which enabled well over 7 million students from working-class families to attend college. Federal assistance for children with disabilities under IDEA, school meal programs, and support for English language learners and STEM education have also been impacted. These programs once served as lifelines to marginalized and disadvantaged communities. With their funding now uncertain and their management delegated to state governments, the concern is that racial and socioeconomic gaps will widen. Families with means—predominantly white and affluent—can pivot to well-funded private schools and benefit

from increased local investment. But millions of low-income students may be left behind, attending increasingly under-resourced public schools with shrinking support systems. Many experts fear that a two-tier education system is emerging, one that privileges the rich while further marginalizing the poor. In such a system, the quality of a child’s education will depend more than ever on ZIP code, race, and economic status. Over time, this could entrench inequality and fuel societal divisions. At the same time, Trump’s move raises concerns about the rise of private influence. As state budgets tighten and federal support fades, education may become increasingly dependent on private foundations, corporate partnerships, and philanthropic donors. While this could open doors for innovation, it also risks allowing private interests to shape public education according to market demands rather than democratic values. There is a growing worry that public schools may become politically sidelined and financially starved while elite private institutions thrive. Trump’s decision is not without precedent or rationale. For years, critics have argued that the Department of Education had grown bloated, inefficient, and overbearing—more focused on compliance and paperwork than actual outcomes. They say returning control to local authorities can foster accountability, responsiveness, and creativity in tackling challenges specific to each region. But the scale and speed of the change have left little time for adaptation. Education is not a short-term enterprise. It is a long-term investment whose results unfold over generations. A shift this drastic, without a safety net or transition plan, risks undermining the very students it seeks to empower. To better understand the potential consequences, it’s important to recall how the federal role in education evolved. For much of U.S. history, education was left to states and local school districts. But this decentralized approach produced huge inequalities—between urban and rural districts, between the North and South, and especially between white and Black communities. The federal government stepped in gradually but decisively. The GI Bill in 1944 opened college

doors to returning veterans. The landmark Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954 declared school segregation unconstitutional. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act brought large-scale federal funding to disadvantaged districts as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975 ensured that children with disabilities had equal access to public education. Finally, in 1979, the Department of Education was created under President Jimmy Carter to centralize these efforts and ensure consistent national standards. Since then, federal oversight has helped enforce civil rights, improve data collection, expand access to higher education, and provide targeted funding to the schools and students who need it most. Dismantling this legacy means reverting to a pre-1960s model—a time when disparities in access and quality went largely unaddressed. Whether Trump’s bold restructuring will yield success remains to be seen. Supporters believe it will lead to innovation and efficiency, but critics argue it will exacerbate inequality and undercut the nation’s competitiveness. If the next four years do not produce measurable improvements, the political winds could shift. A future Democratic administration, or a new Republican president, could potentially restore the Department and reinstate federal programs. But undoing such a sweeping reform will take time—and by then, state systems may have fully adapted to a decentralized model. What is certain is that this decision represents a defining moment in American education. It challenges long-held assumptions about the role of government, the purpose of public schools, and the meaning of equal opportunity. It forces the nation to ask: Should education be a shared national priority—or a local experiment shaped by wealth, race, and regional politics? Trump’s education revolution is underway. Whether it becomes a model for the future or a cautionary tale remains an open question.

– Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)
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Backsliding of liberal institutions in America

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Democratic backsliding is not always accompanied by the outright dismantling of institutions; instead, it often involves their subtle manipulation. In the U.S., the Republican Party has engaged in tactics that undermine democratic principles while maintaining a façade of constitutional legitimacy. These include gerrymandering, voter suppression and judicial appointments designed to entrench partisan advantages

DEMOCRACIES rarely collapse through abrupt coups or military interventions in the contemporary world. Instead, the decline of democratic governance is often a gradual process marked by the weakening of democratic institutions, the erosion of civil liberties and the rise of hybrid regimes that blend democratic and authoritarian elements. In such cases, democratic structures remain formally intact, yet elections lose their credibility, opposition parties face systemic disadvantages and the rule of law becomes compromised. Scholars have warned that the United States, long considered a bastion of democracy, has exhibited symptoms of democratic backsliding in recent years, following trends observed in other nations that have experienced democratic decay. This essay examines the structural conditions that have facilitated democratic backsliding in the U.S., the role of political polarization, the impact of institutional weaknesses and the potential pathways for restoring democratic integrity. The erosion of democratic norms in the United States did not begin with the rise of former President Donald Trump, although his tenure accelerated existing trends. Political conflict has been intensifying since the late 20th century, as partisan divisions have deepened and governing institutions have become increasingly gridlocked. The shift from consensus-driven policymaking to zero-sum political competition can be traced to the 1980s, when party leaders prioritized ideological purity over legislative compromise. The Republican Party’s takeover of Congress in 1994, fueled by a strategy of obstruction and confrontation, marked a turning point in partisan escalation. By the early 2000s, ideological polarization had become more entrenched, with the Republican Party, in particular, rewarding candidates who embraced extremist positions. The rise of the Tea Party movement further exacerbated this trend, as grassroots activists mobilized around anti-government sentiment, economic nationalism and cultural conservatism. Wealthy donors and interest groups, such as the Koch network, played a significant role in reshaping the Republican Party by supporting candidates who prioritized deregulation, tax cuts and a rollback of social protections. The convergence of these forces created an environment in which political competition was no longer about governance but about ideological dominance and partisan survival. A certain degree of polarization is natural in democratic societies, as it allows voters to choose between distinct policy agendas. However, excessive polarization can be detrimental when it leads political factions to view their opponents as existential threats rather than legitimate competitors. Compar-

ative political scholars have identified a dangerous threshold at which polarization transforms into a form of democratic erosion, often aligning with deeper societal cleavages such as race, religion and economic inequality. In the U.S., the historical legacy of racial exclusion has exacerbated partisan divisions, with political competition increasingly revolving around identity-based conflicts. Over the past few decades, partisan identities have hardened, making bipartisan cooperation nearly impossible. Political psychologists have observed that individuals who strongly identify with either party are more likely to view their opponents as morally corrupt and untrustworthy. This form of social polarization generates heightened emotional responses, such as fear, anger and resentment, which further radicalize political discourse. The consequences of this dynamic became evident in the lead-up to the 2020 election, as disinformation campaigns, conspiracy theories and allegations of electoral fraud fueled public distrust in democratic processes. Democratic backsliding is not always accompanied by the outright dismantling of institutions; instead, it often involves their subtle manipulation. In the U.S., the Republican Party has engaged in tactics that undermine democratic principles while maintaining a façade of constitutional legitimacy. These include gerrymandering, voter suppression and judicial appointments designed to entrench partisan advantages. For instance, the refusal to consider President Obama’s Supreme Court nominee in 2016, followed by the rushed confirmation of a conservative justice in 2020, highlighted the extent to which institutional norms had been subordinated to partisan interests. One of the most alarming aspects of recent democratic decline in the U.S. is the growing acceptance of political violence. Surveys conducted in early 2020 revealed that a majority of Republican voters believed that the “traditional American way of life” was under existential threat, with a significant portion expressing support for extralegal measures to preserve it. This rhetoric culminated in the January 6th, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, an event that starkly illustrated the fragility of American democracy. Rather than unequivocally condemning the insurrection, numerous Republican lawmakers downplayed its significance, reinforcing narratives of electoral fraud and illegitimacy. Despite these challenges, certain aspects of the American political system have demonstrated resilience in the face of democratic erosion. The decentralized nature of election administration, for example, has served as a safeguard against large-scale electoral manipulation. State and local officials, irrespective of partisan affiliation, played a crucial role in ensuring the in-

tegrity of the 2020 election. Moreover, the judiciary, while increasingly politicized, has not entirely abandoned its role as a check on executive overreach. Courts at various levels dismissed numerous baseless lawsuits seeking to overturn election results, reaffirming the rule of law. Another underappreciated component of democratic resilience is the administrative state. Bureaucratic institutions, often maligned as inefficient or unaccountable, provide stability and continuity, even amid political turmoil. The public service sector has functioned as a bulwark against authoritarian tendencies by maintaining essential governance functions and resisting efforts to politicize its operations. However, public confidence in government institutions remains low, a vulnerability that can be exploited by populist leaders seeking to delegitimize democratic norms. Restoring democratic integrity in the U.S. will require systemic reforms and a renewed commitment to democratic principles by political elites and civil society. Some proposed reforms include abolishing the Electoral College, restructuring congressional representation and instituting campaign finance reforms to limit the influence of wealthy donors. While these structural changes face significant obstacles, more immediate steps can be taken to protect democratic institutions. These include strengthening voting rights protections, enhancing transparency in electoral processes and fostering bipartisan initiatives aimed at depolarizing political discourse. Ultimately, the survival of democracy depends not only on institutional reforms but also on the political culture that sustains it. Efforts to rebuild trust in democratic institutions must address the underlying social and economic grievances that fuel polarization. Civic education, media literacy programs and initiatives promoting cross-party dialogue can play a vital role in mitigating extremist tendencies and fostering a more constructive political environment. The United States is at a critical juncture, where the future of its democratic system hangs in the balance. The historical precedents suggest that democratic institutions can withstand periods of political turmoil, the current trajectory of polarization and institutional manipulation poses significant risks. Recognizing the warning signs of democratic backsliding is the first step toward addressing the challenges ahead. Through institutional reforms, civic engagement and a commitment to democratic principles, the U.S. can reverse its course and reaffirm its status as a functioning democracy. The stakes are high and the coming years will determine whether the nation can withstand the forces that threaten to undermine its democratic foundation.

Briefs

PM hails Recharge Pakistan initiative...

FROM PAGE 01

"Water is the cornerstone of life; fundamental to our economies, our food systems, and our environment. Yet, this life-sustaining resource is under unprecedented stress," he added. Furthermore, he said that nearly half of the global population experiences water scarcity for at least part of the year. Billions remain without access to clean drinking water, while water pollution continues to rise at alarming levels. "Our wetlands are disappearing three times faster than our forests. This is no longer a distant threat. It is a global crisis that demands immediate and collective action," the prime minister highlighted. The premier also added: "Pakistan is no stranger to these challenges. As a country deeply dependent on its glaciers, rivers, and aquifers, we are witnessing the accelerating impact of climate change and population pressures on our water resources. The catastrophic floods of 2022 continue to cast a long shadow, having caused enormous damage to our irrigation systems and affected millions of lives and livelihoods." At the same time, droughts pose an equally serious threat – with nearly 80% of our land categorised as arid or semi-arid, and 30% of our population directly affected by drought-like conditions, he noted.

Appointment of new CEC...

FROM PAGE 01

parliamentary committee for the appointments has not been formed. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has begun consultations on approaching the court over the delay. According to constitutional procedure, the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader must consult on the appointments. If they reach an agreement, the proposed names will be sent to the parliamentary committee for approval. In case of disagreement, three names for each position will be forwarded to the committee for selection. The parliamentary committee consists of 12 members—six from the government and six from the opposition. It is expected to include three members from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), two from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and one from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Meanwhile, PTI will have five members, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) will have one. As per Article 215(4) of the Constitution, the 45-day deadline for completing the appointments expired on March 12. The eligibility criteria for the CEC include a retired Supreme Court judge, a retired bureaucrat, or a technocrat under 68 years of age. For Election Commission members, the candidates must be retired high court judges, retired bureaucrats, or technocrats under 65.

4 Punjabi labourers shot dead...

FROM PAGE 01

were working as borewell drillers. The DC added that Levies personnel reached the site and the bodies were taken to Rural Health Centre Mande Haji for medical examination. "Further investigation is under way and FIR (first information report) will be lodged against those responsible," the DC said. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. The development comes amid a tense security situation prevailing in the province after last week's terrorist hijacking of the Jaffar Express train in Bolan district. Last month, unidentified gunmen killed seven people travelling to Punjab after off-loading them from a passenger bus in the Barkhan district. Balochistan has witnessed a spate of attacks targeting those hailing from Punjab. In two separate incidents in April 2024, nine people were killed after being forced off a bus near Noshki, while two labourers from Punjab were shot in Kech.

Thumping victory for Argentina as Almada shines

Argentina were without Lionel Messi, Lautaro Martinez and Rodrigo De Paul in Uruguay, but Thiago Almada's curler handed them victory

SPORTS DESK

Bubeus Thiago Almada's stunning strike handed a depleted Argentina team a 1-0 win over rivals Uruguay on Friday, and inched them closer to World Cup qualification. Almada's curling effort in the 68th minute decided a contest lacking in clear-cut chances, which ended with the reigning world and Copa America champions down to 10 men following Nicolas Gonzalez's stoppage-time red card. Both teams managed just one shot on target apiece in the first half, with Sergio Rochet and Emiliano Martinez mere spectators for most of the opening period. Argentina, who had seen Lionel Messi and Lautaro Martinez withdraw from their squad in the build-up to the game, improved after the break as Almada forced a smart two-handed shot from Rochet. But the Uruguay goalkeeper was given no chance by the Lyon midfielder later on, as he curled a spectacular strike into the far corner



from 25 yards out. Marcelo Bielsa's hosts never came close to mustering a response from there, with the only other incident of note seeing substitute Gonzalez sent off

deep into stoppage time. In the 95th minute, Gonzalez caught NahitanNandez on the neck with a high boot and received a straight red card for serious foul play.

That dismissal means he will be suspended for Tuesday's clash with Brazil, in which a point will see Argentina seal qualification for next year's tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada. They are six points clear of second-placed Ecuador in the CONMEBOL standings, and have a 15-point buffer over Bolivia in the play-off spot. Uruguay are seven clear of Bolivia and are also highly likely to qualify. An adductor injury suffered in Inter Miami's MLS match against Atlanta United forced Messi to withdraw from Argentina's squad for these qualifiers, but La Albiceleste found a way to win without their talisman. They were limited to chances worth just 0.71 expected goals (xG), having less possession (44.9%) and fewer final-third entries (45 to 77) than their hosts. But they were excellent in defence, limiting Bielsa's team to just six shots worth 0.19 xG. They have allowed the fewest shots (83) and expected goals against (7.03 xGA) in the South American qualification group thus far.

Boxing legend George Foreman passes away at 76

Foreman captured the heavyweight boxing gold medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City

NEW YORK: American George Foreman, one of the great second acts in sports, who reclaimed the heavyweight boxing title at age 45 and became a celebrated product pitchman, died on Friday at age 76.

"With profound sorrow, we announce the passing of our beloved George Edward Foreman Sr. who peacefully departed on March 21, 2025 surrounded by loved ones," his family said in an Instagram post.

An intimidating, thunderous puncher who lost his first title to Muhammad Ali in their famous "Rumble in the Jungle" in 1974, "Big George" was a more round, jovial figure when he knocked out Michael Moore for his second crown two decades later. Foreman's comeback and the fortune he made selling fat-wicking electric cooking grills made him an icon of self-improvement and success for the Baby Boom generation. Born in Marshall, Texas, on Jan. 10, 1949, Foreman's



family soon moved to Houston where he and his six siblings were raised by a single mother. Growing up poor in the segregated American South, Foreman dropped out of junior high school and used his size and fists in street robberies. "George's journey from the streets of Fifth Ward to boxing and business success was an inspiration," Houston Mayor John Whitmire said in a statement.

"He never forgot where he came from ... Houston will forever be proud to call George Foreman one of our own." The Job Corps, part of President Lyndon B.

Johnson's "Great Society" reforms, "rescued me from the gutter," Foreman later wrote. Through the program, 16-year-old Foreman moved out of Texas and was encouraged to channel his rage and growing bulk into boxing. At age 19 and in his 25th amateur fight, Foreman captured the heavyweight boxing gold medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Turning pro, he won 37 straight matches on his way to face reigning champion Joe Frazier in Kingston, Jamaica, winning by technical knockout in round two. Foreman defended the belt

Pakistan Sports Board Deputy Director General suspended

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government has suspended Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Deputy Director General Mohammad Shahid Islam for allegedly misleading senior officials regarding the credentials of a kabaddi player. The player in question, Heera Butt, was never a part of the national team and had no significant achievements at the international level. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) has been directed to investigate the matter after the Pakistan Kabaddi Federation (PKF) denied recognizing Heera Butt as a national player. Despite this, his name was reportedly forwarded to the federal government for a medal nomination. Following directives from top government authorities, the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) issued Shahid Islam's suspension letter. "The Secretary IPC is pleased to place Muhammad Shahid Islam, Deputy Director General PSB Islamabad, under suspension with immediate effect," the official notification stated. Notably, Shahid Islam's promotion to Deputy Director General is also under scrutiny, as the matter remains pending in the Islamabad High Court. In 2020, a single bench demoted him, but he later filed an appeal. Recently, the Islamabad High Court ordered the Pakistan Sports Board's Director of HR to appear at the next hearing. A division bench, comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Sardar Ijaz Ishaq Khan, is hearing the intra-court appeal. During the proceedings, the court expressed displeasure over the petitioner's lawyer's lack of preparation. Upon inquiry, the lawyer confirmed that Shahid Islam was still holding the Deputy Director General post. Justice Kayani remarked that the court had already ruled on the matter in 2020 and was now reviewing the intra-court appeal.

Nina Hughes beaten by Johnson

WEB DESK

LONDON: Nina Hughes' bid to regain the WBA bantamweight title ended in defeat as Chernela Johnson won their rematch by stoppage. Hughes lost her title in controversial fashion in Perth last May, when a scorecards mix-up meant the Briton was announced the winner before the verdict was corrected. This time round, there was no doubt as Johnson claimed a convincing victory in Sydney, with Hughes' corner throwing the towel in the fourth round. The 30-year-old Australian dominated a scrappy contest to retain her title and improve her professional record to 17-2. Hughes suffered a cut to her nose after a clash of heads in the third round and was deducted a point for holding early in the fifth round. The 42-year-old has now lost two of her eight fights and hugged Johnson immediately after Saturday's bout was stopped.

Knight sacked as England captain after Ashes thrashing

"Winning the ICC Women's World Cup on home turf at Lord's in 2017 will always be a huge highlight, but being a part of the huge steps forward made in the women's game off the pitch brings me just as much pride"

WEB DESK

LONDON: Heather Knight has been sacked as England captain following her side's 16-0 loss in Australia. Knight has been in the position since 2016, but has overseen a difficult winter, with a series win in South Africa sandwiched between a disappointing T20 World Cup campaign and a tumultuous Ashes tour of Australia. On Friday, head coach Jon Lewis was also removed from his position after a review of the tour led by England director of women's cricket Clare Connor. Knight, 34, led the side in eight Tests, 94 one-day internationals and 96 T20s, with 134 wins from her 199 matches in charge. "I have loved being England captain, it's been the most rewarding period of my career," said Knight. "But for now I'm excited to focus on my batting and supporting the team and the new captain in the best way I can. "Winning the ICC Women's World Cup on home turf at Lord's in 2017 will always be a huge highlight, but being a part of the huge steps forward made in the women's game off the pitch brings me just as much pride." Connor said Knight was an "outstanding leader and role model". She will remain available for England selection as a player only, but the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) are yet to confirm who will be her successor. Nat Sciver-Brunt and Amy Jones have both deputised for Knight when she has been absent because of injury, while off-spinner Charlie Dean has been touted as a potential permanent candidate. England's home summer starts with a white-ball series against West Indies starting in May, before they take on India in June and July. Knight took over the side in a period of transition following legendary captain Charlotte Edwards' retirement - and a year into her tenure, England won the 50-over World Cup by beating India at Lord's. However, she failed to win an Ashes series in five attempts during her time in charge, with this latest defeat the most chastening as Australia dominated throughout. It was the first time a side has lost every match in an Ashes series since the multi-format points system was introduced in 2013.

Lewis Hamilton takes first Ferrari win in China

BEIJING: Lewis Hamilton took his first win for Ferrari on only his second outing for the team with a dominant victory in the sprint race at the Chinese Grand Prix. The seven-time champion fended off a challenge from Red Bull's Max Verstappen on the run to the first corner and controlled the race from there. Verstappen fell back from the Ferrari after a few laps into the clutches of McLaren's Oscar Piastri, who passed the world champion with five laps to go. McLaren's Lando Norris managed to salvage a point after a difficult race by passing Lance Stroll's Aston Martin with two laps to go. Hamilton's victory was a resounding recovery after a disappointing Ferrari debut at the opening race of the season in Australia last weekend, in which he qualified eighth and finished 10th. He was praised on the slowing-down lap after his victory by his engineer Riccardo Adami for a "masterclass in tyre management" on a day when every other driver struggled to make their rubber last. Hamilton savoured the cheers from the packed grandstands after climbing out of his car on the pit straight at the end. "I woke up feeling great today," he said. "The first race was difficult and I really do feel a lot of people underestimated the steep climb it is to get into a new team, with communication and understanding and a whole lot of things. "The amount of people I heard yapping away maybe because they haven't done it and don't have the experience. "I came here and the engineers and mechanics have done a great job to fine-tune the car and it felt great today. There is so

much grip on this new tarmac but I think everyone struggled." Verstappen appeared as if he could challenge Hamilton in the early stages but the 40-year-old began to edge away after about eight laps as the Dutchman slipped back into the clutches of Piastri. The Australian bided his time for a few laps, inching closer to the back of the Red Bull, before pulling off a clinical pass into Turn 14 on lap 14. Piastri said: "It was a really productive sprint. Finishing sec-



ond is always a great result and I learnt a lot. As much as the result, the way I got the result was the encouraging thing. "We didn't quite have the pace for Lewis out front but we have some ideas and see if we can go better." Verstappen said: "I tried to give it a go but unfortunately, the last eight laps we just didn't have the pace of the others, so I was just trying to survive out there, so I definitely take the P3. It was tough to manage the tyres. "In general we just lack a bit of overall pace so you have to push a bit harder and that kills you tyres more." Norris, winner in Melbourne, dropped back from sixth on the grid to ninth on the first lap with an error at Turn Six, running wide after apparently misjudging his braking behind Russell and losing three places. Norris spent most of the race complaining he had no grip from his front tyres and could not go any faster, but pounced as Stroll himself ran into trouble in the closing stages. The result means Norris' championship lead has been cut to two points by Verstappen. Norris said: "I went in a bit hot (into Turn Six). On me. I struggled after that. I didn't have any pace. I struggle a lot in these conditions, with the front graining. It's my worst nightmare." Behind Verstappen, Mercedes' George Russell passed Ferrari's Charles Leclerc for fourth place with a dive down the inside of the hairpin at the end of the long back straight on the first lap. Leclerc came back at Russell in the closing stages but the Briton was able to hold him off. Yuki Tsunoda took an excellent sixth for Racing Bulls, fending off Andrea Kimi Antonelli's Mercedes for the entire race.

US-Taliban re-engagement on multiple...

FROM PAGE 01

The U.S. delegation, alongside its Qatari facilitators, repeatedly expressed gratitude to the Taliban for ordering Glezzmann's release. Donald Trump's evolving stance towards former adversaries—such as Russia and the Taliban—could have profound implications on global politics, especially in Asia, where the U.S. continues to employ various strategies to maintain its influence. While Pakistan once played a crucial role in countering socialist and communist threats during the Cold War, the current U.S. focus appears to be on countering China's economic rise and dominance in global trade markets. Unlike Pakistan, China has largely avoided confrontations, opting instead for diplomatic engagements and economic collaborations. Pakistan's predicament is unique. Its military establishment still adheres to the strategic depth policies inherited from the Bhutto-Zia era. Diplomatic relations with its neighbors remain strained, with India and Afghanistan being designated as adversaries, while Iran is regarded with skepticism. Even China, despite its long-standing partnership with Pakistan, has growing reservations about Islamabad's strategic direction. Western think tanks consistently identify religious extremism and terrorism as serious threats to global security, and both phenomena have deep roots in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad's sudden yet brief visit to Kabul raises numerous questions about U.S. intentions. His historical involvement in Afghanistan's political shifts suggests that significant changes may be on the horizon. As the U.S. and the Taliban navigate this new phase of engagement, the broader geopolitical repercussions will unfold in the coming months.

No governance in the...

FROM PAGE 01

mentioning that he has been attending hearings at the Peshawar High Court for the past three days. "I feel like setting up a tent here, given how frequently I have to come," he remarked. He also alleged that false cases have been registered against him, including one for biscuit theft in Hasan Abdal, after previously being accused in seven motorcycle theft cases.

Imran's release possible...

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over May 9, then talks can proceed, or maybe we can talk." The PM's aide's remarks follow his earlier statement where he said that the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government would have no objection if the court released PTI founder Khan who has been behind bars in Adiala jail for well over a year in various cases. The former ruling party, ever since its negotiations with the government reached a stalemate, has been reaching out to opposition parties to launch a protest against the ruling coalition with the movement aiming to restore the supremacy of the rule of law and Constitution and secure the release of political prisoners in the country. Sanaullah's remarks hold significance as the political temperature is expected to rise which is likely to result in further political polarisation.

Iran extends felicitations..

FROM PAGE 01

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the visionary leader and Founding Father of Pakistan, along with the great philosopher and poet, Allama Iqbal, whose ideals continue to inspire generations. Over the decades, Pakistan has demonstrated unwavering resilience, courage, and faith, overcoming challenges with determination and unity. Iran and Pakistan share historic and exemplary relations, rooted in Islamic brotherhood, good neighborliness, mutual respect, and cooperation. These strong ties reflect the shared vision of the leadership of both nations to further strengthen bilateral cooperation across various domains.

Briefs

HZSL, ZTBL
join hands
to empower
farmers

ISLAMABAD: HBL Zarai Services Limited (HZSL) and Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance financial inclusion and modern agricultural services for farmers across Pakistan. This strategic collaboration aims to provide farmers with innovative financial solutions, mechanization support, and expert advisory services to improve farm productivity and economic stability. Under this collaboration, HZSL and ZTBL will utilize their respective platforms— 'HBL Zarai Deras' and 'ZTBL Zarai Baithaks'—as integrated hubs to provide agronomic guidance, financial services, and farm mechanization support. ZTBL will also refer farmers who could benefit from HBL Zarai's agricultural services, ensuring a streamlined approach to modernizing Pakistan's agriculture sector. Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Amer Aziz, CEO of HBL Zarai Services Limited, emphasized the importance of a farmer-centric approach in financial services.—APP

Erdogan
warns against
protests
over mayor's
detention

ISTANBUL: President Tayyip Erdogan warned on Friday that Türkiye would not tolerate street violence or public disruptions after the detention of Istanbul's mayor Ekrem Imamoglu prompted some of the biggest shows of civil disobedience in more than a decade. "We will not accept the disruption of public order. Just as we have never yielded to street terrorism, we will not surrender to vandalism," Erdogan, 71, told an audience in the capital Ankara. The warning came after thousands of people protested for two days in Istanbul, Ankara and other cities, including at university campuses, leading to some clashes. Police used water cannon to disperse some crowds and have closed down streets. More demonstrations are planned later on Friday and tensions could rise at the weekend when a court is expected to rule to formally arrest Imamoglu, Erdogan's main political rival who leads him in some opinion polls. An arrest could also accelerate a three-day selloff in Turkish assets that prompted the central bank to intervene to protect the currency. Imamoglu, 54, was detained on Wednesday facing charges including graft and aiding a terrorist group. His Republican People's Party (CHP), the main opposition, condemned the move as politically motivated and urged supporters to demonstrate lawfully. European leaders have called the detention a sign of democratic backsliding in Türkiye. Erdogan said it was "a dead end" to take to the streets. "Pointing to the courts to defend theft, looting, illegality, and fraud is gravely irresponsible," he said. Authorities imposed a four-day ban after the detention and said that 53 people were detained during protests on Thursday.—APP



ISLAMABAD: National flags flying in the blue sky on the eve Pakistan Day in Federal capital.

Pak urges UNSC to act against
Israeli aggression in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called on the U.N. Security Council to demand that Israel immediately halt its military attacks in Gaza and push for an "indefinite and continuous" ceasefire in the besieged enclave so as to restore humanitarian access. Speaking during a debate on the humanitarian situation in Gaza in the 15-member Council, Ambassador Munir Akram highlighted that over 90% of Gaza's population faces starvation due to Israel's blockade, with newborn babies are dying. "Civilian structures – hospitals, schools, and mosques – are being destroyed on the pretext of targeting combatants, and every principle of international law, including international humanitarian law, has been violated", Ambassador Akram said in his last statement to the Council as he completes his term on March 30. "But", he said, "Israel has vowed to continue the slaughter irrespective of its consequences for Palestinian civilians. It is doing

so with impunity – knowing well that the world, and this Council, will be deterred from taking any action to enforce its resolutions calling for a ceasefire and an end to the mounting atrocities." "Daily military raids, settler violence and illegal land annexations are part of a systematic effort to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian people in the West Bank," the Pakistani envoy said. The Security Council, and the world community, cannot sit back and watch this ongoing ethnic cleansing," Ambassador Akram said. "A failure to halt this brutal war will unleash the worst instinct of powerful and predatory States," he said, urging the elected Council members to initiate measures to end "this cruel war". The 10 elected members on the Council are: Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia. Denouncing the Israeli blockade of humanitarian supplies to Gaza, he underscored the need for pro-

viding full access to the UN and other humanitarian agencies and organizations to meet the needs of suffering people. "Starvation of civilians cannot be used as a weapon of war," the Pakistani envoy told delegates. He said that Gaza genocide is now being extended to the West Bank, with Israel's large-scale military operations, which began in Jenin and other areas of the northern West Bank on 21 January 2025, have expanded to Nur Shams, Tulkarm and Jenin Camps, causing the largest population displacement since 1967. According to OCHA, between 7 October 2023 and 4 March 2025, 896 Palestinians, including children and women, were killed in the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 90 Palestinians since the start of this year. "The ongoing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem flagrantly violate the international law and UN Security Council resolution 2334 and constitutes a

clear breach of the Charter," Ambassador Akram said. "Security Council resolutions are binding and cannot be ignored or selectively implemented." Briefing the Security Council, Sigrid Kaag, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said, the "relentless expansion of Israeli settlements is dramatically altering the landscape and demographics of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, presenting an existential threat to the prospect of a contiguous, viable, independent Palestinian State."

Presenting the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) – a measure calling on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" – she pointed out that settlement activity has nevertheless continued at a high rate, with Israeli planning au-

thorities advancing or approving approximately 10,600 housing units in settlements in the occupied West Bank, including 4,920 in East Jerusalem. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures accelerated across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, she continued, reporting that Israeli authorities demolished 460 structures and displaced 576 people, including 287 children and 149 women, because they did not possess Israel-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Meanwhile, Ms. Kaag said that "alarming levels" of violence continued, with 123 Palestinians, including 6 women and 19 children, killed amidst Israeli forces' air strikes, operations, armed exchanges and other incidents. "Most Palestinians were killed in the context of Israeli operations in Area A, including during exchanges of fire with armed Palestinians," she said.—DNA

UN warns
of 'massive
trauma' for
Gaza's children

GENEVA: The UN warned Friday that all Gaza's approximately 1 million children were facing "massive trauma" as fighting in the war-ravaged territory resumed and amid dire aid shortages. Humanitarians described an alarming situation in Gaza amid a growing civilian death toll since Israel resumed aerial bombardment and ground operations this week after a six-week ceasefire. Sam Rose, the senior deputy field director in Gaza for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, highlighted the psychological shock for already traumatized children to once again find themselves beneath the bombs. This is a "massive, massive trauma for the 1 million children" living in the Palestinian territory, he told reporters in Geneva, speaking from Gaza. The breakdown of the ceasefire that took effect on Jan.—APP

At least 44
civilians killed
in extremist
attack in Niger

DAKAR: An attack by a extremist group on a village in western Niger has killed 44 civilians, the country's Interior Ministry said. The attack took place on Friday afternoon in the village of Fambita in the rural commune of Kokorou, near the tri-state border with Mali and Burkina Faso, the ministry said in a statement. It blamed the attack on the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, or EIGS. The Associated Press was not able to reach out to the EIGS for comment. "Around 2 p.m., while Muslim worshippers were performing Friday prayers, these heavily armed terrorists surrounded the mosque to carry out their massacre of rare cruelty," the statement read. The gunmen also set fire to a market and houses before retreating, it added.—APP

China-Pak Donkey
industry coop
exchange meeting held

BEIJING : China-Pakistan Donkey Industry Cooperation Exchange Meeting was held in Dong'e, a county in China's Shandong Province renowned for its production of Ejiao, a traditional Chinese medicinal product made from donkey hide. The event aimed to modernize Pakistan's donkey industry and foster the high-quality development of the global donkey sector, Gwadar Pro reported on Saturday. As a leading enterprise in the donkey and Ejiao industries, Dong'e Ejiao released a project plan for the industrialization of Pakistan's donkey sector during the meeting. Additionally, representatives from both sides signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Development of Pakistan's Donkey Industry. "In Pakistan, donkeys are mainly used as transportation tools rather than being developed into a specific industry. That's why I hope China's expertise in the donkey industry can help develop it in Pakistan. We have signed a memorandum of understanding, and we will collaborate with Dong'e Ejiao to introduce what we have seen here into Pakistan. I firmly believe we will achieve this soon," said Saleem Mandiwalla, Chairman of the Finance Committee of Pakistan's Senate. In China, there is a significant market demand for donkey meat and hides, particularly as donkey hides serve as a crucial raw material for Ejiao, a traditional Chinese medicinal product. However, China's domestic donkey farming industry remains small, and current stock levels are insufficient to meet market demands. As all-weather strategic partners, China and Pakistan have a strong foundation for cooperation. Pakistan, the world's third-largest donkey-owning country, has a population of approximately 5.8 million donkeys.—DNA

Kurds in Iraq, Syria celebrate
the Nowruz festival

AKRE. Iraq: Kurds in Iraq and Syria this week marked the Nowruz festival, a traditional celebration of spring and renewal, at a time when many are hoping that a new political beginning is on the horizon. Nowruz, the Farsi-language word for "new year," is an ancient Persian festival that is celebrated in countries including Iraq, Syria, Türkiye and Iran. It is characterized by colorful street festivals and torch-bearing processions winding their way into the mountains. For many, Thursday and Friday's Nowruz festivities symbolized not only the arrival of spring but also the spirit and aspirations of the Kurdish people, who are now facing a moment of transformation in the region. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which holds sway in much of northeastern Syria, recently signed a landmark deal with the new government in Damascus that includes a ceasefire and eventual merging of the SDF into the Syrian army. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a decades-long insurgency in Türkiye that has spilled over into conflict in Syria and northern Iraq, recently announced a ceasefire after the group's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, called for its members to put down their weapons. In Iraq, calls for unity As the sun set behind the mountains of Akre in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq Thursday, more than 1,500 volunteers climbed the steep hills, carrying burning torches as their faces shimmered in the light of the flame. From a distance, their movements looked like a river of fire flowing up and down the mountain. At the top, small bonfires burned, while the sky was filled with the flashing colors of fireworks. Women wearing colorful dresses with gold and silver jewelry and men dressed in traditional outfits with wide belts and turbans danced in the streets of the town and in the hills, Kurdish flags waving above the crowds. The sound of dahol drums and zurna flutes echoed everywhere, mixed with modern Kurdish folk songs played from loudspeakers. According to Akre's directorate of tourism, some 88,000 people attended the event, including Kurds who traveled from around the region and the world. The substantial turnout came despite the fact that this year the festival coincides with Ramadan, during which many Kurds – like other Muslims – fast from sunrise to sunset daily. Among those dancing on the hill was Hozan Jalil, who traveled from Batman city in Türkiye. Jalil said he is happy about the peace process and hopeful that it will bear results, although he was also somewhat circumspect. "I hope it won't finish with regrets and our Kurdish people will not be deceived or cheated," he said. Jalil said Nowruz to him represents unity between Kurdish people across national boundaries. "This year, Nowruz to me symbolizes the point of achieving freedom for all Kurdish people," he said. For the people of Akre, Nowruz has become a tradition that connects them to Kurds and others everywhere. A local from Akre, described her pride in hosting such a celebration in her town. "It's a great feeling that everyone from all over the world comes to Akre for this celebration because it makes Akre the capital of Nowruz for the whole world," said Guevara Fawaz. She was walking through the town's main square with her family dressed in traditional Kurdish clothes. Like Jalil, she voiced hopes that the PKK-Türkiye talks would progress and "achieve peace in all four parts of Kurdistan."—DNA

ZTBL's flight towards excellent performance continues

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI

INAMULLAH Khattak, Senior Vice President of Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL), while addressing journalists, highlighted the remarkable achievements of the bank over the past two decades. He stated that in the last twenty-one years, ZTBL earned a total profit of eighteen billion rupees. However, in the last two years alone, the bank's profit surged to an impressive 45.3 billion rupees. The bank contributed 16.7 billion rupees to the government treasury in the form of taxes. Khattak emphasized that ZTBL's services have been a source of support for six hundred thousand farmers. In the past two years, an ad-

ditional forty thousand farmers have joined the bank's network, which is a testament to the unwavering trust that the farming community places in ZTBL. He credited this unprecedented success to the leadership and dedication of President and CEO Tahir Yaqoob Bhatti. Under Bhatti's stewardship, ZTBL has evolved into a formidable institution, standing shoulder to shoulder with the leading banks in Pakistan in terms of banking services. ZTBL, being the largest agricultural bank in Pakistan, provides a diverse range of financial and banking services specifically designed for the rural population. With an extensive network of 501 branches and a team of well-trained mobile credit officers, the bank has solidified its po-

sition as a crucial pillar of support for the country's agricultural sector. The official website of ZTBL offers a comprehensive array of information regarding its services, corporate structure, and

various financial products, as well as valuable insights into Pakistan's agricultural sector. In a bid to modernize and enhance efficiency, ZTBL has incorporated digital tools such as a mobile application, signif-



icantly improving accessibility and customer convenience. Notably, ZTBL is the only public sector financial institution in Pakistan that has consistently generated profits, a testament to its robust operational framework and strategic vision. The bank's outstanding credit rating of AAA/A-1+, maintained for the past five years, underscores its financial stability and operational excellence. This high rating is a reflection of ZTBL's unwavering dedication to supporting Pakistan's farmers. Recognizing the evolving needs of the agricultural community, the bank has introduced several innovative products and services, with a particular focus on empowering women and youth. ZTBL's partnerships with educational institutions and agricultural research organizations highlight its commitment to fostering advancements in

farming practices and increasing the sector's overall contribution to Pakistan's economic growth. For the first time in its history, ZTBL has been aligned with modern financial requirements, ensuring that its services remain competitive and accessible. The introduction of the bank's mobile application represents a significant milestone in its digital transformation, further facilitating seamless banking for its customers. ZTBL's website now provides detailed information on its corporate structure, financial products, and service offerings, alongside branch and ATM locations. The platform features investor relations data and economic insights, reflecting ZTBL's commitment to transparency and a customer-centric approach. By integrating technology into its banking operations, ZTBL

has positioned itself as a forward-thinking financial institution, capable of meeting the demands of today's rapidly evolving financial landscape. The bank's strategic adoption of modern banking practices ensures that it continues to provide unparalleled support to the agricultural community while maintaining operational efficiency. Concluding his remarks, Inamullah Khattak asserted that if Pakistan aims to revitalize its loss-making institutions and transform them into profitable entities, it must prioritize the appointment of hardworking and dedicated professionals like Tahir Yaqoob Bhatti. He reiterated that with the right leadership, even struggling institutions could be turned into successful and thriving enterprises, much like ZTBL.

Briefs

Youn-e-Ali processions end peacefully

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Ali (AS) was observed with deep reverence and devotion across the country on Saturday. All the mourning processions concluded peacefully after passing through their traditional routes in different cities. Foolproof security arrangements were taken to avoid any untoward incident. In Karachi, the main Youn-e-Ali mourning procession started from Nishtar Park, which passed through traditional routes before culminating at Imambargah Husainian Iranian in Kharadar. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah landed the police and other law enforcement agencies over foolproof security measures. In Lahore, the main procession was taken out from Mubarak Haveli inside Mochi Gate in the morning and culminated at Karbala Gamay Shah. Earlier in the day, the authorities banned pillion riding in the port city in light of the Youn-e-Ali procession. All educational institutions in the province will remain closed today on account of directions issued by the Sindh Education Department.

Trump revokes security clearance for Harris, Clinton

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump revoked security clearances from his previously defeated Democratic election rivals, Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton, as well as a number of other former officials and critics. Trump said in February he was revoking security clearance for his predecessor Joe Biden. His order confirmed that decision, adding that he was also revoking the security clearance of "any other member" of the Biden family. "I have determined that it is no longer in the national interest for the following individuals to access classified information," Trump's memorandum read. Former US presidents and top security officials usually keep their security clearance as a courtesy. Trump ordered department and agency leaders to "revoke unescorted access to secure United States government facilities for these individuals." "This action includes, but is not limited to, receipt of classified briefings, such as the President's Daily Brief, and access to classified information held by any member of the intelligence community by virtue of the named individuals' previous tenure in the Congress," the order stated. — Agencies

LHC acquits rape convict after six years

DNA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Saturday acquitted Muhammad Arif, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in a case involving the rape and murder of a 19-year-old girl by slitting her throat, after six years. Justice Tariq Nadeem of the LHC issued an 11-page verdict on the appeal against the convict's sentence, addressing a legal point. In his decision, Justice Nadeem wrote that in the current era, DNA plays a crucial role in bringing cases to a logical conclusion, adding that the courts must also ensure that DNA reports comply with the law and that DNA samples are securely transferred to forensic labs. The court's decision stated that if DNA samples are not securely transferred, their reports cannot be relied upon. In criminal proceedings, DNA reports can only be considered as expert evidence and should be treated as the opinion of specialists. The verdict further mentioned that if all other evidence is flawed, linking the accused to the crime solely based on a DNA report is insufficient.

Malaysia's Vision for ASEAN 2025

Strengthening regional unity and sustainability

Highlighting the economic ties between ASEAN and Pakistan, the High Commissioner noted that bilateral trade reached an all-time high of USD 11.8 billion in recent years.

With Pakistan's ongoing economic diplomacy efforts, he expressed confidence in further increasing trade and investment between ASEAN and Pakistan

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Malaysia, Dato Azhar bin Mazlan, has reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to ASEAN as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. Addressing an audience in Islamabad, he emphasized Malaysia's responsibility in leading ASEAN in 2025 as its Chair, marking a significant milestone in regional co-operation. Highlighting the economic ties between ASEAN and Pakistan, the High Commissioner noted that bilateral trade reached an all-time high of USD 11.8 billion in recent years. With Pakistan's ongoing economic diplomacy efforts, he expressed confidence in further increasing trade and investment between ASEAN and Pakistan. To a question about the Pakistan's status as full dialogue partner, the high commissioner said that there was an ASEAN moratorium therefore until and unless that moratorium is lifted Pakistan may not be able to become a full dialogue partner. He said, Malaysia is committed to expediting the admission of Timor-Leste as the 11th member of ASEAN, further strengthening the unity and inclusiveness of our community. 'At the same time, we will also prioritize regional peace and stability, including ef-



orts to progress the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus towards facilitating a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Myanmar'. Malaysia is committed to advancing negotiations on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ensuring stability and mutual understanding in the region. Malaysia is dedicated to ensuring that ASEAN remains an inclusive, forward-looking, and resilient organization," said High Com-

missioner Dato Azhar bin Mazlan. Malaysia's leadership will be guided by the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and its Blueprints, as well as the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. These frameworks have contributed to ASEAN's achievements in fostering regional peace, stability, and prosperity. Looking ahead, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 will be adopted at the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kua-

la Lumpur, charting the course for the next two decades. Key Priorities Under Malaysia's Chairmanship include Strengthening ASEAN Centrality by promoting strategic trust through sustained dialogue, diplomacy, and goodwill among nations. Expanding ASEAN's partnerships beyond the region, including strengthening ties with Pakistan. Enhancing intra-ASEAN trade and investment with a focus on inclusivity, sustainability, and regional economic growth. Promoting digital resilience, green finance, market integration, and supply chain development. Addressing development gaps and inequalities to improve living standards while mitigating climate change impacts. "As Malaysia assumes ASEAN's Chairmanship in 2025, it is not just about regional diplomacy but about building a future together—one of shared prosperity, peace, and mutual respect," said Dato Azhar bin Mazlan. He invited media representatives and stakeholders to play a role in fostering greater understanding and awareness of ASEAN's vision. "As we break our fast together this evening, let us be reminded that unity and cooperation are the bedrock of progress. Let us work together to ensure that ASEAN remains strong, united, and inclusive for generations to come," he concluded.

IMF approves FBR's request to cut property purchase tax

Reduction in property purchase tax will be effective from April 2025; lender maintains WHT rates on sellers

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Amid ongoing talks between the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the latter has agreed in principle to grant partial relaxations to the FBR request to reduce the Withholding Tax (WHT) rates on property purchases by 2%. The reduction in property purchase tax will be effective from April 2025. However, the withholding tax rates on property sellers will remain unchanged. "In a major and long-awaited development for the real estate and construction sector, the government has convinced the IMF to reduce the WHT rates for purchasers by 2%," confirmed top official sources while speaking to the publication. The development is to be taken in the context of Association of Builders and Developers of Pakistan (Abad) Chairman Hassan Bakhshi's complaint of real estate sector facing pressure in Sindh and Punjab due to developers and housing societies being subjected to double taxation during

property registration at the initial allotment stage. The taxation dispute has resulted in a deadlock in issuing numerous property registries across Punjab. The impasse stems from provincial tax authorities' interpretation of Section 236C of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, which they argue applies to housing societies and developers, creating uncertainty and delays in property transactions. As per Bakhshi, the Board of Revenue (BOR), Punjab, and the Punjab Land Revenue Authority (PLRA) have taken the stance that Section 236C of the Ordinance applies to allotment registries as well. As a result, housing societies were being required to pay withholding tax under this provision. "This has exposed the real estate sector to double taxation," he said. Furthermore, the Washington-based lender has also agreed to reduce the Federal Excise Duty (FED) on property purchasers, while the duty on sellers will remain intact, and has also approved the FBR's request to lower the tax collection target for March 2025 by Rs60 billion, considering the increased number of holidays due to the upcoming Eid ul Fitr.

Pak urges UNSC to initiate steps to end war in Gaza

Munir Akram denounces the Israeli blockade of humanitarian supplies to Gaza

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Pakistan has called on the U.N. Security Council to demand that Israel immediately halt its military attacks in Gaza and push for an "indefinite and continuous" ceasefire in the besieged enclave so as to restore humanitarian access. Speaking during a debate on the humanitarian situation in Gaza in the 15-member Council, Ambassador Munir Akram highlighted that over 90% of Gaza's population faces starvation due to Israel's blockade, with newborn babies are dying. "Civilian structures – hospitals, schools, and mosques – are being destroyed on the pretext of targeting combatants, and every principle of international law, including international humanitarian law, has been violated", Ambassador Akram said in his last statement to the Council as he completes his term on March 30. "But", he said,

"Israel has vowed to continue the slaughter irrespective of its consequences for Palestinian civilians. It is doing so with impunity – knowing well that the world, and this Council, will be deterred from taking any action to enforce its resolutions calling for a ceasefire and an end to the mounting atrocities." "Daily military raids, settler violence and illegal land annexations are part of a systematic effort to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian people in the West Bank," the Pakistani envoy said. "The Security Council, and the world community, cannot sit back and watch this ongoing ethnic cleansing," Ambassador Akram said. "A failure to halt this brutal war will unleash the worst instinct of powerful and predatory States," he said, urging the elected Council members to initiate measures to end "this cruel war". The 10 elected members on the Council are: Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia Denouncing the Israeli blockade of humanitarian supplies to Gaza, he underscored the need for providing full access to the UN and other humanitarian agencies and organizations to meet the needs of suffering people. "Starvation of civilians cannot be used as a weapon of war," the Pakistani envoy told delegates. He said that Gaza genocide is now being extended to the West Ban, with Israel's large-scale military operations, which began in Jenin and other areas of the northern West Bank on 21 January 2025, have expanded to Nur Shams, Tulkarm and Jenin Camps, causing the largest population displacement since 1967.

Mustafa Amir case: Court rejects accused's confession plea

Court expresses reservations about accused's mental state, directs to present him before ATC

COURT REPORTER

KARACHI: A local court on Saturday rejected the request by the prime accused in the Mustafa Amir murder case, Armaghan, to record his confessional statement citing concerns regarding his mental state. The court's decision to reject Armaghan's plea for a statement under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code, came after he reportedly vacillated between confessing and refusing to provide a statement in the court of judicial magistrate (South). During the hearing, the suspect initially agreed to confess to the crime. However, he subsequently retracted his statement, leading the court to question his mental stability. "The accused is not in a stable condition as to record his confession," the court stated in its order. According to the court's order, upon being presented to the court, Armaghan – who seemed to be "lazy and tired" – initially expressed that he wanted to confess his guilt and said that he had killed Mustafa due to a previous grudge. However, the accused claimed that Mustafa's murder was not the result of pre-planning and was rather "a sudden outburst". Later, when Armaghan was informed that whether or not he confessed, he would be remanded to judicial custody, he refused to confess and said that he was being "framed by Jewish mafia" and Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, the court order revealed. "Jewish mafia has been after me since long," claimed Armaghan in court, before

accusing Mustafa's mother of being a member of the 'Jewish lobby' as well. Subsequently, the suspect claimed once again that he did not kill Mustafa. He added that he had rather left Mustafa in the car and set the front side of the vehicle on fire, leaving Mustafa's fate up to God. After a pause, the accused once again urged that he was not "directly" involved in Mustafa's murder, claiming that his death at the time was written in his fate. Furthermore, the accused attacked the country's political parties, accusing them of being part of the 'Jewish lobby' as well, and that the 'Jewish mafia' wanted to sideline him as he was outspoken against them. Following the hearing, the court dismissed the investigating authorities' request and issued directives to have Armaghan presented before the anti-terrorism court. The latest development comes after the Anti-Violent Crime Cell (AVCC) of the Karachi Police arrested Kamran Asghar Qureshi – Armaghan's father – and a local court remanded him into police custody for two days in a case related to illegal weapons and drug possession. The whole saga unfolded after Armaghan opened fire at a team of the AVCC – a specialised unit of the Karachi police responsible for tackling cases related to murder and extortion – during a raid at his residence in Karachi's DHA on February 8. The deceased's body – found by police in a car near the Hub checkpoint on January 12 and buried by the Edhi Foundation on January 16 – was exhumed and later buried by his family following the identity confirmation in the initial DNA report.

Fatah urges Hamas to relinquish power

GAZA CITY: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement called on its Islamist rivals Hamas Saturday to relinquish power in order to safeguard the "existence" of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. "Hamas must show compassion for Gaza, its children, women and men," Fatah spokesman Monther Al-Hayek said in a message sent to AFP from Gaza. He called on Hamas to "step aside from governing and fully recognize that the battle ahead will lead to the end of Palestinians' existence" if it remains in power in Gaza. — Agencies

NHA announces toll tax hike again

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway Authority (NHA) has announced another toll tax increase on national highways and motorways. The new rates would take effect from April 1. An official notification has been released in this regard. The toll charges for cars will be Rs70, vans Rs150, and buses Rs250. Two- and three-axle trucks would give Rs300, while larger trucks will pay Rs550. Major changes have been implemented on several key motorways, including M1, M3, M4, M5, M14, and E35. The toll for cars on the M1 Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway has increased from Rs500 to Rs550. On the M3 Lahore-Abdul Hakeem Motorway, the fee has increased from Rs700 to Rs800. Likewise, car tolls on the M4 Pindi Bhattian-Faisalabad-Multan route have gone up from Rs950 to Rs1,050, while those on the M5 Multan-Sukkur Motorway have increased from Rs1,100 to Rs1,200. The M14 Dera Ismail Khan-Hakla Motorway now charges Rs650 for cars, up from Rs600. The toll for cars on the E35 Hasan Abdal-Havelian-Mansehra route has been increased from Rs250 to Rs300. For big machineries, toll rates across these motorways now range from Rs850 to Rs5,750.

Sudan's seized key buildings in Khartoum

FOREIGN DESK

CAIRO: Sudan's military on Saturday consolidated its grip on the capital, retaking more key government buildings a day after it gained control of the Republican Palace from a notorious paramilitary group. Brig. Gen. Nabil Abdullah, a spokesperson for the Sudanese military, said troops expelled the Rapid Support Forces from the headquarters of the National Intelligence Service and Corinthia Hotel in central Khartoum. The army also retook the headquarters of the Central Bank of Sudan and other government and educational buildings in the area, Abdullah said. Hundreds of RSF fighters were killed while trying to flee the capital city, he said. There was no immediate comment from the RSF. The gain came a day after the military retook the Republican Palace, the prewar seat of the government, in a major symbolic victory for the Sudanese military in its nearly two years of war against the RSF. A drone attack on the palace Friday believed to have been launched by the RSF killed two journalists and a driver with Sudanese state television, according to the ministry of information. Lt. Col. Hassan Ibrahim, from the military's media office, was also killed in the attack, the military said. Volker Perthes, former UN envoy for Sudan, the latest military advances will force the RSF to withdraw to its stronghold in the western region of Darfur.

