



Islamabad POST

Monday, April 20, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

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Iran: Trump has no mandate to dictate us on nuclear issue

Pezeshkian emphasized that Iran remains open to diplomacy but will not accept external pressure or ultimatums regarding its sovereign rights. He called on the international community to respect Iran's legitimate security concerns and right to self-defense

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN – In a strongly worded address, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated his country's commitment to peace while firmly defending Iran's nuclear rights. President Pezeshkian stated: "Iran wants peace in the region. We do not intend to attack any regional country. We seek stability and good neighborly relations with all nations in the Middle East." He directly addressed recent comments from U.S. President Donald Trump on Iran's nuclear program, saying: "Trump has no mandate to dictate to us on nuclear issues. Iran has an inalienable right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, as guaranteed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Our program is transparent and entirely peaceful." Pezeshkian emphasized that Iran remains open to diplomacy but will not accept external pressure or ultimatums regarding its sovereign rights. He called on the international community to respect Iran's legitimate security concerns and right to self-defense. The remarks come amid ongoing regional tensions and reported diplomatic exchanges involving the United States, Iran, and intermediaries. Iranian officials have repeatedly stressed that their nuclear activities are for energy and medical purposes only. This latest statement from President Pezeshkian aligns with previous messages he has delivered to both domestic audiences and the American public, urging de-escalation and mutual respect.

Iran's speaker says talks far from final deal

Strait of Hormuz to stay closed until port blockade lifts, says Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf

DNA

TEHRAN: The crucial Strait of Hormuz will not reopen until the United States lifts its naval blockade on Iranian ports, Tehran said, as a top official warned that a final peace deal remained "far" off. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, speaker of the Iranian parliament, said in a televised address that there has been "progress" in talks with Washington "but there are many gaps and some fundamental points remain." "We are still far from the final discussion," said Ghalibaf, one of Tehran's negotiators in the talks aimed at ending the war launched by Israel and the United States against the Islamic Republic.

A two-week ceasefire is set to end on Wednesday unless it is renewed. US President Donald Trump said meanwhile that "very good conversations" were going on with Iran but warned Tehran against trying to "blackmail" the United States. On Friday, Tehran had declared the Strait of Hormuz, which usually carries a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, open after a ceasefire was agreed in Israel's war with Iran's ally Hezbollah in Lebanon. This prompted

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Briefs

PM Shehbaz requests Iranian president to send team

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Holds Telephone Conversation with President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone call with His Excellency Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this evening.

During their warm and cordial conversation that lasted for around forty-five minutes, the two leaders engaged in detailed exchanges on the current regional situation. The Prime Minister thanked President Pezeshkian and the Iranian leadership for having sent their high-powered delegation, led by Honorable Speaker Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, for talks in Islamabad on 11-12 April, 2026.

The Prime Minister apprised the Iranian President about his own recent engagements with a number of world leaders, including the leadership of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Türkiye. He stated that these interactions were most helpful in building consensus in support of a sustained process of dialogue and diplomacy, aimed at bringing lasting peace to the war-ravaged region. The Prime Minister also thanked the Iranian leadership for their constructive conversations with Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir during the latter's visit to Tehran this week. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that, with the support of friends and partners, Pakistan would remain fully committed to its honest and sincere efforts to advance regional peace and security. He also conveyed his respectful regards for the Supreme Leader, His Eminence Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

JD Vance 'not coming'

US 'advance team' arrives in Islamabad

Authorities in Islamabad tighten security in federal capital, sealing off Red Zone to traffic

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: An advance team from the United States has arrived in Islamabad as Pakistan prepares to host the second round of talks between the Washington and Iran, sources said on Sunday. US Vice President JD Vance is not coming, said US President Donald Trump on Sunday. However, an American TV channel claimed that the vice president will also head to Islamabad. Authorities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi heightened security in the federal capital, sealing off the Red Zone to traffic as Pakistan prepares to host visiting foreign delegations. The measures follow reports about the second round of talks between delegations from the United States and Iran, reportedly scheduled next week. However, there has been no official confirmation from Pakistan, Iran, or the US so far regarding the schedule of the dialogue. In a statement, Islamabad police said that the Red Zone and Extended Red Zone will remain completely closed for all kinds of

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Iran says no date set for talks

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: No date has been set for the next round of negotiations between Iran and the United States, Iran's deputy foreign minister said on Saturday, adding that a framework of understanding must be agreed first. US President Donald Trump has told Reuters there would probably be more direct talks this weekend, though some diplomats said that was unlikely given the logistics of convening in Islamabad, where the talks are expected to take place. "We are now focusing on finalising the framework of understanding between the two sides. We don't want to enter into any negotiation or meeting which is doomed to fail and

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Blockade politics: Trump risks Iran peace deal

QAMAR BASHIR

AT a moment when the world stood on the brink of economic recovery and geopolitical de-escalation, the sudden reversal in the status of the Strait of Hormuz has once again plunged global stability into uncertainty. What appeared to be a fragile but promising pathway toward peace between the United States and Iran was disrupted in less than 24 hours—transforming hope into renewed confrontation and exposing the deep fragility of ongoing diplomacy. The timeline of events is critical to understanding the gravity of the situation. On Friday, April 17, 2026, Iran briefly reopened the Strait of Hormuz, allowing controlled commercial passage. This move followed a fragile ceasefire environment in the region and was widely interpreted as a goodwill gesture aimed at supporting ongoing mediation efforts, particularly those facilitated by Pakistan. The impact was immediate: global markets rebounded, oil prices stabilized, and investor confidence surged as trillions of dollars in previously lost market value began to recover. However, later on the same day—April 17,

2026—President Donald Trump made it unequivocally clear that the United States would not lift its naval blockade on Iranian ports and shipping, stating that the blockade would remain in full force until a comprehensive agreement was reached with Tehran. This declaration fundamentally altered the diplomatic landscape. What Iran had presented as a conciliatory step was met not with reciprocity, but with continued pressure. The consequences were swift and decisive. On Saturday, April 18, 2026, Iran reversed its position. Iranian military authorities announced that the Strait of Hormuz had returned to "strict management and control" under its armed forces. By later that day, Iran effectively reimposed restrictions on the waterway, warning that any unauthorized vessel would be targeted. In practical terms, the Strait was once again closed—this time under a far more militarized and confrontational posture. This rapid sequence—reopening on April 17, U.S. refusal to ease the blockade later that same day, and reclosure by Iran on April 18—illustrates how fragile and reactive the current diplomatic environment has become.

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ISLAMABAD: Security in the Capital beefed up ahead of possible US-Iran talks.

Many injured in US camping shooting

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: Police said "multiple" people were injured in a shooting at the University of Iowa early Sunday, after the midwestern US school issued an alert reporting gunshots in an area popular for nightlife. The United States, where firearms are readily available, has a long history of gun violence that kills thousands of people every year. "The Iowa City Police Department is investigating a shooting that occurred Sunday," Iowa City officials said in a statement, adding that "no arrests have been made." "At this time, multiple victims have been taken to area hospitals to be treated for wounds suffered in the shooting." Their conditions were unknown, authorities said.

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Ukraine slams oil sanction relief for Russia

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday condemned the easing of sanctions on Russian oil after the United States extended a waiver meant to soften surging energy prices driven by the Middle East war. "Every dollar paid for Russian oil is money for the war" and the billions of dollars involved are used for devastating strikes on Ukraine, Zelensky said in a post on X. He did not mention the United States, but President Donald Trump's administration on Friday issued a month-long sanctions waiver allowing the sale of Russian oil and petroleum products that are at sea. The action was intended to bring down soaring energy prices.

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Amidst high tensions

Türkiye optimistic about extension of US-Iran ceasefire

Speaking at the closing session of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum on Sunday, Fidan said both Washington and Tehran have demonstrated the will to continue negotiations and avoid a return to conflict

DNA

ANKARA: Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has expressed optimism that the current two-week ceasefire between the United States and Iran, set to expire on Wednesday, will be extended to allow more time for diplomatic talks. Speaking at the closing session of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum on Sunday, Fidan said both Washington and Tehran have demonstrated the will to continue negotiations and avoid a return to conflict. "No one wants to see a new war break out when the ceasefire expires next week. We hope the parties will extend the ceasefire. I hope there'll be an extension. I am optimistic," Fidan stated. He added that the United States and Iran are "sincere" about the ceasefire and understand the need to sustain it, though reaching a comprehensive final agreement within the current two-week window may not be realistic. Meanwhile, in a show of strength during the ceasefire period,

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'Israel to use full force even during ceasefire'

NEWS DESK

SA NUR: Defense Minister Israel Katz said Sunday that the military had been instructed to use "full force" in Lebanon – even during the ongoing ceasefire – should Israeli troops face any threat. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I have instructed the IDF to act with full force, both on the ground and from the air, including during the ceasefire, in order to protect our soldiers in Lebanon from any threat," Katz said at a function in the occupied West Bank. He said that the military had also been ordered "to remove the houses in the (frontline) villages near the border that served in every respect as

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75 UK MPs back motion demands curbs on Israel

Among those who have supported the motion are former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, SNP foreign affairs spokesman Brendan O'Hara, and the only Palestinian origin member of Parliament, Layla Moran

NEWS DESK

LONDON: At least 75 British MPs have signed a parliamentary motion urging sanctions on Israel war crimes in Gaza,

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Punjab's first sky glass project approved

Water supply schemes in Dhar Jawa and Donga Gali have been completed. The chief minister also granted in-principle approval for establishing Punjab's first Facility Management Unit, which will oversee construction, maintenance and management of Punjab Houses and other buildings across the province

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has granted in-principle approval for the province's first Sky Glass Bridge project in Kotli Sattian, aimed at promoting tourism. The decision was taken during a special meeting jointly presided over by PML-N President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, where progress on the Murree Protection and Rehabilitation Plan was reviewed. The meeting also decided to engage international experts to address the issue of landsliding in Murree. The chief minister directed immediate measures to counter the mid-flow downhill effect and ordered relief and rehabilitation efforts for those affected by landslides in Chatta Mor, Darya Gali, Bansera Gali, Namli, Jhika Gali and adjoining areas. Approval was granted for the establishment of three new hospitality zones in Murree's suburban areas — Shawala, Sozo and brewery — where five-star standard hotels will be developed in collaboration with the private sector. It was further de-

cidated to form a team of experts for the Murree rehabilitation project, while the chief minister directed that debris from structures demolished during anti-encroachment operations be removed immediately. The meeting was informed that Jhika Gali Road and Reach Bil Road would be widened by 10 feet each. The chief minister set a one-month deadline to initiate construction work on the Murree Glass Train project. A detailed briefing was given on three new parks to be established in Murree, including Angoori Road Park, MIT Park and Ariari Park Kotli Sattian. Participants were told that a zoological garden, zoological garden eco-zone, bridge crossing and a state-of-the-art conference room would be developed at Bansera Gali. Facilities for wildlife conservation, including a bear house, tiger house and bird aviary, are also planned. Murree's first glamping pod village will be established at Chewra Hill, designed as a state-of-the-art tourist attraction. Its management will be outsourced

to the private sector, as approved by the chief minister. The meeting also approved the Paragliding Club project in Chewra, and reviewed progress on the Kotli Sattian chairlift project, Punjab House, Forest Rest House and other initiatives. The chief minister directed that the feasibility report for a bulk water supply scheme from the River Jhelum for Murree district be completed by April 30. According to a briefing by DC Zaheer Shirazi, rainwater harvesting systems have been successfully implemented in 187,600 homes across Murree and Kotli Sattian, providing relief to women and children from fetching water from distant locations. Water supply schemes in Dhar Jawa and Donga Gali have been completed. The chief minister also granted in-principle approval for establishing Punjab's first Facility Management Unit, which will oversee construction, maintenance and management of Punjab Houses and other buildings across the province.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: People are busy in buying watermelons at Sunday weekly bazaar, in the Federal Capital.

Mian Nisar completes tenure as SAARC VP

LAHORE: Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Faheem ur Rehman Saigol here Sunday paid rich tribute to Mian Anjum Nisar on successful completion his tenure as Vice President of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SAARC-CCI). He stated that during his tenure as Vice President, he played a significant role in promoting trade cooperation, coordination, and protecting the interests of the business community across the SAARC region. Under his leadership, not only did the organization become more active, but Pakistan's positive image was also strengthened, he added. He further said that Mian Anjum Nisar made strong efforts to enhance regional business connections, promote policy dialogue, and effectively raise the voice of the private sector, which were highly commendable. Meanwhile, circles associated with FPCCI and the Businessmen Panel (BMP) also termed his achievements a matter of pride for Pakistan's business community, adding that under his leadership, the country's stature has risen globally and it marks another major addition to BMP's accomplishments. It is to mention that on completion of Mian Anjum Nisar as SAARC Chamber's VP, all office bearers of the organization have been reshuffled. Under the new setup, the SAARC Chamber's President will be from Nepal, while Pakistan's Atif Ikram Sheikh has been elected as Vice President.—APP

World community now eyeing China: Malik

LAHORE: SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former president Ifkhar Ali Malik said on Sunday that China had managed to attract the global attention as the world community was now looking towards it, while Pakistan was emerging among top five countries most friendly towards prevailing international scenario. In a media statement here, Malik said that new world order spearheaded by China was now backed by the world's majority, adding that international surveys suggest that China's global approval rating rose to 36 per cent last year overtaking the US with 31 per cent.—APP

Kirmani visits Sadiqabad, RY Khan

MULTAN: Minister for Agriculture & Livestock Punjab, Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani, visited Sadiqabad and Rahim Yar Khan on Sunday. On this occasion, a compartment for the eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease was formally inaugurated at Dawood Dairy Farm in Sadiqabad. Later, a detailed briefing was given regarding ongoing activities of Agriculture and Livestock Departments in Bahawalpur Division, as well as the wheat procurement. The meeting was attended by Chaudhry Irtaza Dawood, Director Generals Agriculture Punjab Chaudhry Abdul Hameed and Naveed Asmat Kahloon, Director General Livestock Dr Nadeem Badar, Assistant Commissioner Sadiqabad Imran Rasool, Director Agriculture Extension Muhammad Jameel Ghouri, and officers from the Agriculture, Livestock, and Food Departments. During the briefing, it was informed that out of 900,000 Kisan Card holders in Punjab, 127,000 farmers belong to Bahawalpur Division. It was

further shared that out of 233 wheat procurement centers established across the province, 34 centers were operational in Bahawalpur Division, where registration of 9,000 farmers had been completed regarding wheat procurement in the division. Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani stated that under directions of the Chief Minister Punjab, free of cost bags for wheat procurement worth Rs 6 billion were being provided to farmers. He further added that out of 8 compartments established across the province for the eradication of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, 3 have been set up in Rahim Yar Khan. He further said that all possible facilities were being provided to the private sector to increase milk and meat production and to promote value addition to enhance export volume. Furthermore, according to the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, special package was also being offered to the private sector for value addition of mango, kinnow, and potatoes.—APP

Raheema's husband used her in Naukundri suicide attack

QUETTA: Senior officials of the Balochistan Home Department have revealed that recent incidents of terrorism and cross-border infiltration in the province are linked to networks operating from Afghanistan. Speaking at a press conference in Quetta, Additional Chief Secretary Home Hamza Shafiqat, DIG CTD Aitzaz Goraya, and Special Assistant to the Home Department Babar Yousafzai said that terrorists infiltrate from Afghanistan, carry out attacks in Pakistan, and then escape back across the border. Officials warned that extremist groups are now exploiting women and children as human shields, a tactic described as both inhumane and contrary to Baloch traditions. Babar Yousafzai cited a recent case in which a woman was prepared for a suicide attack by her own husband, who took her to Afghanistan for training. He stressed that hostile elements are exploiting sacred family relationships for their objectives, urging parents to thoroughly investigate family backgrounds before marriages and to remain vigilant against suspicious individuals in their surroundings. Authorities also highlighted that anti-state actors abroad are attempting to mislead youth through social media propaganda. Citizens were urged not to fall prey to such narratives and to cooperate with security institutions in defeating these conspiracies. During the press conference, officials reiterated a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, vowing that every plot to destabilize Pakistan would be foiled. They emphasized that terrorist groups have no connection to any religion and are merely exploiting vulnerable communities to advance their agenda. In a shocking disclosure, Rahima Bibi, the wife of a facilitator involved in the Naukundri suicide attack, revealed in her statement that her husband had used her mobile phone for terrorist purposes, hosted the female suicide bomber at their home.—APP

UoP's staff enter 3rd week of strike over unpaid salaries

PESHAWAR: The pen-down and work boycott strike by Class-III, Class-IV and sanitation employees of the University of Peshawar (UoP) has entered its third week, as workers continue to protest non-payment of salaries and pensions, raising serious concerns over administrative priorities and financial management. According to a press release issued by employees' representative associations on Sunday, low-grade staff have yet to receive full salaries for the month of March, while pensioners have reportedly not been paid any dues so far. The prolonged delay has triggered growing frustration among workers, many of whom rely on timely payments to meet basic living expenses. In response to the situation, employee bodies have decided to continue the strike into the third week and announced a complete lockout, warning of further escalation if their demands

remain unmet. The associations termed it "unjust and discriminatory" that, instead of clearing dues of low-income staff and pensioners, the administration has reportedly released partial salaries to employees in Grade-18 and above. The move has intensified resentment among the protesting workers, who see it as a clear sign of unequal treatment. The protesting employees have strongly condemned the administration's actions and demanded immediate payment of all pending salaries and pensions. They have also called for the removal of the current treasurer under Section 17-A of the University Act, alleging biased decision-making that, they claim, is adversely affecting lower-grade employees. The situation has begun to impact routine operations, with fears that continued disruption may further affect institutional functioning if the standoff is not resolved promptly.—APP

Pakistan playing constructive role in promoting dialogue: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said Pakistan has consistently played a constructive role in promoting dialogue and bringing parties closer to the negotiating table, reaffirming that diplomacy and engagement remain vital for achieving lasting peace. On the sidelines of the 152nd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Istanbul, he met with Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, Numan Kurtulmus. At the beginning of the meeting, Ayaz Sadiq warmly congratulated the Turkish Speaker, as well as the government and people of Türkiye, on successfully hosting the 152nd IPU General Assembly. He praised Türkiye's hospitality and appreciated the active participation of parliamentarians from around the world, describing it as a reflection of parliamentary diplomacy and international cooperation. Ayaz Sadiq said such global parliamentary forums offer an important opportunity for elected representatives to exchange views, share experiences, and discuss common challenges, while promoting democratic values, mutual understanding, and dialogue for global peace and development. During the meeting, both leaders discussed bilateral ties, regional developments, and matters of mutual interest, reaffirming the deep-rooted brotherly relations between Pakistan and Türkiye. Ayaz Sadiq stressed that war and conflict could not resolve disputes and emphasized that sustainable solutions could only be achieved through meaningful and continued dialogue. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to peace, stability, and mutual respect, while underscoring its continued support for tolerance, diplomacy, and constructive global engagement, alongside strong relations with brotherly Islamic countries. On the occasion, the Turkish Speaker appreciated Pakistan's positive role in promoting regional peace and acknowledged its timely efforts in reducing tensions and averting wider crises. He particularly praised the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, and Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir. Both Speakers agreed to further strengthen parliamentary diplomacy through greater institutional cooperation, exchange of delegations, and closer parliamentary engagement, reaffirming their shared commitment to regional peace and stability. Ayaz Sadiq thanked the Turkish leadership for its appreciation and reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to continue playing a positive role for peace and stability at both regional and global levels.—DNA

Hujjaj urged for strict compliance with Saudi laws

LAHORE: Pakistan Ulema Council, Dar-ul-Ifta Pakistan and the International Tazem-e-Haramain Sharifain Council have issued a comprehensive code of conduct for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, urging strict adherence to Saudi regulations and preservation of the sanctity of the holy sites. The guidelines were announced at a press conference in Lahore led by Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council and Secretary General of the International Tazem-e-Haramain Sharifain Council, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, along with prominent scholars and religious leaders. Addressing the gathering, Ashrafi emphasized that pilgrims must respect the sanctity of the Two Holy Mosques and fully comply with the rules and regulations issued by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. He said performing Hajj without a valid permit is both religiously impermissible and illegal, urging those residing in Saudi Arabia to avoid undertaking Hajj without official authorization. The scholars advised pilgrims to acquire complete knowledge of Hajj and Umrah rituals before departure to avoid difficulties during the holy journey. They stressed that Saudi Arabia continuously strives to facilitate

pilgrims, and it is therefore obligatory for visitors to cooperate with authorities and follow the prescribed code of conduct. Pilgrims were also urged to avoid engaging in political activities during Hajj and not to become part of any such efforts, warning that such actions could disrupt the peaceful environment of the holy sites. The code further cautioned against booking travel

through unregistered or unauthorized Hajj and Umrah operators, including informal online groups. Highlighting the spiritual essence of Hajj and Umrah, the scholars advised pilgrims to purify their intentions solely for the sake of Allah Almighty and avoid actions driven by showmanship, including unnecessary photography and videography during acts of worship.—DNA



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

APRIL

- April 04/Senegal National Day
- April 07/W. H. O. World Health Day
- April 12/Somalia Armed Forces Day
- April 15/DPR Korea The Day of the Sun
- April 16/Denmark National Day
- April 17/Iran Army Day
- April 17/Syria Independence Day
- April 18/Zimbabwe Independence Day
- April 24/Holy See Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate
- April 25/DPR Korea Armed Forces Day
- April 26/Tanzania National Day
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Water Tank

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Azerbaijani envoy opens investment exhibition

He emphasized the strategic location of Azerbaijan as a gateway to the Caucasus, Central Asia, and European markets



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, Khazar Farhadov, officially inaugurated an investment exhibition in the federal capital on Saturday, highlighting the growing economic partnership between the two brotherly nations.

The event, held at a local hotel in Islamabad, drew a large number of Pakistani businessmen, investors, and government officials. During the inauguration, the ambassador cut the ceremonial ribbon and toured the exhibition stalls, which

showcased key sectors of Azerbaijan's economy, including energy, agriculture, tourism, logistics, and information technology. Interacting closely with visitors, Ambassador Farhadov briefed them in detail about the vast business potential

and investment-friendly environment that Azerbaijan offers to Pakistani investors. He emphasized the strategic location of Azerbaijan as a gateway to the Caucasus, Central Asia, and European markets.—DNA

Rana reviews Rawalpindi performance

RAWALPINDI: Provincial Minister for Education Rana Sikandar Hayat chaired a meeting at PEC-TA Islamabad to review the educational performance of districts in Rawalpindi division. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of District Education Authorities from all districts of the division presented detailed briefings on academic performance and ongoing initiatives. District Education Authority (DEA) Rawalpindi chief, Muhammad Yaseen Khan Baloch highlighted progress on missing facilities, Annual Development Programme (ADP) schemes and enrolment in the district. He also briefed the meeting on steps being taken under the district education authority to improve education standards. The provincial minister appreciated the efforts of the Rawalpindi team and commended the initiatives undertaken under the leadership of Muhammad Yaseen Khan Baloch. He reiterated the government's commitment to accelerate reforms and development projects in the education sector to ensure provision of quality education to every child. The meeting concluded with a consensus on adopting a coordinated strategy for further improvement in the education sector across the division.—APP

Arid University closed till April 26

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University (PMAS-AAUR), has announced the closure of its main campus and affiliated institutes within the territorial jurisdiction of Rawalpindi from April 18 to April 26 due to security arrangements. According to an official notification issued by the university administration, the decision was taken by the competent authority in consultation with deans and directors to ensure necessary security measures. The notification stated that academic activities will continue through online mode during the closure period as per the prescribed timetable. It further said that, following directions of the local administration, all students residing in university hostels have been directed to vacate the hostels immediately and ensure strict compliance with the instructions. All university employees, including officers, teachers and staff, will perform their duties from home during the period, while essential services staff will remain available as per requirement, the notification added.

ICT admin reject juice link after probe of 3 deaths

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has denied the social media claims that 3 people were died in Islamabad after drinking juice. Spokesman of ICT administration told on Sunday that the district administration took notice of the reports and reviewed the case. Initial findings show that the deaths were not caused by juice consumption, according to officials, he said. A post circulating on social media alleged that three individuals were died after consuming juice in Islamabad. The claim drew attention and raised concern among the residents. The district administration responded and began verification of the information. According to a spokesman, hospital reports

do not support the claim that the deaths occurred due to drinking juice. The medical findings did not link the cause of death to any beverage. Officials also stated that the affected family could not confirm any details about buying juice before the incident. The family did not provide information about any shop or location from where juice was purchased. The Islamabad Food Authority carried out inspections in the area where the family lives. Teams checked all juice corners operating in the locality. In addition, nearby grocery stores and supermarkets were also inspected to trace any possible source. During the inspection process, no harmful or unsafe juice was found in the area. The teams reported that all sampled

products were found within safety standards. No evidence of contamination or harmful substances was identified. Further investigation by the district administration also did not find any proof that the deaths were linked to juice consumption. Officials stated that the inquiry is based on available medical reports, field inspections, and statements from the affected family. The administration has urged citizens to avoid sharing unverified information on social media. Officials said that spreading unconfirmed claims can create confusion and concern among the public. Authorities advised people to rely on verified sources for information and to report any suspicious activity to relevant departments.—DNA

Hassle-free pilgrimage under Route to Makkah earns praise

ISLAMABAD: As the annual pilgrimage movement gathers pace, pilgrims from across the country have embarked on their journey to Saudi Arabia under the Route to Makkah initiative, commending the efficient arrangements and warm reception while thanking the governments of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for their facilitation and support. Compared to previous years, this year's immigration facilities under the Route to Makkah project have been significantly upgraded, ensuring faster, smoother, and more dignified processing for pilgrims, including at Lahore's additional airport facility, said a report with PTV news channel. Departing citizens, overwhelmed with gratitude and emotion, thanked the government for these enhanced arrangements, describing their journey as seamless and filled with heartfelt ease and spiritual comfort. Pilgrims from Faisalabad, Sialkot, Lahore and Multan shared their experiences, praising the authorities for exceptional arrangements made "beyond capacity," saying the government had organized facilities well beyond expectations to accommodate the large number of travelers with ease and efficiency. Another woman pilgrim noted that this year, there was no burden or difficulty on travelers, as immigration had been made extremely simple and stress-free, allowing pilgrims to complete their procedures smoothly without long delays or complications. A pilgrim further appreciated that a significant amount of time was saved during the immigration process, highlighting that the improved system ensured swift processing and reduced waiting times, making the overall journey far more comfortable than before. Others commended the best-in-class facilities, warm attitude of staff, and welcoming environment, also appreciating the gestures of hospitality, including gifts provided to pilgrims, calling the entire experience respectful, organized, and truly memorable.—DNA

ICT Police detain 85 suspects

The official urged citizens to cooperate with police during checking and report any suspicious activity immediately

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Saturday conducted large-scale joint grand combing operations across the federal capital, detaining 85 suspicious individuals and shifting 47 motorcycles for further verification during intensified security measures. An official told APP on Sunday that the operations were carried out in the jurisdictions of Shalimar, Khanna, Secretariat, Korral, Golra, Bhara Kahu, Noon, Lohi Bher and Ramna police stations. He said the operations were conducted under the supervision of SSP Operations Qazi Ali Raza and

zonal SPs. The official said lady police officials also participated in the operations to ensure effective checking. During the operations, a total of 1,164 individuals and 679 households were checked. He said 113 shops and 63 hotels were also inspected during the search. The official said 426 motorcycles and 164 vehicles were examined during the drive. He said suspects and motorcycles were shifted to relevant police stations for further verification. The official said a suspect involved in illegal possession of weapons was also arrested and one pistol along with ammunition was recovered. He said

drug peddlers were also apprehended and ice (crystal meth) was recovered from their possession. The official said special checking points had been established at entry and exit routes of the city to ensure effective monitoring. All patrolling units and special squads were actively performing duties across the city, he added. Senior officers remained present in the field, reviewing security arrangements and ensuring implementation of measures. The official urged citizens to cooperate with police during checking and report any suspicious activity immediately.—APP

Efforts afoot to control fuel prices: Minister

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum, Ali Pervaiz Malik, on Sunday thanked the Prime Minister for backing the petroleum sector, stating that efforts were in progress to stabilize the prices and maintain balance, asserting that Pakistan's situation was relatively stronger than many countries under global war-related economic stress. While speaking to a local media channel, Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik said that the government was prioritizing the common man as efforts continue to ease fuel price pressure. He stated that steps were being taken to ensure stability in the petroleum sector while keeping public relief at the center of policy decisions. He added that ongoing measures aimed to balance economic challenges with public needs

and expressed confidence that continued reforms and support from the leadership would help maintain price stability and provide relief to consumers across the country. He further stated that the country's civil and military leadership, including the Field Marshal, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, merit recognition for their sustained diplomatic engagements and efforts to strengthen Pakistan's international standing. He added that such coordinated efforts were helping strengthen Pakistan's position and contribute to overall national stability. Ali further stated that Pakistan's mediator role in the Middle East crisis had been widely appreciated across the world, adding that the entire nation was taking pride in the country's diplomatic

efforts. He noted that both the United States and Iran had shown some flexibility in their positions, which was a positive development. The minister added that, however, both sides still needed to move towards a comprehensive and lasting peace agreement. Expressing optimism, he hoped that the matter would be resolved soon through continued dialogue and diplomatic engagement. He pointed out that countries like India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka had gone through tough economic challenges amid global and regional pressures, whereas Pakistan was currently maintaining a relatively stable position. He added that continued efforts and upcoming policy initiatives were expected to bring more relief to the public and improve overall economic conditions.—APP

Pakistan emerging as influential UN-style mediator: Kamal

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Health and MQM-P leader Syed Mustafa Kamal on Sunday said Pakistan is lucky to have strong leadership in the form of Field Marshal Asim Munir, stating that the country is playing an active mediator role in world affairs and standing as a bridge of peace among nations. In an exclusive conversation with a local media channel, Mustafa Kamal said that after Marka-e-Haq, Pakistan has been elevated from earth to the skies in terms of global recognition and diplomatic standing, calling it a matter of great fortune for the country to have a courageous leader like Field Marshal Asim Munir at its helm. He further appreciated the Prime Minister's strategy and policies, stating that they have contributed significantly to strengthening national stability and improving Pakistan's international image. He said that such coordinated leadership has helped the country move in a positive direction despite global challenges. He added that Pakistan has earned widespread appreciation on the world stage and has effectively played a UN-like mediator role among nations, promoting peace, dialogue and cooperation. He noted that the country's diplomatic efforts are being acknowledged internationally as constructive and impactful. Mustafa Kamal further said that Pakistan is the only undisputed country capable of playing a balanced role on the global stage, maintaining strong and friendly relations with China, the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. He added that this unique diplomatic position reflects Pakistan's credibility and growing trust among nations, setting an example for others. He said this achievement is a matter of national pride and a blessing from Allah, emphasizing that gratitude should be expressed through prayers and prostration before the Almighty. He noted that the confidence and trust of nations in Pakistan's role is a significant honor, for which the entire nation must remain thankful. Responding to a query regarding President of the United States Donald J. Trump visit to Pakistan, the minister said it would be a great honour for the country, adding that such a statement is significant and reflects positive developments. He further remarked that during the same period, India and Israel faced the most disappointing outcomes, stating that both countries experienced setbacks on multiple fronts, which reflected negatively on their positions. To another query regarding polio, he said that the second vaccination drive of the year has been completed successfully, reflecting strong coordination and field efforts. He added that continued public cooperation is essential to ensure complete eradication of the disease. He concluded by urging parents and communities to fully support the remaining phases of the campaign, stressing that only collective responsibility and sustained participation can help achieve a polio-free Pakistan.—DNA

Briefs

Mujeeb Shah promises seamless hajj

ISLAMABAD :In-charge Hajj Operations Sialkot, Mujeeb Akbar Shah Sunday voiced strong confidence in the arrangements for intending pilgrims, highlighting that the government has put in place comprehensive and well-organized facilities, including comfortable accommodation, efficient transportation and quality medical services to ensure a smooth and safe Hajj journey. While speaking to PTV News, Mujeeb Akbar Shah said that the first Hajj flights have already departed, marking the beginning of this year's Hajj operation, adding, all arrangements for intending pilgrims had been completed in line with the directives of the government and the ministry. He stated that the immigration process has been made more efficient and pilgrim-friendly, with streamlined procedures to reduce waiting time and ensure a smooth departure experience. He further shared that well-planned routes to Makkah have been arranged, supported by organized transportation and strong logistical coordination to facilitate pilgrims throughout their journey. He also advised pilgrims to follow official guidelines, remain patient and cooperate with staff to avoid any inconvenience. He urged them to take care of their health and keep their travel documents secure. Mujeeb Akbar Shah expressed confidence that these arrangements would help ensure a safe, comfortable and spiritually rewarding Hajj experience for all pilgrims.—APP

Poet, journalist Abeda's 14th death anniversary

ISLAMABAD: The 14th death anniversary of author, activist and journalist Abeda Iqbal will be marked on Monday, April 20, with literary and social circles reflecting on her contributions to journalism, poetry, and socially engaged writing. Abeda Iqbal breathed her last on April 20, 2012, and her untimely death cut short her career, which was at its high point. She was widely known for her activism expressed through poetry and a simple, reader-friendly diction that made her work accessible to a broad audience. She emerged as a strong voice against injustice and violence against women, using her writings to highlight social realities and amplify marginalized perspectives. Abeda Iqbal established herself as a prominent columnist and gained recognition through her poetic work Aasman, along with her widely read columns Aaina and Chehre, which were published simultaneously in different national dailies. Her journalistic contributions also appeared in several newspapers across Pakistan, where she consistently addressed social and political themes. Her literary repertoire further included translations of works by Saadat Hasan Manto and Kahlil Gibran. Her feature series Date-line Dhaka, documenting the events surrounding the 1971 fall of Dhaka, was published in leading newspapers and drew attention from academics, scholars, and writers for its historical depth and narrative value.—DNA

Passing out parade of cadets of 153rd PMA long course

Commandant's Canes were awarded to Course Under Officer Ali Bin Waqar of 72nd Integrated Course and Course Under Officer Walia Zeb of 27th Lady Cadet Course.

DNA

RAWALPINDI :Passing Out parade of cadets of 153rd PMA Long Course 38th Technical Graduate Course, 72nd Integrated Course, 15th Mujahid Course and 27th Lady Cadet Course was held at Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Kakul today. Cadets from several friendly countries including Iraq, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Palestine, Qatar and Sri Lanka were also graduated from Pakistan Military Academy. Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, NI (M), HJ graced the occasion as Chief Guest and Reviewing Officer of the parade. Chief of Air Staff reviewed the parade and gave awards to distinguished cadets. The coveted Sword of Honour was awarded to Academy Senior Under Officer Bilal Nasim of 153rd PMA Long Course; the President's Gold Medal to Battalion Senior Under Officer Muhammad Saad Musa of 153rd PMA Long Course and Chief of Defence Forces Overseas Gold Medal to Friendly Country Senior Under Officer Pabin Kunwar from Nepal of 153rd PMA Long Course. Marksman Medal was awarded to Gentleman Cadet Masood Ur Rehman of 153rd PMA Long Course. Chief of Army Staff Cane was awarded to Course Under Officer Haider Bin Abid of 38th Technical Graduate Course. In 15th Mujahid Course Chief of Army Staff Cane was awarded to Sergeant Pir Muhammad Abdullah Shah. Commandant's Canes were awarded to Course Under Officer Ali Bin Waqar of 72nd Integrated Course and Course Under Officer Walia Zeb of 27th Lady Cadet Course.



ICCI president welcomes FBR's revised property valuation

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has welcomed the recent initiative of the Federal Board of Revenue to revise the valuation of residential and commercial immovable properties in Islamabad, terming it a positive and business-friendly step. In a statement issued here, he said that the notification S.R.O. 644(I)/2026 dated April 16, 2026 reflects a pragmatic approach by the FBR to rationalize property valuations in line with prevailing market conditions. He noted that the downward adjustment in property values would help reduce the tax burden on buyers and sellers, thereby encouraging documented transactions in the real estate sector. Sardar Tahir Mehmood further highlighted that the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry had already taken up the issue of inflated property valuations with the higher authorities of the Federal Board of Revenue, urging them to remove anomalies and bring valuations closer to ground realities. He expressed satisfaction that the concerns of the business community have been duly acknowledged.—APP

China-Made Bus Service expands mobility

ISLAMABAD: The Sindh provincial government launched a new route for the People's Bus Service between Shikarpur and Sukkur, marking a significant step in the expansion of its modern transport network. The service, featuring Chinese-built buses, was inaugurated by Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon as a "gift for the people" of the region, Gwadar Pro reported. At the inauguration ceremony, Memon emphasized that the initiative reflects the strengthening Pakistan-China cooperation in the field of urban mobility and public services. He highlighted that the fleet, which is manufactured using Chinese technology, offers safe, air-conditioned, and affordable transportation options for residents. "This service belongs to the people, and it is their responsibility to protect it," Memon stated, urging citizens to ensure its proper usage and upkeep. The newly launched route, spanning approximately 33 kilometers via Lakhi Gulam Shah, is part of Sindh's broader efforts to modernize its transport infrastructure through international collaborations, particularly with China. This service aims to address long-standing transportation challenges in the region by offering environmentally efficient and comfortable commuting alternatives. In an effort to make the service more accessible, the Sindh government will subsidize 50 percent of the fare, benefiting low- and middle-income commuters while promoting sustainable urban mobility practices inspired by Chinese transport models. Memon also highlighted that under the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), headed by Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, there is a continued commitment to expanding such services across Sindh. He further mentioned that the provincial government is implementing additional measures, such as subsidies for motorcyclists, financial assistance for farmers, and the distribution of free solar panels, alongside reforms in the transport sector. The expansion of the People's Bus Service is seen as part of a broader initiative to integrate Chinese transportation solutions into Pakistan's urban development, aiming to enhance connectivity and boost economic activity, particularly in secondary cities.—DNA

RCCI delegation briefs Jam on U.S visit

ISLAMABAD: President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) Usman Shaukat and Senior Vice President Khalid Farooq Kazi called on Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan to present a detailed post-visit briefing on their recent visit to the United States, focusing on outcomes and future avenues for bilateral trade and investment. Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan appreciated the RCCI delegation's proactive engagement with U.S. stakeholders and termed such initiatives as vital for strengthening Pakistan's economic diplomacy, said a release issued here on Saturday. He emphasized that chambers play a key role in identifying business opportunities, building international linkages, and supporting the government's efforts to enhance exports and attract investment. The Minister reiterated that Pakistan is committed to promoting structured, business-focused cooperation with the United States to achieve sustainable trade growth and industrial development. During the meeting, the RCCI delegation shared key outcomes of its engagements with U.S. lawmakers, business leaders, chambers of commerce, and economic development institutions. The delegation informed the Minister that the visit generated strong interest in expanding Pakistan-U.S. commercial ties, particularly in sectors such as steel, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, minerals, mining, and technology. The delegation briefed the Minister on its interactions in Capitol Hill, where discussions centered on strengthening bilateral trade relations and improving Pakistan's investment outlook. It was noted that American stakeholders expressed interest in deeper economic engagement and highlighted the importance of policy consistency and investor facilitation.—DNA

China-backed Sahiwal power plant drives Pak's energy security

As Pakistan continues to face rising energy demands, the Sahiwal plant is increasingly viewed as a model for future infrastructure development under CPEC, highlighting the strategic importance of China's role in the country's long-term growth trajectory

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The China-supported Sahiwal Coal-Fired Power Plant has emerged as a cornerstone of Pakistan's energy and economic landscape, combining advanced Chinese technology with significant socio-economic benefits, according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro on Sunday. Operated by Huaneng Shandong Ruyi, the 1,320-megawatt facility is among the most prominent projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework, playing a vital role in addressing Pakistan's power shortages. Since becoming operational in 2017, the plant has contributed substantially to the national grid while also serving as a major source of government revenue through taxes, duties, and related economic activity. Beyond electricity generation, the project has had a transformative impact on the local economy. It has created employment opportunities, supported local businesses, and

established a Technical Training Center to equip Pakistani youth with modern industrial skills. This focus on human capital development has helped retain skilled workers in the region, reversing migration trends and fostering sustainable community growth. On the technological front, the plant incorporates advanced Chinese supercritical technology, enabling higher efficiency and reduced coal consumption. Environmental safeguards, including Electrostatic Precipitators and Flue Gas Desulfurization systems, ensure emissions remain within acceptable limits. Experts say the project exemplifies how China-Pakistan cooperation can deliver multi-dimensional benefits, enhancing energy security, promoting economic stability, and supporting environmental management. As Pakistan continues to face rising energy demands, the Sahiwal plant is increasingly viewed as a model for future infrastructure development under CPEC, highlighting the strategic importance of China's role in the country's long-term growth trajectory.

When the Gulf trembles, Pakistan's economy feels the shock first

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has issued a new Policy Viewpoint by Dr. Ahmad Fraz, Associate Professor of Finance, titled "From the Strait of Hormuz to the PSX: What the Iran-Israel War Reveals About Pakistan's Economic Vulnerability." The study highlights that the Iran-Israel conflict is not a distant geopolitical development for Pakistan. It is already being reflected in the country's economy through oil markets, inflation expectations, and movements in the Pakistan Stock Exchange. The viewpoint argues that Pakistan's exposure extends beyond rising oil prices and is rooted in structural vulnerabilities. As an oil-importing economy closely linked to Gulf energy routes, Pakistan remains highly sensitive to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, where even limited instability can

translate into higher costs, external pressures, and financial uncertainty. The study draws on recent market developments to substantiate its argument. The Pakistan Stock Exchange did not experience a uniform decline, nor did it remain stable. Instead, it underwent correction, heightened volatility, and an uneven recovery. This pattern suggests that investors interpreted the conflict not as a temporary disturbance, but as a broader macro-financial shock with implications for inflation, business costs, investor confidence, and overall economic stability. Sectoral responses were also differentiated: while oil and gas-related segments demonstrated some resilience, the banking sector remained under sustained pressure, reflecting underlying domestic vulnerabilities. According to the viewpoint, the stock market functioned as an early indicator of emerging economic stress. Financial markets adjusted rapidly as they incorporate expectations about future

risks rather than current conditions. As concerns related to oil supply, inflation, exchange-rate pressures, and financing conditions intensified, market valuations responded ahead of their reflection in official economic indicators. The transmission of the shock occurred through multiple interconnected channels, including supply disruptions, increased freight and insurance costs, imported inflation, rising operational expenses, and a broader repricing of financial risk. A key finding of the study is the divergence across sectors. Banking stocks emerged as a clear indicator of domestic stress, reflecting concerns related to inflation, credit quality, and tightening financial conditions. While the oil and gas sector exhibited relative resilience, it did not provide complete insulation, as broader country risk and structural constraints continued to influence performance. The analysis further emphasizes that the risks extend beyond market volatility.

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Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 06 Issue: 162

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

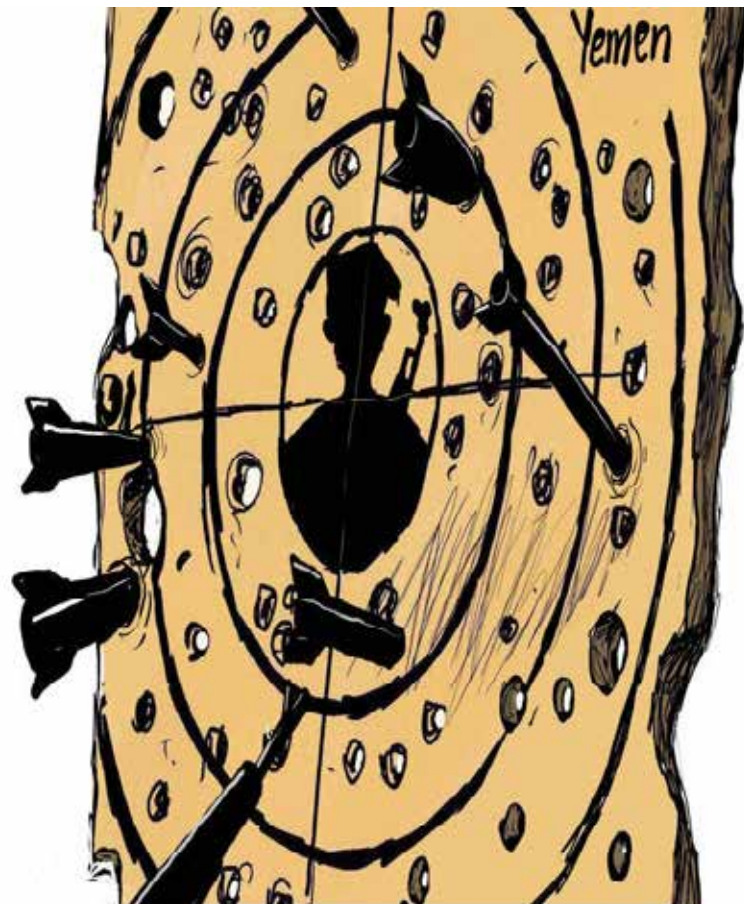
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The Commander Who Stepped into the Flames

MUHAMMAD MOHSIN IQBAL

MAN holds nothing dearer in this world than his own life. For its safety he will pass through every danger and endure every trial, knowing that life is granted by Allah but once, a sacred trust to be guarded with all the vigilance a mortal heart can muster. Yet there exist a few lion-hearted souls who, setting aside all thought of self-preservation, step forward not merely for their own sake or even their homeland, but for the sake of their neighbours and the wider brotherhood of faith. Placing their lives upon their palms as if they were mere pebbles, they accomplish what only those with unwavering trust in Allah and the unyielding heart of a lion can achieve. Among such men stands Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, a commander whose name has come to echo across the Islamic world as a symbol of selfless courage. At a moment of extraordinary delicacy, when the shadow of conflict loomed large and the drums of war threatened to echo once more across the Middle East, he chose to journey to Tehran, the proud capital of brotherly Iran. The risks were neither hidden nor slight. Entering a region still tense from recent clashes, where any unforeseen spark could ignite wider flames, he travelled undeterred. Pakistan's falcons—those steadfast guardians of the skies—provided an iron canopy of protection, yet every soul aboard knew that true safety lay only in the hands of the Almighty. Israel, long recognised for its cunning and its repeated assaults upon human and moral values, had already struck at Iranian military and civilian leaders with calculated brutality. Still, this commander felt neither fear nor hesitation. Within his breast resides the Quran, an unshakable fortress of faith that has guided him through trials far greater than any earthly peril. Upon landing, the warmth of the welcome spoke louder than any formal protocol. Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, received him at the airport with such genuine enthusiasm and heartfelt respect that the moment itself became a living testament to the bonds of Islamic brotherhood. From there, Field Marshal Munir proceeded directly to Iran's defence headquarters at Khatam al-Anbiya, the nerve centre of the nation's military resolve. There, in closed and candid sessions, he engaged with Iran's highest leadership, carrying forward Pakistan's quiet but determined diplomacy. His presence was no mere courtesy call; it was a bold assertion that even in the most perilous hour, reason and restraint could



still prevail over the logic of vengeance. The world had already witnessed his mettle only last May, when he struck decisively against enemies within their own strongholds, demonstrating a resolve that left adversaries stunned and allies inspired. Yet it is not only in battle that his stature shines. When the hour calls for friendship and mediation, he upholds it with the same sincerity and depth. Iranian leaders could scarcely contain their admiration, praising both his courage and his unwavering commitment to peace. In him they saw not merely the commander of Pakistan's armed forces, but a valiant leader for the entire Muslim ummah. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a single country across the Islamic world where songs of his bravery and dedication have not been sung in local tongues—from the bustling streets of Jakarta to the ancient alleys of Damascus, from the highlands of Anatolia to the shores of North Africa. Even those who once stood as adversaries now appear compelled to acknowledge his merit. Western media outlets, long accustomed to bias and hostility toward Pakistan, have grown tireless in their praise, recognising in this soldier-statesman a figure who transcends narrow national boundaries. In Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir flows the blood and spirit of the great commanders of Islamic history—Khalid bin Waleed, whose tactical brilliance turned the tide of empires; Tariq bin Ziyad, who burned his boats to inspire conquest through faith alone; and Salahuddin Ayyubi, who united fractured realms through justice and chivalry. Like them, he understands that when intentions are pure and the heart is anchored in divine guidance, the path to the destination becomes clearer, the burdens lighter, and the outcome, God willing, crowned with success. The mission he has undertaken in these tense days builds upon earlier rounds of mediation hosted in Islamabad. Accompanied by his close aides and a high-level delegation, he has worked tirelessly to transform a fragile ceasefire between the United States and Iran into something more enduring—a genuine opening for dialogue that might spare the region fresh rivers of blood and suffering. In a world too often fractured by suspicion and power plays, Pakistan has emerged as a trusted bridge, and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir its steadfast architect. Pakistan can take quiet yet profound pride in this hour. In a time when many nations shrink from risk, a son of this soil has risen to serve not only his own people but the broader cause of stability, brotherhood, and peace. His actions remind us that true leadership is not measured merely in ranks or titles, but in the willingness to stand where others hesitate, guided by faith and a vision that looks beyond borders. May Allah Almighty protect and guide Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, granting him every success in his noble endeavours. May He shield Pakistan and its people from all harm, and bless these efforts so that the ominous drums of war may yet give way to the enduring blessings of peace and fraternity. Lastly, it is such lion-hearted souls who remind humanity that courage, when rooted in faith, can still bend the arc of history toward justice and hope.

US-Iran talks still in limbo

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti



At the heart of the failure lies the core issue that has long plagued US-Iran relations: Iran's nuclear program. The United States reiterated its long-standing demand that Iran hand over its enriched uranium and abandon its nuclear ambitions altogether. For Washington, this remains a non-negotiable requirement, framed as essential for regional and global security. Iran, on the other hand, categorically rejected this demand, viewing it as an infringement on its sovereignty and its right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology

THE much-anticipated talks between the United States and Iran, recently held in Islamabad, have ended in what can only be described as a diplomatic fiasco. While both sides attempted to project a sense of guarded optimism before the negotiations, the outcome has laid bare the deep-rooted mistrust and rigid positions that continue to define relations between Washington and Tehran. Iranian officials were quick to point out that expecting a breakthrough in a single sitting was unrealistic, while American representatives maintained that the onus for progress lay with Iran. In reality, however, both sides emerged from the talks claiming that the ball was in the other's court a familiar refrain that underscores the persistent deadlock. At the heart of the failure lies the core issue that has long plagued US-Iran relations: Iran's nuclear program. The United States reiterated its long-standing demand that Iran hand over its enriched uranium and abandon its nuclear ambitions altogether. For Washington, this remains a non-negotiable requirement, framed as essential for regional and global security. Iran, on the other hand, categorically rejected this demand, viewing it as an infringement on its sovereignty and its right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology. This fundamental disagreement proved insurmountable, rendering discussions on other matters largely inconsequential. Indeed, while topics such as the Strait of Hormuz, the situation in Lebanon, and Iran's ties with groups like Hamas were reportedly discussed, these issues were peripheral compared to the central dispute over the nuclear program. Without movement on the core issue, progress on these secondary matters was always unlikely, the US Vice President also mentioned in his media talk. The talks, therefore, became an exercise in reiterating established positions rather than exploring new avenues for compromise. One of the most critical factors contributing to the failure of the Islamabad talks was the absence of a credible and influential mediator. Pakistan deserves recognition for hosting the talks and providing a neutral venue, reflecting its genuine desire to promote peace and stability in the region. However, Islamabad's role was largely limited to that of a facilitator. It did not possess the leverage necessary to influence either side in a meaningful way or to push them towards compromise. Effective mediation in high-stakes international disputes requires not only neutrality but also significant political, economic, and strategic clout. In this context, countries such as China and Russia or even a collective entity like the European Union are better positioned to play the role of mediator. While reports suggest that representatives from China and Russia were present during the Islamabad talks, their participation was limited to that of observers. They did not actively engage in the negotiations or attempt to bridge the gap between the two sides. This lack of active mediation proved to be a crucial short-

coming. Mediation is not a passive exercise; it requires sustained engagement, creative diplomacy, and the ability to apply pressure or offer incentives where necessary. Without such intervention, the talks were bound to flounder, as both the United States and Iran remained firmly entrenched in their traditional positions. Despite the failure of the talks, it would be unfair to dismiss Pakistan's role as insignificant. On the contrary, Islamabad's initiative has positioned it as a country willing to contribute constructively to global peace efforts. At a time when tensions in the Middle East continue to pose a threat to international stability, Pakistan's willingness to host such high-level negotiations sends a positive signal to the global community. It demonstrates a commitment to dialogue and diplomacy, even in the face of daunting challenges. The Islamabad talks, though unsuccessful, have also created a framework that can potentially be built upon in the future. Diplomatic processes are rarely linear, and setbacks are often an inherent part of negotiations of this magnitude. What is important is that the channels of communication remain open and that efforts to resolve the conflict continue. Looking ahead, the way forward requires a more structured and inclusive approach. Major global powers, particularly China, Russia, and the European Union, must take a more active role in facilitating dialogue between the United States and Iran. These actors possess the economic influence and political leverage necessary to bring both sides to the negotiating table and to encourage them to adopt more flexible positions. China, with its growing global influence and strong economic ties with both Iran and the broader Middle East, is uniquely positioned to act as a mediator. Similarly, Russia's strategic relationships and experience in regional diplomacy make it a key player in any potential resolution. The European Union, which has historically played a role in nuclear negotiations with Iran, can also contribute by providing a multilateral framework that lends legitimacy and balance to the process. However, the involvement of these powers alone will not guarantee success. Ultimately, the responsibility for reaching an agreement lies with the United States and Iran themselves. Both sides must recognize that their current approach—marked by rigidity and an unwillingness to compromise—is unsustainable. Continued adherence to maximalist positions will only prolong the conflict and exacerbate tensions, with potentially serious consequences for regional and global security. For the United States, this may require a reassessment of its demands regarding Iran's nuclear program. While concerns about proliferation are valid, insisting on complete abandonment may not be a realistic objective. A more pragmatic approach, focusing on limitations, transparency, and robust verification mechanisms, could provide a viable path forward. For Iran, greater flexibility is equally essential. While safeguarding national

sovereignty is important, engaging constructively with the international community and addressing concerns about its nuclear activities could help build trust and pave the way for sanctions relief and economic stability. Iran must weigh the long-term benefits of compromise against the costs of continued isolation. The stakes are too high for both sides to remain locked in a cycle of confrontation. The potential consequences of failure extend far beyond bilateral relations, affecting the stability of the entire Middle East and the global economy. The Strait of Hormuz, a critical artery for global energy supplies, remains a flashpoint that could have far-reaching implications in the event of escalation. Similarly, ongoing conflicts and proxy dynamics in the region add further complexity to an already volatile situation. In this context, the international community has a vested interest in ensuring that the diplomatic process does not collapse. The Islamabad talks, despite their shortcomings, represent an important step in keeping dialogue alive. They have demonstrated that both sides are at least willing to engage, even if meaningful progress remains elusive. The challenge now is to build on this foundation and to inject new momentum into the process. This will require not only the involvement of major powers but also a willingness on the part of the United States and Iran to move beyond entrenched positions. Confidence-building measures, incremental agreements, and a focus on common ground could help create the conditions necessary for a broader settlement. It is also important to recognize that diplomacy is a gradual process. Breakthroughs are often preceded by multiple rounds of negotiations, each contributing in small ways to the eventual outcome. The failure of one round of talks should not be seen as the end of the road but rather as an opportunity to reassess strategies and to approach the problem with renewed determination. The Islamabad talks between the United States and Iran may have ended in failure, but they have also highlighted the path forward. The absence of a strong mediator, the persistence of rigid positions, and the focus on non-negotiable demands were key factors that led to the breakdown. Addressing these issues will be essential for any future success. Pakistan's role as a facilitator, while limited, deserves acknowledgment and appreciation. More importantly, the international community must now step up to ensure that the process initiated in Islamabad does not derail. With the active involvement of major powers and a genuine commitment to compromise from both sides, there remains a real possibility of bringing the talks back on track. The alternative continued deadlock and escalating tensions is a scenario that neither the region nor the world can afford. The prevailing situation therefore demands a pragmatic diplomacy and shared responsibility. - The article originally published in CENTRELINE journal in its April 2026 issue. The article is reproduced here for readers' interest.

Europe Breaks from Washington on Iran War

Qamar Bashir



This transformation has been dramatically accelerated by the recent war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, and the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz—a vital artery through which nearly a fifth of the world's oil and gas once flowed daily. The decision by Washington to launch strikes on Iran without adequately consulting its European allies proved to be more than a strategic misstep; it became the breaking...

THE second presidential term of Donald Trump has triggered a geopolitical shift of historic proportions. For decades, the United States stood as the uncontested leader of the Western alliance, commanding not just military superiority but also strategic obedience from its European partners within NATO. That era, defined by unquestioned transatlantic unity, is now visibly eroding. What is emerging in its place is a more assertive, self-directed Europe—one that is no longer willing to follow Washington into conflicts without consultation, nor accept the consequences of decisions it did not shape. This transformation has been dramatically accelerated by the recent war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, and the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz—a vital artery through which nearly a fifth of the world's oil and gas once flowed daily. The decision by Washington to launch strikes on Iran without adequately consulting its European allies proved to be more than a strategic misstep; it became the breaking point in a relationship already strained by years of unilateral policies, sanctions, and economic coercion. Europe's response has been swift, calculated, and deeply symbolic. In a move that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago, Keir Starmer, alongside Emmanuel Macron, convened a summit of more than 35 countries to address the Hormuz crisis—deliberately excluding the United States. This was not merely a diplomatic gathering; it was a declaration of strategic independence. For the first time in decades, Europe signaled that it was prepared to lead, not follow. The summit focused on practical and urgent objectives: restoring safe navigation, securing stranded vessels, stabilizing energy flows, and coordinating both diplomatic and limited military responses such as mine-clearing and maritime monitoring. Unlike the U.S. approach, which has leaned heavily on military pressure, Europe emphasized a blend of diplomacy, coordination with global industry, and measured security interventions. The message was clear: sustainable solutions cannot be imposed through force alone—they must be negotiated and collectively maintained. The urgency behind Europe's actions is rooted in economic reality. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent shockwaves through global energy markets, but its impact on Europe has been particularly severe. Having already reduced dependence on Russian energy, European economies had shifted toward Middle Eastern supplies. The disruption of these routes has now placed the continent in a precarious position, facing rising fuel costs, supply short-

ages, and broader economic instability. Tourism—a major pillar of many European economies—has been hit by reduced travel and rising costs. Aviation faces operational strain due to jet fuel uncertainty. Industrial output is slowing under the weight of energy constraints. In short, Europe is bearing a disproportionate share of the economic fallout from a conflict it neither initiated nor endorsed. This reality has reinforced a critical lesson: strategic dependence carries unacceptable risks. Yet Europe's response is not merely reactive—it is transformative. Collectively, European economies represent one of the largest economic blocs in the world, rivaling the United States and exceeding any single nation, including China. This economic weight is now translating into political ambition. Europe is beginning to act like what it has long been in economic terms: a global power capable of shaping outcomes rather than absorbing them. The exclusion of the United States from the Hormuz summit underscores a deeper shift. It reflects a growing realization within Europe that reliance on American leadership has become a liability rather than an asset. Washington's expectation that allies would support its military actions—followed by demands for assistance in managing the consequences—has been met with resistance. Europe is instead constructing a framework based on sovereignty, collective decision-making, and a clear preference for diplomacy over confrontation. This evolving doctrine represents a fundamental rebalancing of the transatlantic relationship. It does not necessarily signal a complete rupture, but it does mark the end of unquestioned alignment. Europe is asserting its right to define its own strategic priorities and to pursue solutions that align with its interests, even when they diverge from those of Washington. At the same time, a quieter but equally significant transformation is unfolding in the global financial system. The extensive use of sanctions by the United States has prompted many nations to explore alternatives to the dollar-based system. European countries, along with members of BRICS, are increasingly experimenting with trade settlements in euros, local currencies, and digital financial mechanisms. While the dollar remains dominant, its monopoly is gradually being challenged. If this trend continues, it could weaken one of the United States' most powerful tools of influence: its control over global financial infrastructure. The possibility of parallel systems—designed to bypass traditional channels such as SWIFT—reflects a broader desire

among nations to insulate themselves from economic coercion. Europe's participation in this shift signals that even long-standing allies are reconsidering their dependence on American financial dominance. Beyond economics and strategy, Europe's initiative represents a philosophical shift in how global conflicts are approached. The Hormuz summit emphasized de-escalation, post-conflict stabilization, and long-term security rather than immediate military gains. Plans to clear mines, secure shipping lanes, and engage Iran diplomatically illustrate a commitment to sustainable peace rather than temporary victories. This approach resonates with a broader global sentiment. Many nations are increasingly wary of interventions that prioritize force over diplomacy and dominance over stability. Europe's actions suggest that there is an alternative path—one that balances security with dialogue and power with restraint. The implications of these developments are far-reaching. The world is moving toward a multipolar order in which power is distributed across multiple centers rather than concentrated in a single dominant state. In this emerging landscape, Europe is positioning itself as a key pillar—alongside rising powers in Asia and other regions. The United States remains a formidable power, but its role is evolving. Its reliance on military solutions and economic pressure has accelerated the search for alternatives. Allies are no longer content to follow; they are beginning to lead. For Washington, this moment presents a critical choice. It can adapt to the realities of a changing world—embracing multilateralism, respecting the autonomy of its partners, and leveraging its strengths in innovation and diplomacy—or it can continue on a path that risks further isolation. What is clear, however, is that the global order is undergoing a profound transformation. The age of unquestioned American dominance is giving way to a more balanced, more complex system. In this new world, leadership will not be defined solely by military power, but by the ability to build consensus, manage crises, and deliver stability. Europe has signaled that it is ready to assume that role. The question now is not whether the world will change—but how quickly, and who will shape the future that emerges. - Press Secretary to the President (Rtd) Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France Former Press Attaché to Malaysia Former MD, SRBC | Macomb, Michigan

Briefs

Iran's speaker says talks...

FROM PAGE 01
elation in global markets and sent oil prices plunging, but with Trump insisting the blockade of Iranian ports would continue until a deal is struck to end the wider war, Tehran said it was shuttering the strait once more. "If America does not lift the blockade, traffic in the Strait of Hormuz will definitely be limited," Ghalibaf said. Iran's supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who has yet to be seen since taking power, said meanwhile in a written message that Iran's navy "stands ready" to defeat the United States. Trump, speaking to reporters at a White House event, accused Iran of getting "a little cute" with its recent moves and warned Tehran not to try to "blackmail" Washington with its flip-flopping on the Strait of Hormuz. "We have very good conversations going on," the president said, adding that the United States was "taking a tough stand."

US 'advance team' arrives...

FROM PAGE 01
traffic until further notice due to the arrival of foreign delegations. They advised citizens to use alternate routes and cooperate with traffic police to ensure smooth flow and security. Further, the district administrations of Islamabad and Rawalpindi announced an immediate suspension of public and goods transport in the twin cities. The Islamabad deputy commissioner suspended heavy transport and public transport services until further notice, without citing any reason. "Heavy transport and public transport in the city are being suspended until further orders. Citizens are earnestly requested to cooperate with the security agencies," the Islamabad DC posted on X. Similarly, all private, public, and goods transport has been suspended with immediate effect in Rawalpindi. The official confirmed that further updates will be issued later. "All private, public and goods transport in Rawalpindi is hereby suspended with immediate effect. Further updates will be shared," the Rawalpindi DC said in his X post.

Iran says no date set for talks

FROM PAGE 01
which can be a pretext for another round of escalation," Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters on the sidelines of a diplomacy forum in the southern Turkish province of Antalya. "Until we agree the framework, we cannot set the date... There was significant progress made, actually. But then the maximalist approach by the other side, trying to make Iran an exception from international law prevented us from reaching an agreement," he said, referring to US demands over Iran's nuclear programme. "I have to be very crystal clear that Iran would not accept being an exception from international law. Anything that we are going to be committed to will be within the international regulations and international law."

Türkiye optimistic...

FROM PAGE 01
Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed it is replenishing and upgrading its missile and drone launchers at a faster rate than before the recent conflict. Majid Mousavi, Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force, said: "During the ceasefire, our speed in updating and replenishing missile and drone launch pads is even faster than before the war." The remarks come as the fragile US-Iran ceasefire, mediated with involvement from countries including Pakistan and Türkiye, holds amid ongoing regional tensions. Turkish officials have been actively engaged in back-channel diplomacy to prevent escalation and promote a lasting de-escalation in the Middle East.

Pakistan Customs clinch U-18 youth hockey championship



ISLAMABAD: Chief guest Tariq Fazal Ch Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs along with President Pakistan Hockey Federation Mohiuddin Wani, tournament director Olympian Kh. M Junaid giving winners trophy to Pakistan Customs team that defeated Punjab team in the final of Under 18 Youth Hockey Championship by 3-1. The hockey championship was organized by the Pakistan Hockey Federation. – DNA

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Customs defeated Punjab 2 by 3-1 to win the Under-18 Youth Hockey Championship final, organized by the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) at Nasir Banda Hockey Stadium here on Sunday. Pakistan Customs took a 1-0 lead into the half-time break and

maintained strong pressure in the second half to register a convincing victory. Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry was the chief guest on the occasion. Prominent former Olympians including Samiullah Khan, Hassan Sardar, and Khawaja Junaid also graced the final with their presence. Speaking at the prize distribution ceremony, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry

said: "Our young talent has the potential to restore Pakistan's lost glory in hockey. The government is committed to providing full support to sports, especially hockey. We are also working on the promotion of departmental sports to strengthen the grassroots structure of the game." The minister congratulated the winning team and appreciated the efforts of the Pakistan Hockey Federation for organizing the youth

championship, saying such tournaments are vital for unearthing new talent. Pakistan Customs players displayed excellent teamwork and finishing skills, while Punjab 2 fought hard but could not match their opponents' clinical performance. This victory is expected to boost the morale of departmental hockey teams and highlight the depth of emerging talent in Pakistan's youth hockey.

Rawalpindi's Ring Road to open without Thalian interchange

RAWALPINDI: As the Rawalpindi Ring Road is set to be completed by the end of May, the provincial government has decided not to start work on the Thalian interchange on the motorway and instead make the road functional with a two-way carriageway. A senior official of the divisional administration told that work on the Ring Road had entered its final phase, as the road had taken shape and horticulture work had started along the main corridor. He said work had begun to widen the Thalian section, where the Ring Road merges with the motorway, as more than 18,000 vehicles will enter the motorway from the Ring Road. At this point, it is necessary to widen the road to avoid long queues of vehicles. Official says work on Rs5 billion Thalian interchange project will not start immediately. Deputy Project Director of Rawalpindi Ring Road Ashfaq Sulheri said that the Rs5 billion Thalian interchange project would not start immediately. To make the Ring Road functional, authorities have decided to use a two-way carriageway so that traffic can enter the motorway. He said there were some issues and that the interchange would be constructed after the completion of the Ring Road. He added that the National Highway Authority (NHA) was also working to expand the service road, which would be able to cater to the traffic demand.

He said the Project Management Unit had sent the revised PC-I of the Ring Road, in which the Thalian interchange was included, but to make the road functional, the government decided to start work on the interchange later. Regarding progress, Mr Sulheri said the Punjab government had directed the project management unit to speed up work so that it could be completed before the monsoon season. "We have now started working in three shifts. The Soan Bridge has been completed, work on the railway bridge is under way with girder casting started, and asphalt work has begun. So far, over 28 kilometres of the road has been completed," he said. He added that work on interchanges, bridges and road surfacing was now being carried out simultaneously to make up for the three-month slowdown during the monsoon, with October and November targeted to recover the delay. According to project details, the Rawalpindi Ring Road will be 38.3km long, with five interchanges at Bant, Chak Baiti Khan, Adiala Road, Chakri Road and Thalian. An industrial zone is also planned along the route. It may be mentioned that the project cost has escalated from Rs33 billion to Rs47 billion. Officials said further price escalation would be accommodated at the end of the project. – DNA

Pakistan Army clinch Inter-Departmental National Kabaddi title

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Army were crowned champions of the Inter-Departmental National Kabaddi Championship after defeating Pakistan Air Force 41-31 in a thrilling final. The championship, organized under the auspices of the Pakistan Kabaddi Federation (PKF) in collaboration with divisional and district kabaddi associations

in Faisalabad, featured eight teams from across the country, including Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Police, Wapda, Pakistan Ordnance Factories Wah, Higher Education Commission Pakistan and ASF, said a press release issued here. Played in front of an energized crowd, the final witnessed a high-intensity

contest between Army and Air Force. However, Army's superior planning and execution, under the guidance of coaches Muhammad Salman Jutt, Faisal Qadeer and Muhammad Naseer, proved decisive as they sealed a convincing 41-31 victory. In the third-place playoff, Wapda defeated Higher Education Commission 39-21

to secure a podium finish. Federal Minister for Inter Provincial Coordination Rana Sanaullah attended the event and distributed prizes among the winning teams. He was accompanied by Secretary Army Fitness and Sports Directorate Col. Nabeel Ahmed Rana and other officials, and also praised the players for their performances. – APP

Pakistan 'in talks' with Argentina over potential friendly match

PFF and AFA discuss friendly, coaching exchanges and long-term football cooperation

KARACHI: Pakistan and Argentina have held initial discussions over the possibility of an international friendly between their football teams, as part of broader talks on football development cooperation, sources privy to the matter said. According to sources, officials from the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) and the Argentine Football Association (AFA) held early-stage discussions during an online exchange, where they reviewed multiple areas of cooperation, including coaching development, technical training programmes and a potential friendly fixture. Both sides also discussed the possibility of Argentinian coaches visiting Pakistan under a structured development initiative and explored a wider technical collaboration framework aimed at strengthening Pakistan's football structure. An official statement shared by Pakistan's mission in Argentina said a "productive and forward-looking meeting" was arranged and coordinated by the mission, bringing together the PFF and the AFA following AFA's launch of the "AFA Pakistan" brand and its expressed interest in building "meaningful engagement with Pakistan's football ecosystem."

The meeting, chaired by Ambassador Hassan Afzal Khan, was attended by PFF President Syed Mohsin Gilani and his team, along with AFA Marketing Director Francisco Lemmi, the statement said. According to the statement, Ambassador Hassan said the development presented "an excellent opportunity to strengthen collaboration and contribute to the growth of football in Pakistan".

It added that Gilani welcomed AFA's outreach and emphasized the importance of developing the partnership in a "structured and sustainable manner" aimed at long-term cooperation and mutual benefit.

If finalised, the proposed friendly would take place after the Fifa World Cup, with both federations agreeing to continue working on various logistical and technical aspects before any confirmation. The statement described the engagement as a "promising step toward international collaboration in sports development" that opens new avenues for football advancement in Pakistan. – Agencies

'Israel to use full force even..

FROM PAGE 01
Hezbollah terror outposts and threatened Israeli communities," Katz added.

75 UK MPs back motion demands...

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origin member of Parliament, Layla Moran. The motion condemns the annexation of Palestinian territories in the West Bank and calls for concrete measures such as an arms embargo, a ban on trade with Israeli settlements, economic sanctions, and individual sanctions against Israeli officials. Burgen has called for the motion to gain even more support in the coming weeks. This is not the first time Burgen has submitted a motion to sanction Israel for its genocidal actions in Gaza.

Many injured in US...

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The ICPD said its officers responded to a report of a "large fight" on campus just before 2:00 am local time (0700 GMT), adding that officers arriving at the scene "heard gunfire." The University of Iowa said there were "confirmed victims" in the incident, without providing additional details of casualties. In emergency alerts, the school told people to avoid the area and "remain vigilant."

Ukraine slams oil sanction...

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But the US Treasury Department extension came two days after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that Washington would not renew the waiver. Zelensky said there were more than 110 tankers carrying Russian oil in breach of international sanctions currently at sea, carrying more than 12 million tonnes of crude "which, due to the easing of sanctions, can once again be sold without consequences." "That is \$10 billion – a resource that is directly converted into new strikes against Ukraine," Zelensky said.

Blockade politics: Trump risks Iran peace deal

FROM PAGE 01

Rather than a gradual breakdown, the process collapsed almost instantly, driven by contradictory actions and absence of coordinated confidence-building measures.

The escalation was not merely symbolic. Reports of Iranian gunboats firing upon merchant vessels, including Indian-flagged ships, triggered immediate international alarm. India's diplomatic protest underscored the global stakes involved. The Strait of Hormuz is not just a regional passage; it is a critical artery through which nearly 20% of the world's oil supply flows. Any disruption sends shockwaves across global energy markets, trade routes, and national economies.

The economic fallout was immediate. Oil prices surged sharply, moving from relative stability into volatile territory. Financial markets, which had rallied just hours earlier, again lost significant value. Supply chains, already strained by weeks of conflict, faced renewed uncertainty. What the world briefly perceived as a turning point toward peace quickly reverted into another phase of instability. Amid this turbulence, diplomatic efforts led by Pakistan have continued with notable persistence. High-level engagements—including visits by Pakistan's military leadership to Tehran and regional outreach by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif—reflect a sustained commitment to bridging the divide between Washington and Tehran. Yet these efforts are

being undermined not by lack of diplomacy, but by lack of discipline within diplomacy.

One of the most damaging elements in this process has been the premature disclosure of sensitive negotiations. Diplomatic engagements—especially those mediated by third parties—require confidentiality, trust, and incremental consensus-building. When incomplete discussions, such as proposals regarding nuclear material or security guarantees, are made public prematurely, they trigger defensive reactions and harden positions. Iran's firm stance on not handing over enriched uranium must be understood within this context. Such positions are often part of broader negotiation frameworks, not final conclusions. Publicizing them as definitive outcomes distorts the process and fuels mistrust. In diplomacy, discretion is not optional—it is essential.

Simultaneously, developments in Lebanon have added another layer of volatility. The killing of a French UN peacekeeper and subsequent accusations between Israel and Hezbollah highlight how fragile ceasefires can easily unravel. Whether intentional or incidental, such incidents risk reopening additional fronts, complicating already delicate negotiations elsewhere. Against this backdrop, the joint initiative by the United Kingdom and France on April 17, 2026, represents a significant geopolitical shift. Convening more than 50 nations, the summit emphasized freedom of navigation,

adherence to international law, and the urgent need to reopen the Strait of Hormuz unconditionally. The proposal for a multinational defensive maritime mission signals growing international concern over the weaponization of critical trade routes.

Notably, the relative absence of the United States from this initiative indicates an emerging divergence between Washington and its European allies. The declaration implicitly criticized both the U.S. blockade and Iran's retaliatory restrictions, placing responsibility on all parties to restore normalcy. This development reflects a broader transformation in global geopolitics—one in which Europe is increasingly willing to chart an independent course when global economic stability is at risk.

At its core, the crisis reveals a fundamental contradiction. All parties publicly express commitment to peace, yet their actions often undermine that objective. The United States insists it cannot be pressured, while Iran asserts its sovereign control over its waterways. Both positions, while strategically understandable, become counterproductive when pursued without coordination.

The cost of this contradiction is global. Countries with no direct involvement in the conflict are bearing immense economic burdens—rising fuel costs, disrupted trade, inflationary pressures, and weakened currencies. The global economy, still recovering from previous shocks, cannot sustain prolonged

instability in such a vital region.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for recalibration. Diplomacy must return to its foundational principles: confidentiality, sincerity, and mutual respect. Public rhetoric must align with private commitments. Actions must build trust, not erode it. Incremental progress—however modest—is far more valuable than dramatic reversals that undo hard-earned gains within hours.

The path forward requires discipline and restraint. Negotiations must proceed without unnecessary public exposure, allowing mediators the space to manage complex issues. Confidence-building measures—such as phased easing of blockades and conditional reopening of transit routes—should be prioritized. Ultimately, the lesson of this crisis is stark. Peace is not achieved through isolated gestures, but through sustained, coordinated actions. The events of April 17 and April 18, 2026, stand as a powerful reminder that diplomacy can collapse just as quickly as it can emerge. If the current trajectory continues, the world risks not only economic turmoil but also the loss of a rare diplomatic opportunity. But if restraint prevails, if confidentiality is respected, and if sincerity guides action, there remains a possibility—still fragile, but real—that this crisis can be transformed into a turning point. The choice lies with the actors involved. The consequences, however, will be borne by the entire world.

Briefs

Fire in Malaysia's destroys 200 homes, hundreds displaced

KUALA LUMPUR: Hundreds of people have been displaced after a fire destroyed around 200 homes in a coastal village in Malaysia's Sabah state on Sunday, state news agency Bernama reported. Authorities were notified of the fire in Sandakan district at around 1.32 a.m. (1732 GMT), the district's fire and rescue chief Jimmy Lagung was quoted as saying by Bernama. "Strong winds and the close proximity of the houses caused the fire to spread rapidly, while low tide conditions also made it difficult to obtain an open water source," Lagung said, according to Bernama. The fire broke out in one of Sabah's water villages, which feature wooden houses built on stilts and are home to some of the country's poorest communities, including many stateless and indigenous groups. Around 445 people have been displaced so far, Bernama said, citing unofficial figures of people registered at a temporary relief center in Sandakan. Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the federal government was coordinating with Sabah authorities to provide basic assistance and temporary relocation for those affected. "The priority now is the safety of the victims and immediate assistance on the ground," he said in a Facebook post.—APP

Turkiye says US and Iran have the will to continue talks

ANTALYA: Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Sunday that both Iran and the United States had the will to continue talks to end the war. Speaking to reporters at a diplomacy forum in the southern province of Antalya, Fidan said that while the talks between Washington and Iran were largely complete, there were still a number of disagreements. Fidan also said a ceasefire which is due to expire next week should be extended. "No one wants to see a new war break out when the ceasefire expires next week. We hope ... the parties will extend the ceasefire." Cevdet Yilmaz, whose country has been supporting Pakistan's efforts to bring the sides together, earlier told The Associated Press there are many "complex issues" on the table. Yilmaz said he still believes talks between Iran and the United States would continue. "We would all like these talks to end all at once, in a very short time. But we need to be realistic. These comprehensive negotiations will take some time," Yilmaz said. The vice president also said that a comprehensive settlement between Iran and the United States would be a prerequisite for free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. "What is the root cause here? The ongoing war.—APP

Iran reports 3,468 dead in war with US, Israel

TEHRAN: Iran's state-run Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs said on Saturday that the war with the United States and Israel had killed more than 3,400 people in the Islamic republic. The announcement comes in the midst of a two-week ceasefire in the conflict, which erupted in late February with US-Israeli strikes on Tehran. Foundation head Ahmad Mousavi was quoted by the ISNA news agency as saying that 3,468 "martyrs... fell during the recent conflict." A previous toll from the head of the Iranian Legal Medicine Organization issued on April 12 said 3,375 people in Iran had been killed in the war. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said on April 7 that at least 3,636 people had been killed, including 1,701 civilians — among them at least 254 children — as well as 1,221 military personnel and 714 people whose status had not been classified. Due to reporting restrictions, AFP is not able to access the sites of strikes nor to independently verify tolls in Iran.—APP



MULTAN: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, along with Harerimana Fatou, High Commissioner of The Republic of Rwanda, planted a sapling at Gilani house

Iran war hits Bangladesh's PM stabilization plan

"The major areas of restoring the macroeconomic stability — like reducing the market inflation, creating momentum in the investment sectors, restoration of order in the banking sector — I don't think it would happen so easily, in such a short time. Even if they could manage the existing issues smoothly, it will take at least 1.5 to 2 years to overcome the impacts of this war," Prof. Rahman said.

DHAKA: Despite efforts to mitigate supply disruptions, Bangladesh was forced to hike fuel prices on Sunday, as Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's economic stabilization plans are facing a setback from the US-Israeli war on Iran. A country of 170 million people, which relies on imports for 95 percent of its energy needs, Bangladesh has been struggling to secure supply since the beginning of the attacks on Feb. 28. Iranian retaliatory strikes on American-linked assets across the fuel-producing Gulf region have stopped exports and led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Bangladesh initially sought to cushion the impact through subsidies, diversifying supply, and \$2 billion in loans — from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank

— to secure supply from other sources, including the more expensive spot market. But the measures have become difficult to sustain, and the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources raised retail fuel prices by 10 percent to 15 percent — a move likely to have an impact on all sectors. "They tried to hold out as long as the economy had the capacity to endure, but I feel it has reached a point where further uncertainty has been created regarding the Strait of Hormuz," Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka, told Arab News. "The impact has already started. We are having to go for rationing. The government is facing issues with electricity. Now we have to adjust (fuel) prices, and this will have

a knock-on effect on inflation at a time when there isn't much momentum in investment and employment growth." Even if supply chains were to be restored soon, he expected longer-term effects, which would directly hit the plans of the prime minister, who was elected two weeks before the war started. His administration took over from an interim government that had led the country for 18 months after its longtime Premier Sheikh Hasina was ousted in a student-led uprising in August 2024. Under the interim administration, the country has recorded little foreign or domestic investment, and the new prime minister's first 180-day program was going to accelerate private sector growth and increase employment. Now, his government will have to take

care of the loans it took to purchase fuel. "The major areas of restoring the macroeconomic stability — like reducing the market inflation, creating momentum in the investment sectors, restoration of order in the banking sector — I don't think it would happen so easily, in such a short time. Even if they could manage the existing issues smoothly, it will take at least 1.5 to 2 years to overcome the impacts of this war," Prof. Rahman said. "Additionally, there will be a price hike of all commodities and other sectors due to fuel price increase, and once prices go up, they rarely want to come down. Even if fuel prices return to previous levels, we've seen it doesn't have much of an effect. So, the pressure created by this price hike will persist in the future.—DNA

Govt committed to empowering business community: Kayani

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani underscored the government's unwavering dedication to fostering a collaborative partnership with the private sector to drive national prosperity. Speaking during a productive and forward-looking consultative session at the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) in Karachi, the minister emphasized that the private sector remains a key driver of national prosperity, said a news release. The meeting was attended by representatives of trade bodies, chambers and industry associations, was part of ongoing pre-budget consultations aimed at enhancing coordination between the public and private sectors. Highlighting the business community as a vital pillar of Pakistan's economy, the minister celebrated their instrumental contributions to tax revenue, employment generation, and industrial expansion. Emphasizing a culture of sustained engagement, he confirmed that the government is actively integrating stakeholder feedback into its budgetary planning for the upcoming fiscal year, ensuring that policy priorities are closely aligned with the needs of productive sectors. The minister highlighted the government's strategic success in stabilizing the macroeconomic environment over the past two years, which has established a robust foundation for future tax rationalization and meaningful relief measures. Bolstered by improved fiscal discipline, the government continues to navigate global economic volatility, exemplified by its proactive efforts to shield citizens and businesses from sudden energy price spikes. Meanwhile, he said the government's commitment to long-term predictability is reflected in its five-year National Tariff Policy, which seeks to simplify customs structures by June 2030, while ongoing comprehensive reforms within the Federal Board of Revenue, including advanced digitisation through PRAL, are set to streamline operations and enhance ease of doing business.—DNA

Strait of Hormuz blocked as gaps remain on Iran peace talks

WASHINGTON/ISLAMABAD: Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz was at a standstill on Sunday after Iran reasserted control over the strategic waterway that is key to global energy supply, days before a fragile ceasefire with the United States was set to expire. Iran's top negotiator said recent talks with the US had made progress, while President Donald Trump cited "very good conversations" with Tehran. But neither side offered any specifics and Iran's chief negotiator, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, said the two sides remained far apart on nuclear issues and the Strait of Hormuz, the two main sticking points. On Saturday, Iran, which had earlier announced it would allow shipping to pass through Hormuz, reversed course, accusing Washington of violating a ceasefire agreement by maintaining its own blockade of Iranian ports. After two Indian-registered ships reported being attacked on Saturday while trying to pass through the strait, shipping data showed traffic through the narrow waterway had come to a stop early on Sunday. One China-owned tanker and an Indian-owned gas carrier were seen transiting eastbound early on Sunday morning. But they appear to have been turned back and no other vessels entered or left the Gulf after midnight GMT, according to MarineTraffic vessel-tracking data. Iran's armed forces separately turned back two tankers attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday after issuing warnings, semi-official Tasnim news agency reported, saying this came as a result of the continuing US maritime blockade on Iran. The vessels, sailing under the flags of Botswana and Angola, were forced to change course after what the report described as "unauthorized transit" through the strategic waterway. Now in its eighth week, the war has created the most severe shock to global energy supplies in history, sending oil prices surging because of the de facto closure of the strait, which before the war carried one-fifth of the world's oil shipments. Meanwhile uncertainty surrounded Pakistani-brokered efforts to end the conflict, which has killed thousands since it began on February 28 with a wave of US and Israeli airstrikes against Iran and which has spread to Lebanon. Talks in Islamabad — the first direct negotiations between the United States and Iran in decades — ended with no agreement last week but preparations appeared to be underway for a resumption, ahead of the expected end to the ceasefire on Wednesday. Rolls of barbed wire could be seen near the Serena Hotel where last week's talks were held. The hotel told guests on Sunday they would need to leave due to a government event, a hotel representative said, adding that no reservations were being taken until further notice. In central Islamabad, there was a heavy police and army presence but the security protocols did not appear to be at the same level as they were before the first round, when Vice President JD Vance led the US delegation. Pressure for a way out of the war has mounted on Trump as his fellow Republicans prepare to defend narrow majorities in Congress in the November midterm elections with US gasoline prices high, inflation rising and his own approval ratings down. Trump, who met senior national security aides at the White House on Saturday, said the US was having "very good conversations," but gave no other details. He later went to the Trump National Golf Club with top envoy Steve Witkoff, one of his Iran negotiators. Iran's chief negotiator, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, told state media that the talks in Islamabad had made progress but he added: "There is still a big distance between us." "There are some issues on which we insist ... They also have red lines. But these issues could be just one or two." On Friday, Iran had announced the temporary reopening of the Strait of Hormuz following a separate US-brokered 10-day ceasefire agreement on Thursday between Israel and Lebanon to end fighting between Israeli forces and Iran-backed Hezbollah.—DNA

The Price of Miscalculation

TANVEER HUSSAIN



HISTORY bears witness to the fact that certain decisions and mistakes are not merely temporary they go on to reshape the balance of power across the world. In the history of South Asia, May 1998 proved to be one such turning point. By 1998, both Pakistan and India were under intense international pressure to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban

Treaty (CTBT) and either abandon their nuclear programs or restrict them strictly to peaceful purposes. Major global powers remained engaged in continuous negotiations with both countries, as the region was already fraught with tension. At that time, India enjoyed clear superiority in conventional military strength, making the regional balance of power appear one-sided. However, in May 1998, the situation changed dramatically. The government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, driven by internal pressures and its political narrative, conducted nuclear tests at Pokhran, surprising the world. These were not just tests; they were followed by aggressive rhetoric from Indian political leaders and media directed toward Pakistan, further escalating regional concerns. In this charged atmosphere, then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was also seen taking a leading role. The international community fully understood the sensitivity of the situation, which is why the pressure on Pakistan doubled. On one hand, major powers and global institutions attempted to dissuade Pakistan from conducting nuclear tests through diplomatic, economic, and political pressure—even offering financial incentives. On the other hand, the people of Pakistan held a firm

stance: there could be no compromise on national security. The American leadership made repeated contacts, reportedly using both pressure and incentives to stop Pakistan from proceeding with nuclear tests. Offers of billions of dollars in aid were also put forward. However, Pakistan's response remained principled: given the history of wars with India and India's recent nuclear tests, Pakistan's national security now faced serious threats. Ultimately, Pakistan rejected international pressure and, on May 28, 1998, conducted nuclear tests at Chagai, establishing itself as a nuclear power. Pakistan thus became the first Islamic country to possess nuclear capability. This move not only restored the balance of power in the region but also rendered India's conventional military superiority less significant. It is an important reality that sometimes an adversary's move becomes the source of your strength. India's nuclear tests effectively compelled Pakistan to take a decision that reshaped the strategic landscape of the region. Similarly, certain actions in the Middle East have also led to serious consequences. In the 1980s, after destroying Iraq's nuclear reactor, Israel shifted its focus toward Pakistan. According to media reports, Israeli aircraft had reached

as far as Jammu, but Pakistan's effective defensive strategy thwarted the mission. More recently, during the May 2025 Pakistan-India aerial conflict, the entry of Israeli drones into Pakistan was seen as a serious miscalculation that intensified anti-Israel sentiment. However, the missile strike on Qatar proved to be an even greater blunder. The attack raised serious security concerns across the Arab world and also shook their trust in the United States. This shift in regional dynamics contributed to closer defense cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In the past, Pakistan's stance against Israel was largely limited to diplomatic condemnation at the United Nations. However, after the Qatar incident, a noticeable shift in the situation has been observed. Today, Pakistan's air power is regarded as an emerging force in the region. The presence of Pakistan's JF-17 Thunder aircraft in Saudi Arabia is considered not only important for the security of Arab states but also a potentially effective deterrent against any future Israeli action targeting Pakistan. In the end, it can be said that power in history is not determined by weapons alone, but by decisions and sometimes, mistakes, whether intentional or not, end up changing the destiny of nations.

'Multiple' injured in midwestern US campus shooting: police

Police said "multiple" people were injured in a shooting at the University of Iowa early Sunday, after the midwestern US school issued an alert reporting gunshots in an area popular for nightlife. The United States, where firearms are readily available, has a long history of gun violence that kills thousands of people every year. "The Iowa City Police Department is investigating a shooting that occurred Sunday," Iowa City officials said in a statement, adding that "no arrests have been made." "At this time, multiple victims have been taken to area hospitals to be treated for wounds suffered in the shooting." Their conditions were unknown, authorities said. The ICPD said its officers responded to a report of a "large fight" on campus just before 2:00 am local time (0700 GMT), adding that officers arriving at the scene "heard gunfire." The University of Iowa said there were "confirmed victims" in the incident, without providing additional details of casualties. In emergency alerts, the school told people to avoid the area and "remain vigilant." The university said the gunshots were reported near College and Clinton streets in the heart of the Midwest college town. Shootings are shockingly common on US school and university campuses.—APP

UK ministers back Starmer amid fresh calls to quit

LONDON: British government ministers on Sunday backed embattled premier Keir Starmer as he struggles to shake off a scandal over long-time Jeffrey Epstein associate Peter Mandelson. Starmer is due to face lawmakers in parliament on Monday to explain how Mandelson was appointed Britain's ambassador to the United States in late 2024 despite failing to pass security checks. The beleaguered prime minister, who has been dogged by the controversy for months, said Friday that he and other ministers were not told Mandelson had failed the vetting process, calling that "unforgivable." He has blamed foreign office mandarins for allowing Mandelson's appointment against the advice of security officials, and sacked the department's top civil servant Oly Robins on Thursday. But ex-civil servants have accused Downing Street of scapegoating Robins while opposition leaders have called for Starmer to quit, with accusations ranging from incompetence to wilful misleading of the public. Technology minister Liz Kendall told the BBC on Sunday that Starmer would not have appointed Mandelson had he known that he had not received the appropriate security clearance. Deputy prime minister David Lammy, who was foreign secretary when Mandelson was appointed to Washington, said the same in an interview with the Guardian published late Saturday.—APP

Thousands gather for Pope Leo's first mass in Angola

UPDATLUANDA: Tens of thousands gathered outside Angola's capital Luanda for a giant open-air Sunday mass led by Pope Leo XIV on the second day of his visit to the resource-rich country marked by deep poverty. Leo flew to Portuguese-speaking Angola on Saturday to start the third leg of a four-nation African tour. He went immediately into a meeting with President Joao Lourenco and other officials, where he spoke out against oppression and the "suffering" caused by poverty and the rampant exploitation of natural resources. The remarks continued a theme of his 11-day tour during which he has delivered pointed warnings against corruption and the plunder of the continent's natural wealth. Multitudes — many seeking a message of hope in difficult circumstances — turned out to join Leo for the Sunday mass at Kilamba on the outskirts of the capital.—APP

Briefs

Traffic restored on KKH

NEWS DESK

GILGIT: The Karakoram Highway (KKH) was reopened for traffic on Sunday while the Astore Valley road remained blocked as heavy rainfall lashed parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, triggering landslides across the region. The KKH was blocked after a landslide near the Lachi area in Kohistan late Saturday night. According to local police, light traffic was restored to the KKH after nearly 20 hours. Due to the blockage, thousands of passengers travelling to and from GB to other areas remained stranded for several hours, police said. District administration has urged the public to take precautionary measures in light of the weather. As per the police, landslides have also blocked the Shounter Road in the Astore Valley. Last week, the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) had predicted rain, wind, and thunderstorms – with isolated heavy falls and hailstorms – in the upper parts of the country from April 16-19. A westerly wave was expected to enter the northwestern parts of Pakistan on April 16 and is likely to persist in the upper regions until April 19. The department advised provincial and district administrations to take necessary precautions to avoid any untoward situations during the forecast period.

Pakistan eyes \$1.2bn inflow next month

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's liquidity pressures are expected to ease as the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Executive Board is set to consider approval of a Staff-Level Agreement (SLA) next month, potentially paving the way for a fresh disbursement of about \$1.2 billion under the two programmes. The SLA was reached on March 28 on the successful third review of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and his delegation held a series of meetings with IMF and World Bank officials in Washington this week during the Spring Meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions. The talks focused on Pakistan's macroeconomic stabilisation, reform agenda, and external financing outlook. In a conversation with Dawn, the minister said the IMF Executive Board is expected to meet in mid-May in Washington to review the SLA, which would unlock the next tranche under Pakistan's programme. An IMF mission arrived in Islamabad on Feb 25, before the start of the Middle East conflict.

Russian embassy's 'genocide of Soviet people' exhibition held

Russian Ambassador Albert P. Khorev addressed the gathering and shared personal family stories while stressing the need to preserve historical truth and counter neo-Nazism



ISLAMABAD: Distinguished diplomats and esteemed guests inaugurated the photo exhibition 'Genocide of Soviet People' organized by the Russian Embassy in Pakistan at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) in Islamabad. The exhibition, which opened on April 17, 2026, featured powerful archival photographs and historical materials highlighting the atrocities committed against Soviet civilians during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), where approximately 27 million Soviet lives were lost, including around 14 million civilians. Russian Ambassador Albert P. Khorev addressed the gathering and shared personal family stories while stressing the need to preserve historical truth and counter neo-Nazism. Diplomats from CIS countries including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, along with representatives from Cuba, Iran, Kenya, Rwanda, Syria, Zimbabwe and Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the event. The inauguration concluded with candle lighting and a minute of silence in remembrance of the victims. – DNA

North Korea fires ballistic missiles again, flexing muscle amid Iran war

DNA

SEOUL: Pyongyang's intense missile activity – this was the fourth such launch this month and the seventh of the year – is meant to display its self-defence capabilities while gaining international leverage, some experts said. "The missile launches may be a way of showing that – unlike Iran – we have self-defence capabilities," said South Korean former presidential security adviser Kim Ki-jung. "The North also appears to be exerting pressure preemptively and make a show of force before engaging in dialogue with the United States and South Korea," he said. The seven-week-old US-Israeli war against Iran, which has as one aim the curbing of Tehran's nuclear programme, could reinforce Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, experts and former South Korean officials say. US President Donald Trump, preparing for a summit in China next month, and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung have repeatedly expressed interest in holding talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. There are no publicly known plans for any meetings. Lee recently conveyed regret to the North for drone incursions from the South, receiving rare praise from Pyongyang. Sunday's missiles were fired from near the city of Sinpo on North Korea's east coast toward the sea around 6:10am local time and flew about 140 km (90 miles), South Korea's military said in a statement. Japan's government posted on social media that the missiles were believed to have fallen near the east coast of the Korean Peninsula, and no incursion into Japan's exclusive economic zone had been confirmed. South Korea's presidential Blue House convened an emergency security meeting, calling the launches a provocation that violated UN Security Council resolutions, according to media reports. It urged Pyongyang to "stop the provocative acts". It was not clear what kind of ballistic missiles were fired, but Sinpo has submarines and equipment for test-firing submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

SBP governor says economy can weather Iran risk

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jameel Ahmad has said the country's key macroeconomic indicators have improved faster than anticipated at the start of the fiscal year, owing to a prudent mix of monetary and fiscal policies that helped stabilise inflation and strengthen external positions. While the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has introduced new risks and heightened uncertainty about the macroeconomic outlook, he said, the economy is relatively better positioned than during previous crises to manage these challenges. The SBP governor was speaking at meetings with senior executives of leading

global financial and investment institutions, including JP Morgan, Barclays, Citibank, Jefferies and Franklin Templeton, as well as major credit rating agencies such as Fitch, Moody's and S&P Global. These engagements took place on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank spring meetings held from April 13 to 18 in Washington. Mr Ahmad also held key meetings with the leadership of the IMF and World Bank Group. He informed the participants about the significant progress made by Pakistan in stabilising the economy prior to the Middle East conflict, saying that a prudent monetary and fiscal policy mix had helped reduce and stabilise inflation within the target range, while strengthening fiscal and external buffers.

The governor said that during the first nine months of the current fiscal year, inflation averaged 5.7 per cent, the external current account remained in surplus, and SBP's foreign exchange reserves rose to \$16.4 billion, mainly due to central bank purchases from the interbank market. He said reserves are expected to increase further to around \$18bn by June 2026, supported by continued SBP purchases and the realisation of official inflows, including fresh bilateral arrangements. The governor said improved macroeconomic stability has supported a gradual, sustainable and broad-based recovery in growth. Real GDP expanded by 3.8pc in the first half of FY26, compared to 1.8pc in the same period last year.

Cleric engr. Mirza survives attack

DNA

JHELUM: Religious cleric and lecturer Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza survived an attack by an unidentified person on Sunday, police said. The attacker was killed in retaliatory firing. Mirza, known for delivering religious speeches on social media, has over 3.1 million followers on his YouTube channel. He was also attacked earlier this year, and previously survived an assassination attempt in Jhelum in March 2021. The cleric was outside the Quran & Sunnat Research Academy where he delivers lectures when a man carrying a 9mm pistol arrived at the premises, lay down on the ground, and opened fire, Jhelum police spokesperson Kashif Kiani told. Jhelum Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Chaudhry Shafiq said police fired back in retaliation, killing the attacker on the spot. He added that the cleric remained safe and unhurt during the attack and is continuing his lectures at the academy. Kiani confirmed that a policeman on the scholar's security team was injured during the attack. The constable sustained a gunshot wound to his foot and was taken to Jhelum District Headquarters Hospital, where his condition was stated to be out of danger. SSP Shafiq that deployed security was active at the time of the attack and would be further beefed up. He added that assistance from the National Database & Registration Authority (Nadra) would be sought to identify the attacker. District Police Officer Jhelum said that an investigation is underway to identify the attacker and his suspected links to others involved in the attack.

As Iran war strains ties with Trump's US, UK looks to Europe

Starmer's admin preparing "reset" bill that will give ministers powers to align UK standards with EU market rules

LONDON: Britain's government is set to announce legislation next month to move the country closer to the European Union, as the Iran war sours the UK's so-called special relationship with the United States. President Donald Trump's unpredictability and stream of insults towards America's historic ally is adding impetus to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's bid to deepen ties with the 27-na-

tion bloc, a decade after Britons narrowly voted to leave the EU. Starmer's administration is preparing an EU "reset" bill that will give ministers powers to align UK standards with EU single market rules as they evolve – something called "dynamic alignment". King Charles III will announce the legislation on May 13 when he reads out Starmer's legislative plans for the coming months, a government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Starmer has repeatedly called for a deeper economic and security relationship with Europe since his Labour party won the 2024 general election, ousting the Conservatives, who had implemented the 2016 Brexit referendum. He has upped those calls in recent days, telling Dutch leader Rob Jetten on Tuesday that "the believed the partnership between the UK and the bloc needed to be fit for the challenges we were facing today". The EU is Britain's biggest trading partner, while the International Monetary Fund warned this week that the UK will be the advanced economy hardest hit by the Iran conflict. "Certainly Iran has made it [the reset] more prescient," said the UK official. – Agencies

Romania secures \$500 million for gas infrastructure

DNA

BUCHAREST: Romania has secured \$500 million for natural gas infrastructure, Energy Minister Bogdan Ivan said in a Facebook post after a meeting in Washington with US Energy Secretary Chris Wright, which was also attended by Finance Minister Alexandru Nazare. "In Washington, together with US Energy Secretary Chris Wright, we secured \$500 million for the development of the national natural gas transport infrastructure, through a World Bank Group - Ministry of Finance - Transgaz agreement. Together with my colleague, Finance


Minister Alexandru Nazare, we had a substantial dialogue at the US Department of Energy on how to transform the strong partnership we already have with the United States into as many real advantages as possible for Romania: investments, stability and lower gas and energy prices for Romanians. I thank my counterpart Chris Wright for the concrete support in the development of energy projects in Romania," Ivan wrote. A ministerial delegation led by Finance Minister Alexandru Nazare is participating this week in the spring meeting of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, in Washington DC, United States of America.

Pakistan to pitch Discos privatisation in global roadshows across key markets

Officials say strong domestic participation anticipated, with major groups likely to explore bidding opportunities

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is set to launch an international investor outreach campaign to attract bids for the privatisation of three major power distribution companies as part of a sweeping reforms. Under the plan, Pakistan will hold a series of roadshows in China, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, alongside domestic investor engagements to promote the upcoming privatisation of Islamabad Electric Supply Company (Iesco), Gujranwala Electric Power Company (Gepco) and Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (Fesco). Officials said the 45-day campaign is designed to showcase investment opportunities in Pakistan's power distribution sector and build momentum ahead of the formal bidding process. The roadshows will highlight restructuring plans, governance reforms and potential efficiency gains under private sector management. The move follows key approvals by the Privatisation Commission Board, which has already cleared the proposed transaction structure, pre-qualification criteria and restructuring framework for the three Discos. These recommendations have now been forwarded to the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) for final approval. Once endorsed by the CCoP, the government will issue Expressions of Interest (EOIs), formally opening the door for both local and international investors to participate in the bidding process. Officials indicated that strong domestic participation is also anticipated, with major business groups likely to explore bidding opportunities. These include prominent industrial and energy-linked conglomerates such as the Mansha Group, Abdullah Group, Tabba Group, Fatima Group, and Hubco, which officials noted may consider entering bids due to the profitability and



commercial potential of selected Discos. The inclusion of profitable distribution companies in the first phase of privatisation is seen as a strategic move aimed at attracting credible investors and ensuring competitive valuations. The privatisation drive is being overseen by Chairman Privatisation Commission Muhammad Ali, who has chaired key meetings approving the transaction framework. Officials familiar with the process said the upcoming roadshows will focus on presenting Pakistan's broader power sector reform agenda, including improved governance structures, operational restructuring and long-term sustainability measures aimed at reducing inefficiencies and financial losses in the distribution network. China, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia have been selected as priority destinations due to their strong appetite for infrastructure and energy investments, as well as longstanding economic and strategic ties with Pakistan. If completed, the privatisation of three DISCOs would represent one of the most significant structural transformations in Pakistan's power sector in recent years. Authorities believe the move could help improve service delivery, reduce circular debt pressures and enhance operational efficiency through private sector participation. Government representatives described the initiative as a "decisive step" towards modernising the electricity distribution system and attracting long-term foreign direct investment into a sector that has historically struggled with financial and operational inefficiencies. The process now awaits final approval from the CCoP, after which formal investor engagement through EOIs and international roadshows will begin. – DNA



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