



Islamabad POST

Thursday, March 06, 2025

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

Canadian FM: Trump's remarks on 51st state 'not a joke anymore'

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Armed forces are not a part of judiciary

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Smith ends ODI career after CT exit

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Breather for Shehbaz govt

PM thanks Trump for praising Pak role against terrorism

"We remain steadfast in our resolve and unwavering commitment to combating terrorism," says Premier Shehbaz

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has thanked US President Donald Trump for acknowledging and appreciating Pakistan's role and support in counter-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan. In a post on his X handle on Wednesday, he said Pakistan would continue to partner closely with the United States in securing regional peace and stability. His remarks came hours after the US president thanked the Pakistani government for apprehending the "top terrorist" involved in the 2021 Kabul airport bombing. The attack marked a tragic end to America's longest war in Afghanistan, claiming the lives of 13 US service members and around 170 Afghans who were desperately trying to escape Kabul after the Taliban takeover. Identifying the terrorist as Shareefullah, a top-tier operational commander of Daesh, the prime minister mentioned that the militant was an Afghanistan National and was apprehended in a successful operation conducted in the Pakistan-Afghan border region. As is well-known, the premier said, Pakistan has always played a critical role in counter-terrorism efforts aimed at denying safe havens to terrorists and militant groups the space to operate

Dar speaks Waltz Pak seeking broad-based ties with US

Ishaq Dar also welcomed Trump's decision to retrieve military equipment from Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held a telephonic conversation with US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz, sources disclosed. The Foreign Office spokesperson stated that the US advisor conveyed President Donald Trump's appreciation for Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism. Foreign Minister Dar congratulated Waltz on assuming office and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to strengthening its broad-based relations with the United States under the Trump administration. Reaffirming Pakistan's dedication to counterterrorism cooperation with the US, Dar also welcomed President Trump's decision to retrieve American military equipment left behind in Afghanistan. Both sides expressed their resolve to enhance collaboration in the fields of information technology, energy, and minerals. Additionally, they agreed to continue discussions on trade, investment, climate change, and health as part of a broader agenda in the coming days. — DNA

against any other country. "We remain steadfast in our resolve and unwavering commitment to combating terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations," the prime minister added. In this effort, he said, Pakistan has rendered great sacrifices, including the lives of over 80,000 of our brave soldiers and citizens.

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After Eid

PTI to join opp for anti-govt protest

The PTI leader also condemned the expansion of the federal cabinet, calling it a reward for 'turncoats'

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leader Senator Shibli Faraz has announced that the party, along with the opposition alliance, will protest against the government after Eidul Fitr. In a media briefing outside the court in Peshawar, Shibli Faraz stated that the alliance with the opposition is already in the works and that negotiations will be concluded in the coming days. "After Eid, we will all unite to protest against this government," he said. Shibli Faraz criticised the government's one-year tenure, calling it the "darkest period in Pakistan's history." He pointed out that the government passed several laws, including the PECA law and the 26th Amendment, not through democracy but by using force. "Nothing has been accomplished except wasting billions of rupees on advertisements," he added. The PTI leader also condemned the expansion of the federal cabinet, claiming it was a reward for 'turncoats' and 'miscreants.'

Continued on Page 06

Govt engaged in talks with IPPs to renegotiate terms

He clarified that the new net metering policy will apply to new installations rather than existing solar systems

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Awanis Ahmed Leghari has said the government is engaged in negotiations with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to renegotiate terms. Talking to media on Wednesday, he said the primary objective of these negotiations is to maintain the integrity of contracts while ensuring the best interests of Pakistan. The Minister for Power said the revision of solar net metering policy is

Continued on Page 06

Pak expected to pass first review of \$7bn IMF loan

IMF team is in Pakistan to meet with govt officials and assess their progress in meeting loan conditions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is expected to successfully complete the initial assessment of its \$7 billion loan programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as it has taken sufficient steps to boost revenue, according to officials and diplomats cited by a foreign news outlet. Islamabad secured the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) last summer to help claw its way out of an economic crisis. The programme has played a key role in stabilising Pakistan's economy and the government has said the country is on course for a long-term recovery. The News reported on Wednesday that the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government has approved a law to tax agricultural income, attempted to sell a stake in state-owned Pakistan International Airlines and taken steps to meet an ambitious tax target, and have presented these developments to the IMF, the people said, asking not to be identified

Continued on Page 06

Delay in audit of state institutions worries IMF

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: A delay in the audit process of state institutions has worried the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) Ajmal Gondal told a meeting of the Public Account Committee (PAC) on Wednesday. The development comes as discussions began this week between the IMF and Pakistan for the first biannual review of the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility to address governance and corruption vulnerabilities. While addressing today's meeting, AGP Gondal disclosed that the IMF had expressed its concerns over nearly 600,000 pending audit paras.

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ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Aleria and International Free Zones Authority UAE calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. — DNA

Government committed to completely eradicate polio

PM appreciated the cooperation of security forces during the polio campaign

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed the government's commitment to complete eradication of polio from the country. Chairing a meeting in Islamabad on Wednesday, he praised the timely identification of polio cases and the negative trend in these cases, acknowledging the efforts of all provincial authorities. Shehbaz Sharif emphasized that the complete eradication of polio from the country will only be possible through cooperation between the federal and provincial governments.

Continued on Page 06

UAE FM calls DPM/FM Dar

DPM/FM extended warm Ramadan wishes to FM, the UAE leadership

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar received a phone call from UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan who conveyed heartfelt Ramadan greetings to the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as the leadership and citizens of Pakistan. In return, DPM/FM extended warm Ramadan wishes to H.H. DPM/FM, the UAE leadership, and its solidarity with the people of the UAE. The two leaders also discussed the results of the recent visit by H.H. the Crown Prince of the UAE to Pakistan.

Continued on Page 06

All 16 terrorists killed

Afghan nationals involved in Bannu attack, says ISPR

Displaying unwavering courage and professional excellence, our valiant troops engaged the intruders with precision, eliminating all sixteen terrorists, including four suicide bombers. In this intense exchange of fire, five brave soldiers, after putting up a heroic resistance, embraced martyrdom in the line of duty

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Security forces successfully thwarted a cowardly terrorist attack on Bannu Cantonment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killing all 16 militants who attempted to intrude into the facility on March 4, according to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Wednesday. "In this intense exchange of fire, five brave soldiers, after putting up a heroic resistance, embraced martyrdom in the line of duty," the military's media wing added. However, in the exchange of fire, five soldiers were also martyred while putting up a heroic resistance, the military's media wing said. As many as thirteen civilians were also martyred and 32 others were injured as a result of destruction caused by suicide blasts during the clash.

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Gandapur urges dialogue to resolve Afghanistan issues

Vows to find a lasting solution to security issues in Kurram district

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has stressed that all issues with Afghanistan should be resolved through negotiations. He criticised the federal government for not responding to proposed Terms of References (TORs) for talks with Afghanistan. Addressing the

Continued on Page 06

US releases \$ 397 million for Pakistan F-16s fleet

The waivers meant those funds should have been allowed to be spent

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration released \$5.3 billion in previously frozen foreign aid, mostly for security and counter-narcotic programs, according to a list of exemptions reviewed by Reuters that included only limited humanitarian relief. The Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, focused on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, received 17 exemptions worth more than \$30.4 million, the list showed. Also released was \$397 million for a US-backed program in nuclear-armed Pakistan that a congressional aide said monitored Islamabad's use of US-made F-16 fighter jets to ensure they are

employed for counterterrorism operations and not against rival India. President Donald Trump ordered a 90-day pause on foreign aid shortly after taking office on January 20, halting funding for everything from programs that fight starvation and deadly diseases to providing shelters for millions of displaced people across the globe. The freeze sparked a scramble by US officials and humanitarian organizations for exemptions to keep programs going. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has said all foreign assistance must align with Trump's "America First" priorities, issued waivers in late January on military aid to Israel and Egypt, the top US allies in the Middle East, and for life-saving humanitarian aid, including food.

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Briefs

Explosion kills 4 in Khuzdar

Injured and dead bodies have been transferred to the nearby Naal hospital

DNA

KHUZDAR: At least four dead, five others injured explosion rocked tehsil Naal of Khuzdar, Baluchistan. According to police officials, the vehicle parked nearby the spot of explosion caught fire soon after the incident. The police officials further stated that the injured and dead bodies have been transferred to the nearby Naal hospital. Earlier today, Pakistan security forces thwarted terrorist attack on Bannu Cantt, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to military's public relations wing, Pakistan security forces killed 16 Khawarij militants including four suicide bombers to foil a cowardly attack on Bannu Cantt.

NZ thump SA to set up final with India

The highly-anticipated final is scheduled to be played in Dubai on March 9

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: Anchoring centuries by Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson, followed by a combined bowling effort, led New Zealand to a thumping 50-run victory over New Zealand in the second semi-final of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 here at the Gaddafi Stadium on Wednesday. Chasing a daunting 363-run target, South Africa's batting unit amassed 312/9 in their allotted overs despite David Miller's blitz at the backend. The Proteas got off to a shaky start to their innings as opening batter Ryan Rickelton (17) was dismissed by Matt Henry in just the fifth over with 20 runs on the board.

MARCH 2025

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Govt to build 500,000 houses in 5 years, pledges CM

During the meeting, the CM directed authorities to rehabilitate and improve 23 previous housing schemes developed by the Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency (PHATA) across 19 districts. She also instructed the immediate release of funds to accelerate these efforts

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that the Punjab government is determined to build 500,000 houses in five years for deserving individuals. The CM chaired a special meeting to review the 3-marla free plot scheme, here on Wednesday. The meeting focused on providing plots to deserving individuals along with financial support to help them construct their homes.

During the meeting, the CM directed authorities to rehabilitate and improve 23 previous housing schemes developed by the Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency (PHATA) across 19 districts. She also instructed the immediate release of funds to accelerate these efforts. Emphasizing the significance of housing for the underprivileged, CM Punjab expressed her deep commitment to the cause, stating, "Providing shelter to the homeless is a major concern. It brings me great joy to see homes be-

ing built under the 'Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar' programme." Earlier, DG PHATA briefed the Chief Minister on the progress of the housing initiative. He informed her that loan repayments under the program have begun, with a 100 percent repayment rate recorded so far. He further updated that 9,661 houses are nearing completion across Punjab under the 'Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar' program. CM Punjab directed PHATA authorities to ensure the completion of the target by March.

CDA attributed 40pc increase of water tanker price

ISLAMABAD: The Director General (DG) Water Management of Capital Development Authority (CDA), Sardar Khan Zimri, on Wednesday, attributed the increase in water tanker price from 300 to 500 was to cover the rising costs of vehicle maintenance and transportation expenses. Talking to media, he stated that the price adjustment was necessary to cover operational costs incurred during the distribution of water to households through the tanker. He estimated, "the total cost of approximately 4,000 rupees is incurred for each water tanker, covering everything from refilling to delivery," adding that a single tanker, which serves three households, is charged just 500 rupees per delivery. While on the other hand, the residents of Islamabad demanding a more efficient and streamlined water supply system, urging authorities to address longstanding distribution issues instead of imposing additional financial burdens. In reaction to that Zimri explained that the water supply opens every day to all CDA sectors at a specific time, while on the contrary, it is needed for the citizens to use water with extra care.—DNA

Large convoy of 225 supply vehicles reaches Parachinar

PESHAWAR: To cope with ongoing issues in Kurram District, where communication channels remain disrupted, the government continues its efforts to meet the needs of the local population. In this regard, a major supply convoy comprising 225 vehicles reached Parachinar, said the district administration on Wednesday. The convoy includes essential food supplies as well as petroleum products to support the region. Additionally, under the peace agreement, authorities are actively demolishing bunkers and filling connected trenches, with 272 bunkers already dismantled. The phased process of surrendering weapons and arms to the state has also begun. So far, over 100 miscreants have been taken into custody.—APP

WSSC lifts 4300 tonnes garbage during cleanliness drive

DNA

Dera Ismail Khan :Water and Sanitation Services Company DI Khan had removed over 4300 tonnes garbage under its special three-week long cleanliness campaign in the city. On the directions of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, the Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSC) DI Khan had launched the three-week special cleanliness drive under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister's "Awami Agenda" program with aim to make the city clean and healthy so that the citizens can offer prayers in a clean environment during the month of Ramadan. While talking to APP, Chairman of the WSSC board of Directors Naimat Ullah Khan said that the purpose of the cleanliness drive was to create a sense

of responsibility among citizens to keep their environment and surroundings neat and clean. He said that during the cleanliness drive 16 km major drains and 25 km minor drains were cleaned, while over 4300 tonnes of garbage were removed from the city. Chairman expressed his satisfaction on the performance of the staff and sanitary workers and said that all the available resources will be utilized to provide best sanitation services to the citizens of DI Khan. Chairman said the WSSC-DI Khan has practically proved its claims through hard work and performance, which is highly commendable. He added that besides this achievement, responsibility has come to further improve operational activities and work with full devotion and dedication. The

Company's Supervisor Abdur Rehman Saddozai said that main objective of this campaign is to improve the quality of sanitation across the city and to highlight the awareness of environmental protection among the people. During the cleanliness drive, special cleaning arrangements have also been made by the WSSC in public places, markets, and other important areas. Apart from this, seminars, walks, and other events were also being organized as part of the campaign to create public awareness. The local people have also actively participated in this campaign and are playing their role in the cleaning work. He appealed to the citizens not to throw garbage in drains but it should be placed in designated places so that it could be disposed off easily.

Commissioner reviews food prices in Sahulat Bazaar

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi, Engr Aamir Khattak on Wednesday visited Ramadan Sahulat bazaar set up in Allama Iqbal Park Double Road, where he reviewed the prices, availability and quality of essential commodities. According to the details, the Commissioner also conversed with customers, inquiring about the facilities provided in the Bazaar. Additional Deputy Commissioner General gave a briefing on the current and required stock of commodities, saying that efforts were being made by the administration to provide quality and affordable items.—APP

NBF's museum showcases Pakistan's thriving literary heritage

ISLAMABAD: NBF Book Museum emerged as a beacon of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage, showcasing the nation's most revered literary and intellectual treasures. Since its inception in 2010 and subsequent renovation in 2013, the museum had become a beloved destination for bibliophiles, students, and literary enthusiasts who celebrated Pakistan's vibrant reading culture. With its diverse collection of ancient manuscripts, rare books, and statues of prominent national literary figures, the museum once afforded visitors an engaging and insightful experience. Quranic manuscripts and translations in various languages were placed in the museum, Books authored by renowned Sufi saints, poets, and literary figures. The museum's distinctive features included Book Tree and Book Truck, further capture the attention of visitors. Talking to APP, Managing Director of NBF, Murad Ali Mohmand, highlighted the museum's significance, stating, "This is a unique book museum where visitors can explore ancient Quranic manuscripts, historical literature, and the cultural essence of all four provinces, presented in regional languages. Statues of national heroes and other rare items have been preserved in their original form." He revealed that Quranic manuscripts at the museum were crafted using wood, leather, and cotton, reflecting the craftsmanship of ancient times. "A dedicated corner showcases the heritage of Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, and Taxila, featuring thousand-year-old written scripts that predate the invention of print," he added. Moreover, the celebrated literary figure Mirza Ghalib, along with an intricate depiction of his haveli in Gali Qasim Jaan, Ballimaran in old Delhi, Pakistan's national heroes, with statues and rare photographs of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as well as exclusive publications detailing his life and leadership. Literary icons such as Allama Iqbal, Saadat Hasan Manto, Hafeez Jalandhari, and Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi statues were also placed in the museum, Qasmi's personal belongings, including his mug, glass, pen, and waistcoat—generously donated by his family—were displayed as a tribute to his literary contributions. "One of the museum's most interactive features is the Book Tree, where visitors leave handwritten messages during various NBF events," he told. "This unique initiative reflects the museum's role in promoting a love, peace for literature and intellectual engagement," he shared. According to the MD NBF, the museum had welcomed frequent visits from CSP officers, as well as students and faculty members from educational institutions across Pakistan, who appreciated its beautifully curated environment. "We aim to send a message of peace through this book museum," he added. Visitors had also expressed deep appreciation for the museum's literary ambiance.—APP

PNS ASLAT participates in Komodo 25 in Indonesia



DNA

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan Navy Ship ASLAT participated in 5th edition of the Multinational Naval Exercise KOMODO-25, organized by Indonesian Navy in Bali, Indonesia.

Themed 'Maritime Partnership for Peace and Stability', the exercise brought together navies from approximately 38 countries to enhance maritime cooperation and strengthen regional security. PNS ASLAT is currently on an Overseas Deployment (OSD). The ship's ac-

tive participation in Exercise KOMODO-25 underscores Pakistan Navy's commitment to international maritime collaboration and its role in promoting peace, security, and stability in the region. The exercise commenced with a grand Fleet Review, where PNS ASLAT,

alongside other warships, helicopters, and aircraft from participating nations, showcased naval capabilities and demonstrated interoperability. Prior to the exercise, PNS ASLAT visited Colombo, Sri Lanka. During the port call, the Commanding Officer of PNS ASLAT called on the Commander of Western Naval Area and other senior military officials. Discussions focused on matters of mutual interest, reaffirming the commitment to strengthening bilateral ties in all spheres. The Commanding Officer also conveyed good wishes of Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, to the people of Sri Lanka in general and the Sri Lankan Navy in particular. Pakistan Navy ships are regularly deployed under the Regional Maritime Security Patrols (RMSP) to fulfill international obligations for maritime security, ensure freedom of navigation on the high seas, and safeguard global commons. The visit of PNS ASLAT to Sri Lanka and Indonesia will significantly contribute to enhancing naval collaboration between the friendly nations.



KHARIAN: Director Dunya Consultant Mandi Bahauddin Chaudhry Shahzeb Munawar presenting gift to President Kharian Bar Association Chaudhry Mehboob Dhola along with his team at MoU signing ceremony between Dunya Consultant Mandi Bahauddin and Kharian Bar Association.

PFA discards 300 sachet banned gutka

MULTAN: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has intensified its inspection drive across food points during Ramadan to ensure availability of safe and hygienic food. Under the leadership of Director Operations Zubair Ijaz, the PFA conducted surprise inspections at renowned restaurants, fat rendering units, and various other food establishments. During the crackdown, authorities confiscated 300 sachets of banned gutka, 50 liters of substandard oil, 20 kg of expired bakery items, and 10-kg of expired turmeric powder, all of which were immediately discarded. As part of its enforcement measures, the PFA imposed fine Rs 345,000 on eight food business owners for violating food safety regulations. Additionally, a fat rendering unit was sealed in Industrial Estate due to the absence of traceability records for processed oil, and 2,200 liters of oil were seized. A bakery on Suraj Kund road was fined Rs. 100,000 for poor hygiene, including the presence of expired food items and pest infestation in the processing area. A fat rendering unit at Chungi No 14 was fined Rs. 30,000 for operating without a food license and producing oil under unhygienic conditions. A renowned restaurant on Abdali Road was penalized Rs. 80,000 for storing food in dirty freezers and using open, unprotected spices. A famous restaurant in Gulgasht was fined Rs 50,000 for using rancid oil in food preparation.—APP

Pakistan: A hidden gem of dates world

DNA

PESHAWAR: Sajjad Khan, a 42-year-old dates vendor from Nowshera District, is finding himself all smiles this Ramadan. A once struggling small business owner, Sajjad is now making the most of the lucrative dates market in Peshawar, where the fruit is flying off the shelves faster than he can stock it. Assisted by his two sons at the Pabbi fruit market, Sajjad's stall is busier than ever, with customers lining up to buy dates before Iftar. "The demand for dates this year has been overwhelming despite their high prices," said Sajjad, as he carefully measured out Dhaki and Punjor dates for customers. He added that these

local varieties have seen a surge in popularity due to their exceptional taste and energy-boosting properties. The fact that these dates are more affordable than international varieties like Ajwa or Iranian dates has only added to their appeal. According to Fazal Wahab Khan, Director of Agriculture Research in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan is the fifth-largest producer of dates globally, after Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan's fertile land and favorable climate have made it an ideal location for dates cultivation, with the regions of DI Khan, Kech, and Panjgur producing some of the finest varieties. "Approximately 60 types of dates are produced in Balochistan alone," said Wa-

hab Khan, explaining that Dhaki dates from DI Khan are especially sought after for their unique flavor. Pakistan currently produces between 550,000 and 650,000 metric tons of dates annually, and with the right financial incentives for farmers, this production could easily increase. Pakistan's dates aren't just popular in local markets—they are making waves in the Gulf states as well. Due to their affordability and distinctive taste, Pakistani dates are quickly becoming a favorite among international buyers. "Demand from the Gulf has increased significantly," Wahab Khan added. While the fruit's popularity is boosting local businesses like Sajjad's, its health benefits are also a key factor in its demand during Ramadan.

Law ministry extends Intl coop for legal reforms

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Over the past year, the Ministry of Law and Justice has actively advanced international legal cooperation, anti-corruption efforts, and rule of law through high-level engagements. As per the official document, the law minister met with justice ministers and officials from Qatar, Belarus, Iran, and ambassadors from Turkey, Japan, EU, US, Australia, Azerbaijan, Sweden, and the UN, discussing legal reforms, governance, and human rights. He also led Pakistan's dele-

gation at the OIC Anti-Corruption Ministerial Meeting in Doha and addressed the SCO Ministers of Justice Meeting, reaffirming regional legal cooperation. The ministry signed MoUs with the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) to educate lawyers on competition law and with SCBA and the Housing Ministry for lawyer welfare. Engaged with the Implementation Minority Rights Forum (IMRF) & Christian Lawyers Association (CLA) on minority rights protection. Similarly, it also signed MoUs with the CCP to educate lawyers on compe-

tion law and with SCBA and the Housing Ministry for lawyer welfare. Engaged with the Implementation Minority Rights Forum (IMRF). The lawyers have consistently praised the government's legal initiatives, recognizing them as pivotal in strengthening the rule of law, enhancing judicial efficiency, and promoting equitable access to justice. Following the successful resolution of cases under the Hague Convention on Child Abduction, the U.S. Embassy awarded certificates of appreciation to the Law Ministry for its constant hard work and dedication.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

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

Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
Marriott.....051- 2826121
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122
& Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
CAA.....9281092



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



Departments

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Ahsan calls for private sector-led growth to strengthen economy

Ahsan Iqbal highlighted that Pakistan was on the brink of a major breakthrough in tourism and hospitality, with its landscapes and heritage sites gaining global recognition

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday emphasized that Pakistan's economic future depended on a shift towards private sector-led growth and a nationwide focus on skill development. Addressing the COTHM Global Convocation here, he said Pakistan must prepare its workforce to meet the demands of a changing global economy and that the private sector must play a central role in driving investment, business expansion, and economic progress. The minister said that no country has achieved sustained growth without the active involvement of the private sector and a skilled workforce. He said Pakistan's economic challenges required a fresh approach where the government facilitates businesses, encourages investment, and equips young professionals with modern



skills. He pointed out that while Pakistan has immense potential, it needed structured reforms in education and industry to compete with economies such as Malaysia, Thailand and India. Ahsan Iqbal highlighted that Pakistan was on the brink of a major breakthrough

in tourism and hospitality, with its landscapes and heritage sites gaining global recognition. He said despite progress, Pakistan has yet to fully capitalize on this potential due to gaps in infrastructure and skilled human resources. He said Pakistan's journey from

a security-challenged country to a growing tourist destination was made possible by the sacrifices of the armed forces, but the next phase of development requires strategic investments in human capital and digital connectivity. He said Uraan Pakistan initiative

provided a roadmap for Pakistan's economic takeoff, aiming to transform the country into a \$3trillion economy by 2047. He said this initiative was focused on strengthening key sectors, promoting innovation, and ensuring that Pakistan's youth are equipped to compete in international markets. He said a strong emphasis was being placed on technical and vocational training, IT education, digital skills, and apprenticeship programs to create employment opportunities and bridge the skills gap. The minister said Pakistanis were already excelling in the global hospitality and service industries, but there was a need to expand training programs, integrate modern technologies, and establish stronger industry-academia partnerships. He said Pakistan's ability to grow economically depended on national unity and a clear economic vision. He said Pakistan, as a nuclear nation with strategic importance, must now shift its focus towards becoming an economic power.

Pakistan emerging as global tech hub

Broadband penetration surged by 5%, with over 139 million subscribers benefiting from enhanced connectivity. Policies supporting AI, cloud computing, and digital entrepreneurship are transforming the landscape, empowering startups and freelancers

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is rapidly transforming into a global tech hub, driven by record-breaking IT exports, policy-driven innovation, and a thriving digital workforce over the past year. The government's commitment to digital advancement aims to create a more connected, secure, and innovative future for the country. The Ministry of IT and Telecom remains dedicated to positioning Pakistan as a leading digital economy by fostering innovation, expanding connectivity, and ensuring universal access to telecom services. According to official documents, "These efforts are creating a sustainable digital ecosystem, making Pakistan a rising tech hub." Over the past

year, Pakistan's IT and telecom sector has witnessed remarkable progress, fueled by government initiatives promoting digitalization and innovation. Key achievements during the one year of the government included Pakistan's tech industry earned a record \$3.223 billion in FY 2023-24, reflecting a 24% increase from the previous year. Broadband penetration surged by 5%, with over 139 million subscribers benefiting from enhanced connectivity. Policies supporting AI, cloud computing, and digital entrepreneurship are transforming the landscape, empowering startups and freelancers. The Digital Economy Enhancement Project (DEEP) drives digital infrastructure

expansion, boosts IT exports, and enhances digital skills. Pakistan has made significant strides in e-governance, cybersecurity, and digital services, further solidifying its position in the global digital landscape. Due to efforts of the government, Pakistan now ranks in Tier 1 of the Global Cybersecurity Index and has improved its standing in the UN E-Government Development Index. The widespread adoption of e-office solutions has reduced decision-making time by 70%, streamlining governance. The launch of the Hajj App and One Patient One ID system has enhanced public service efficiency. Over 600,000 individuals have been trained under DigiSkills.pk, equipping the

workforce with essential digital expertise. More than 166 startups have emerged, generating over 5,000 jobs and attracting Rs. 260 million in investments. The NGIRI program has funded 1,281 projects, driving academic innovation and technological advancements. Over 1,500 certifications were awarded in AI, cybersecurity, and cloud computing, boosting employability. Pakistan is gearing up for 5G with a scheduled spectrum auction and the implementation of the National Fiberization Policy. Other telecom advancements included: Broadband Expansion: The OFC program has provided 4.1 million people with improved connectivity. Regulatory Improvements: -DNA

RCB to start surveillance on encroachment

RAWALPINDI: After clearing the encroachments from the main bazaars, the authorities in Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) have decided to launch a continuous follow up mechanism. A surveillance team will be deployed in the bazaars to stop repeated encroachments. The decision has been taken to maintain smooth mechanized and pedestrian flow. The RCB's enforcement cell launched a comprehensive anti-encroachment operation during which a number of main roads and bazaars were cleared of encroachments. The enforcement personnel have destroyed a large number of sheds, concrete encroachments, signboards etc in Tench Bhatta, Range Road, Mughalabad, Kamalabad, Peoples Colony and other areas. "This clean up operation needs a strong follow up to have long lasting effects", said Arshad Khan, Add'l CEO RCB while talking to APP here on Wednesday. Arshad Khan said that additional deployment was being done in the areas, cleared by RCB. He further informed that the personnel would remain in the bazaars hideously to monitor the repetition of encroaching and to report to the RCB's control room for necessary action. "The moving carts and street vendors add to the irregular crowd in the bazaars, the deployment will specially focus on parking and street vending issues", he said. The Additional CEO also informed that the crowd management in Cantt areas was already underway in which issues of congestion, encroachment and parking were being resolved. "There were some complaints from the citizens regarding overcharging of parking fees, which have been addressed", Arshad said adding that no one would be allowed for overcharging of parking fees. On the other hand, the anti-encroachment operation is also continued. The enforcement personnel visited Range Road on Wednesday in which extravagantly contracted sheds and other encroachments were destroyed. -DNA

Law ministry proposes projects of linking 13 jails with courts

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Law and Justice was informed on Tuesday that the ministry has proposed projects for linking 13 major jails in Pakistan to courts. The Senate body met here under the chairmanship of lawmaker Muhammad Bashir Virk here while the other members, Minister of Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar and officials from ministry of law and justice were also in attendance. During the meeting, the law ministry also withdrew the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Amendment Bill, which proposed to increase the NAB remand from 14 days to 40 days. The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Law approved 5 projects. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said that there is a joint session of Parliament on Monday, after which there will be a 10-day session. -APP

Services' export up by 6.16% in Jul-Jan

ISLAMABAD: The export of various services witnessed 6.16 percent increase during the first seven months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding months of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. According to the PBS data, Pakistan earned \$4.748 billion from the export of services during July-January 2024-25 as compared to services' export of \$4.472 billion in July-January 2023-24. The services' imports also increased by 9.15 percent during the months under review and were recorded at \$6.678 billion as compared to the imports of \$6.118 billion in July-January 2023-24. Based on the figures, the services' trade deficit surged by 17.27 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of previous year. The services trade deficit was recorded at \$1.929 billion against the deficit of \$1.645 billion in last year. -APP

Ramazan fervor grips mosques, markets

ISLAMABAD: As Ramazan celebrations continue across the country, Pakistanis remain steadfast in their devotion and prayer, with mosques filled with faithful for saying taraweeh prayers and communities coming together to break their fasts and share in the blessings of the holy month, fostering a spirit of togetherness. According to a report aired on PTV News, a resident of Karachi, Ayesha said "I love the sense of community that Ramazan brings, everyone comes together to share iftar and prayers. "The mosques are so beautifully lit up at night, it's a breathtaking sight", in Islamabad, another resident commented. The report added that the country's mosques and religious institutions are witnessing a significant increase in attendance, with millions of Pakistanis participating in Ramazan-related activities and events. Special iftar dinners are also a highlight of the month, with families gathering at home to share traditional dishes. "We have a big iftar dinner at our house every year, with all our relatives and friends," said a resident of Quetta. "It is a wonderful way to break our fast and spend time together." Many restaurants also offer special iftar deals and buffets, which are popular among citizens. "We go to our favorite restaurant every year for iftar, they have an amazing spread of food," said a resident of Lahore. Mosques are also hosting special iftar dinners, which are attended by hundreds of people. "Our mosque has a big iftar dinner every night, it is a wonderful way to bring the community together," said a resident of Islamabad. In all major cities, shops and markets are preparing special iftar and sehri food to attract citizens. In Karachi Tariq Road and Gulshan-e-Iqbal are offering a wide range of traditional iftar items like samosas, pakoras and kebabs. In Lahore, the famous food street is buzzing with activity, with restaurants and food stalls offering special iftar deals and discounts. In Islamabad, the superstores on Jinnah Avenue are stocked with a variety of sehri and iftar items, including dates, fruits and traditional desserts. In Peshawar, the markets on Chowk Yadgar are filled with the aroma of traditional iftar items like kebabs, haleem, and falooda. In Quetta, the shops on Shahrah-e-Iqbal are offering special iftar deals on traditional Balochi dishes like sambosas, kachoris and dumplings. Around mosques, vendors are selling various prayer-related items, including prayer mats, rozaries (Tasbeeh) and Islamic books. "I come to the mosque every year to buy a new prayer mat and some rozaries for my family," said a resident of Islamabad. Kids are also excitedly observing their first fasts, known as "Roza Kushai". -DNA

Atif urges for giving legitimate rights to Diamer-Bhasha Dam victims

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries Atif Iqbal Sheikh has said that legitimate rights should be given to the victims of Diamer Bhasha Dams so that the month-long protest can end peacefully. The MoU signed by the victims with the federal and provincial governments should be implemented. So far some people have received compensation in this regard and the demands of

the remaining people should also be accepted. We will also submit our proposal at the federation level in our budget and we will also discuss the issues and proposals related to Bhasha Dam and Bunji Dam. He expressed these views while speaking at an important meeting held at FPCCI Former Vice President FPC-Cl and FPCCI Convener (ICT & GB) on CPEC Special Economic Zone Johar Ali Rakhi (T.I) said that the agreement reached between the victims and the government people

is now going to be completed with the construction of the dam which will add 4500 megawatts of electricity to the system, but the victims have not yet been compensated, which is why they are protesting. Apart from this, the surveys of another Bunji Dam which can generate 7100 megawatts of electricity are in the final stages and this dam comes on the CPEC route where millions of dollars have been allocated for the energy sector. We demand that if the government pays attention to these two dams, the ongoing energy crisis in the country can end.

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By MONAL

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Briefs

Wah Medical College convocation held

WAH CANTT: Wah Medical College, in collaboration with the National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS), has hosted the convocation ceremony for the MBBS session 2020-2024. The prestigious event was held at Wah Medical College, marking a significant milestone in the academic journey of the graduating doctors. Lt Gen Arshad Naseem, HI(M), Surgeon General/Director General, Medical Services (Inter Services) graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Maj Gen Muhammad Kashif Azad, HI(M), Director General (Commercial), POF was the Guest of Honour. Lt Gen Wasim Alamgir, HI(M), (Retd), Vice Chancellor of NUMS, conferred degrees upon the graduates, recognizing them as the future of Pakistan's healthcare system. Maj Gen Abdul Khaliq Naveed, HI(M), (Retd), Principal Wah Medical College shared key milestones in academic excellence, research advancements, faculty development, and infrastructure improvements. Lt Gen Arshad Naseem, HI(M), while addressing the graduating doctors and guests, emphasized the importance of professionalism, research, and patient-centred care in the future medical careers of the graduating doctors. Convocation ceremony was attended by senior faculty members, parents and distinguished guests who celebrated the achievements of the graduates. —APP

IG reviews security at mosques

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police Inspector General (IG) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi visited various areas of the city on Wednesday to review security arrangements at mosques and imambargahs during Fajr prayers. An official told APP that IG Rizvi encouraged officers performing alert duty to ensure the safety of citizens and appreciated their dedication. IG Rizvi said Islamabad Police remain committed to their duty at all times, prioritizing the safety of citizens and ensuring a prompt response to every call. "Protecting places of worship and worshippers is our sacred duty," IG Rizvi emphasized, urging all officers to stay in the field and perform their duties with devotion. IG Rizvi further warned that negligence in duty would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Newly appointed cabinet members call on PM

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday held separate meetings with the newly appointed Ministers of State Abdul Rehman Kanju, Talal Chaudhry and Special Assistant Haroon Akhtar. During the meetings, the prime minister felicitated them on joining the federal cabinet and extended his best wishes for their new responsibilities. The cabinet members thanked the prime minister for his trust and support. —APP

Pakistan successfully hosted multilateral moots, says MOFA

Pakistan actively promoted its positive global image to boost tourism, foster people-to-people connections, and enhance trade and business relations, a report of MOFA highlighted the incumbent government's one-year performance

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), last year, focused on revitalizing diplomatic ties and expanding engagement globally as the high-level visits and the successful hosting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Council of Heads of Government in Islamabad highlighted these efforts. On the economic front, Pakistan attracted investments through the Special Investment Facilitation Council, with active support from its missions and consulates. "Pakistan remains committed to safeguarding national security and geostrategic interests, including the peaceful resolution of Jammu & Kashmir in line with UNSC resolutions. The country prioritizes strengthening economic and commercial ties with the international community while ensuring the welfare of the Pakistani diaspora and optimizing resources to facilitate them," it was added. Additionally, Pakistan actively promoted its positive global image to boost tourism, foster people-to-people connections, and enhance trade and business relations, a report of MOFA highlighted

the incumbent government's one-year performance. Throughout 2024, Pakistan actively worked to strengthen diplomatic ties worldwide while continuing its political and diplomatic support for the Jammu & Kashmir and Palestine causes at international forums, particularly the UN. Pakistan extended its strong political, moral and diplomatic support for the people of Jammu & Kashmir at all relevant international forums, especially the UN and the OIC. The prime minister highlighted the Jammu and Kashmir issue in his address before the United Nations General Assembly. The deputy prime minister/foreign minister emphasized Pakistan's principled position on Jammu and Kashmir at the 15th OIC Summit held in Banjul, Gambia which adopted comprehensive communique including reaffirming support for the just settlement of the Jammu & Kashmir dispute as per the UNSC resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people. "Pakistan has consistently provided unwavering diplomatic support to the Palestinian cause, denouncing Israeli aggression and advocating for Palestinian rights at international platforms such as the UN, OIC, and D-8," it said. The prime

minister attended the Arab-OIC Summit on Palestine in Riyadh, while the deputy prime minister/foreign minister reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment at the 15th OIC Summit in Banjul and the Extraordinary Meeting of the D-8 Council of Foreign Ministers. Pakistan also participated in the high-level conference on Gaza in Jordan and presented its oral statement at the ICJ regarding Israel's policies in occupied Palestinian territories. Since the start of the Gaza conflict, Pakistan had called for an immediate ceasefire, unobstructed humanitarian aid, and a lasting resolution based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as Palestine's capital. The prime minister conducted official visits to multiple countries, including China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, to enhance political, economic, and investment relations. "Pakistan's presence at global summits such as the UNGA, COP29, and the SCO Council of Heads of Government reflected its commitment to international cooperation," the report said. The country also secured a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2025-2026 and led the adoption of a UN resolution against

Islamophobia. "In trade and economic diplomacy, Pakistan expanded its partnerships with key allies, increasing exports, securing foreign investments, and fostering bilateral agreements with regional and global powers. These diplomatic achievements underscore Pakistan's proactive role in global affairs, multilateral cooperation, and economic engagement," it was further added. During the Kyrgyzstan student crisis, the Pakistan Embassy provided 24/7 assistance, coordinated with local authorities, and facilitated evacuations. Following boat tragedies off Greece, Morocco, and Libya, Pakistani missions identified victims and survivors, while the Crisis Management Unit kept families informed. MoFA launched an online Apostille certificate portal to streamline document legalization. A two-day symposium, "From Gandhara to the World" (May 28-29, 2024), gathered global religious leaders and scholars to promote Buddhist heritage, cultural collaboration, and tourism. Over 50 cultural events worldwide, including fashion shows, Qawwali performances, and Pakistan nights, promoted Pakistan's image.

Reduction in inflation rate to nine-year low hailed

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Wednesday that the inflation rate in Pakistan has dropped to a nine-year low, which is a credit to the current government. He said that last month, the inflation rate was 1.5 percent, compared to 2.4 percent in January. Mian Zahid Hussain said that according to the official statistics, the inflation rate in urban areas was 24.9 percent in February last year, which has decreased significantly. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that although inflation in the country is at its lowest since September 2015, the people's financial condition is not what it was then. The business leader said that the trend of decreasing inflation is continuing, and soon, the State Bank is likely to reduce interest rates, which will positively impact the economic situation. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the government's indicators show a decrease in the rate of price increase. However, the decrease in inflation is insufficient because electricity bills are still out of the people's reach. He underlined that reducing electricity and gas prices is also necessary. The people's purchasing power has also been exhausted. They have been facing inflation and income decline for many years, so something should be done to relieve them. He said the Ramadan package of Rs 20 billion by the federal government and Rs 30 billion by the Punjab government is commendable. Despite the decrease in the trend of increasing prices of goods, people are deprived of the ability to buy necessities of life because they are stuck in a purchasing power crisis. He said that to increase the purchasing power of the masses, new employment opportunities must be created, and for this, business activities must be increased. Reducing electricity and gas tariffs and tax rates while increasing taxes and broadening the tax base is necessary to increase business activities.



ISLAMABAD: People buy fritters for iftar during the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan, in the Federal Capital.

"Caring Kitchen" initiative lights up Ramadan for hundreds in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As the first day of Ramadan dawned on March 2, a heartwarming initiative took root in Pakistan, bringing nourishment and hope to hundreds of families. The "Caring Kitchen" program, launched in the country, will provide daily Iftar meals to 400 individuals throughout the holy month. This initiative not only addresses food insecurity but also embodies the spirit of compassion and solidarity that defines Ramadan. This year's "Caring Kitchen" initiative is a continuation of efforts that began seven years ago. Saleem, one of the local coordinators of the program expressed his gratitude for the initiative's impact, stating, "I am proud to continue this tradition of service and to see the positive difference it makes in people's lives. It's more than just a meal; it's a reminder that they are not alone, and that their community cares for them." In addition to the meal services, the program extends its support to families facing medical challenges.

First air cargo route between Urumqi and Islamabad starts

ISLAMABAD: The first air cargo route between Urumqi in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Islamabad in Pakistan officially commenced operation, strengthening cross-border logistics between the two friendly nations. The maiden cargo flight departed from Urumqi Diwopu International Airport and landed in Islamabad approximately two hours and 40 minutes later. The route will operate two round-trip flights per week, with a maximum cargo capacity of 26 tons per trip, primarily supporting cross-border e-commerce and the transportation of high-value goods. With the opening of this route, SF Airlines' flights to cities in Pakistan have increased to 3, covering its capital Islamabad and largest city Karachi, and the second largest city Lahore. The operation of multiple international routes has broadened the air logistics channel for China-Pakistan economic and trade exchanges. Beyond doubt, the opening of this freight route is a milestone in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It will inject new impetus into bilateral economic and trade cooperation and enhance the stability of the regional industrial chain and supply chain. CPEC aims to develop into a complete and diversified network covering roads,

railways, fiber optic networks and air transport. As cross-border e-commerce has high requirements for logistics efficiency, this new route will further simplify trade processes as well as enhance logistics. "Fresh agricultural products are a vital category of Pakistan's exports to China. However, the country lacks an efficient cold chain logistics system, resulting in a relative high loss rate during long-distance transportation. A more convenient logistics network enables Pakistan's fresh agricultural products to be shipped to China faster and reduce losses," noted Ren Haiping, Deputy Head of Department of Strategic Research, China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said in an interview with Gwadar Pro, "thus further deepening bilateral trade ties." "With developed border trade, Xinjiang is an important hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and Russia. Improving Xinjiang's logistics hub function will further drive the Belt and Road economic cooperation and efficiently promote regional coordinated development," Ren added. Trade between China and Pakistan in 2024 hit USD 23.06 billion, an 11.1 percent increase year-on-year, according to data from the General Administration of Customs.—DNA

Rupee sheds 10 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 10 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs279.86 against the previous day's closing of Rs279.76.—APP



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Mobilink Bank recognized among 'Top 10 Inclusive Companies'

From empowering employees to supporting customers and championing women across Pakistan, we are driving sustainable economic transformation."

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's leading digital microfinance bank, Mobilink Bank, has been named one of the 'Top 10 Inclusive Companies of the Year' at the prestigious Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Benchmarks (GDEIB) Awards 2025. The Bank secured 14 out of 15 award categories, reflecting its commitment to global DEI best practices and its efforts to accelerate women's social and economic progress in Pakistan. This unprecedented success is

driven by the bank's transformative DEI initiatives, including the Women Inspirational Network (WIN), which promotes gender diversity and leadership development; Humqadam that builds an inclusive and accessible workforce for Persons with Disabilities; MobiCare, an Employee Assistance Program designed to support employees' mental, physical, financial, and workplace well-being; and MobilinkHER, a returnship program for females coming after a career break. Additionally, Mobilink Bank's Inheritance Calculator

has been launched to promote financial equity and women's empowerment by ensuring their rightful share in inheritance. Complementing these efforts, the Bank's equal opportunity and safe workplace policies guarantee fairness, respect, and growth opportunities for all employees. The bank has made significant strides in advancing diversity and inclusion, reducing its Gender Pay Gap from 11% in 2023 to 2% in 2024, increasing female hiring from 24% in 2023 to 26% in 2024, and enhancing overall diversity from 13.8%

to 16% during the same period. "These awards affirm our commitment to a society rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion," said Haaris Mahmood Chaudhary, President & CEO, Mobilink Bank. "As a future-ready Bank, we strive to create an environment where everyone—within our organization and beyond—can thrive and achieve their ambitions in today's digital world. From empowering employees to supporting customers and championing women across Pakistan, we are driving sustainable economic transformation."

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Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 05 Issue: 268

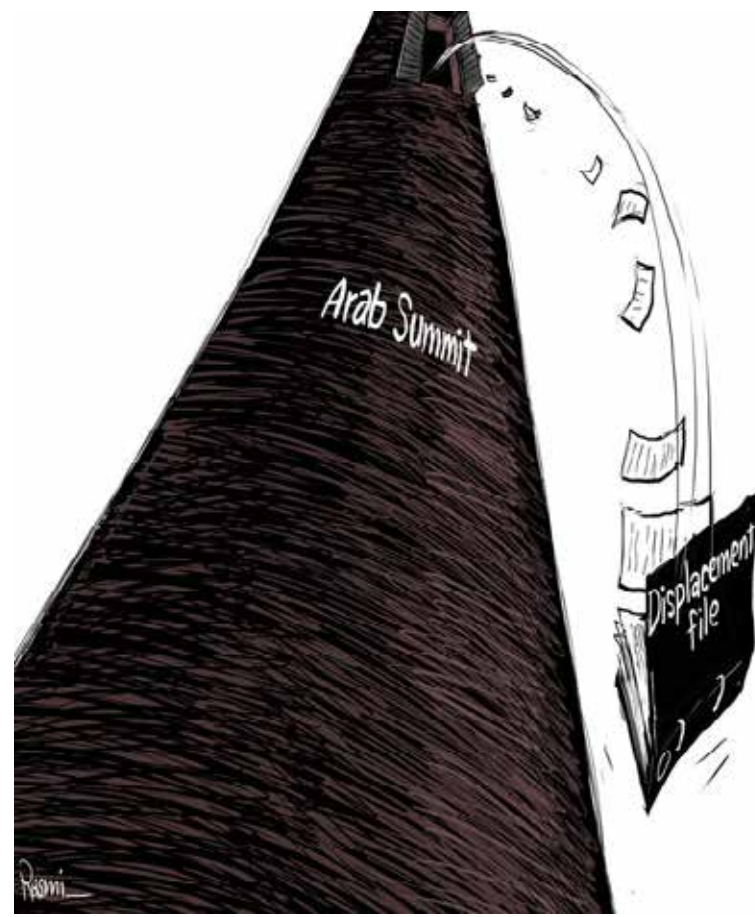
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Behind loud headlines

RECENTLY, some Western media outlets have fixated on a few key challenges within China's economy: the perceived fragility of the property sector, the weight of local government debt and the persistent issue of youth unemployment. But this narrow view obscures a broader and more complex picture – a story of remarkable resilience, ongoing economic transformation and significant potential. While the challenges are undeniable and demand careful attention, they do not define the entirety of China's economic landscape. The property market, while facing headwinds and undergoing a necessary period of adjustment, is not in a state of collapse. Rather, it is experiencing a managed transition. The Chinese government has shifted its focus from the previous era of speculative, rapid growth to a more sustainable model that emphasises stability and affordability. This transition, while challenging in the short term, is vital for fostering a healthier and more balanced property market in the long run. Data emerging this year provides encouraging indicators of a recovery trend. Proactive policy support from the central government, coupled with renewed market confidence, is contributing to a noticeable rebound in housing prices in major urban centres such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Goldman Sachs, citing these positive trends, expects China's housing prices to bottom out this year, and market confidence is gradually recovering. This evidence suggests the market is navigating out of its adjustment period. The issue of local government debt, while a legitimate concern in certain regions, must be viewed with a more nuanced perspective. It is crucial to recognise this is not a uniform problem across the entire nation. Many local governments are displaying effective fiscal management, and the central government has established robust mechanisms to provide targeted support. Furthermore, the debt burden should be contextualised within China's economic growth and capacity to generate revenue. The government's strategic focus on infrastructure development, particularly in less-developed regions, while contributing to local debt in the short term, is a critical investment in long-term economic potential. This investment creates jobs, improves connectivity and fosters economic growth, ultimately enhancing the ability of local governments to manage their debt effectively. Youth unemployment, a significant challenge faced by many nations globally, is being addressed in China through a comprehensive, multipronged approach. The government is investing in vocational training programmes, promoting entrepreneurship and working to create more job opportunities in emerging sectors such as technology and renewable energy. It is essential to acknowledge that millions of graduates successfully enter the workforce each year, contributing to China's dynamic economy. Data from last year reveals a stable, gently declining national urban surveyed unemployment rate, with notable growth in service-sector jobs and migrant worker employment. This shows the government's commitment to fostering a robust labour market. Claims that China's policy response to stimulate domestic demand is limited and ineffective are demonstrably inaccurate. Beyond targeted trade-in programmes for specific goods, the government is implementing a wide range of measures to boost consumer confidence, increase disposable income and promote rural revitalisation.



'Common home' with Russia

LET'S face it, Europe as a geopolitical concept is as shaky as an edifice on sand after America, under President Donald Trump, "abandoned Ukraine" and even became Europe's "enemy", to quote the Financial Times. With the Ukraine war marching into its fourth year, Trump spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a cordial phone call about ending the war. US and Russian officials held meetings in Saudi Arabia and Turkey – disregarding Europe and Ukraine in the process – to reestablish relations and discuss peace, on the apparent understanding that there would be no return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders, no Nato membership for Kyiv, and no American or Nato troops as part of any post-peace arrangement in Ukraine. Trump has refused to condemn Russia as an invader, instead berating Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for not having "the cards" to win the war in a shouting match at the White House, demanding foreclosure on Ukraine's rare earth assets to recoup the alleged war aid to the country. The US has now said it will pause all military aid to Ukraine "to ensure that it is contributing to a solution". European leaders have denounced Washington's U-turn and the drastic manner of its execution. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, for one, sided with Zelensky after his bitter encounter with Trump, praising him for being "fearless". European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas proclaimed "the free world needs a new leader". Crisis summits have taken place in Paris and London in an effort to form a united European front, with leaders vowing to continue aiding Kiev's war efforts and be part of the peace process, including dispatching European peacekeeping troops if needed after any armistice. Most observers are pessimistic, even defeatist, about Europe. Already in the shadow of a security threat from Russia, it has been caught off guard by Washington's brazen betrayal when it seemingly needs an ally more than ever. But this risks missing the big picture and underestimating Europe's pride as the cradle of modernity, its existential fear of economic impoverishment and determination to avoid a repeat of the calamity of war that ravaged the continent twice in the last century. Beneath the semblance of European impotence intertwined with moral grandstanding and the inevitable prostrations before Washington, serious politicians in Paris, Berlin and London are acutely aware of the perdition lurking ahead. Left alone, the continent will become fragmented, immiserated and marginalised before being reduced to a mere geographical concept. Among those politicians, French President Emmanuel Macron stands out, an indisputable champion of European "strategic autonomy", starting with his outcry over "the brain death of Nato" in 2019. In this column last March, I commented on Macron's controversial dare for Nato countries to send a "strategic surge" of troops to Ukraine. I observed that he "may have presented Washington with a checkmate", that a US failing to cope should let the Europeans "sort it out with the Russians", and "eventually Europe must stand up and be counted as an independent geopolitical player, with Russia (and even Britain) returning to the fold".

The future of world order

Joseph S. Nye Jr.

Empires themselves depended on both hard and soft power. China was held together by strong common norms, highly developed political institutions and mutual economic benefit. So was Rome, especially the Roman Republic. Post-Roman Europe had institutions and norms in the form of the papacy and dynastic monarchies, which meant that territories often changed governance through marriage and family alliances, regardless of the subject people's wishes. Wars were often motivated by dynastic considerations, though the 16th and 17th centuries brought wars born of religious fervor and geopolitical ambition, owing to the rise of Protestantism, divisions within the Roman Catholic Church and increased interstate competition

US President Donald Trump has cast serious doubts on the future of the postwar international order. In recent speeches and UN votes, his administration has sided with Russia, an aggressor that launched a war of conquest against its peaceful neighbor, Ukraine. The White House's policy of imposing tariffs on trading partners has raised questions about long-standing alliances and the future of the global trading system, while its withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organization has undercut cooperation on transnational threats. The prospect of a wholly disengaged, self-focused US has troubling implications for world order. It is easy to imagine Russia taking advantage of the situation to try to dominate Europe through the exercise or threat of force. Europe will have to show greater unity and provide for its own defense, even if a US backstop will remain important. Likewise, it is easy to imagine China asserting itself more in Asia, where it openly seeks dominance over its neighbors. Those neighbors will surely have taken note. In fact, all countries will be affected, because the relationships among states and other major transnational actors are interconnected. An international order rests on a stable distribution of power among states; norms that influence and legitimize conduct; and shared institutions. A given international order can evolve incrementally without leading to a clear paradigm shift. But if the preeminent power's domestic politics change too radically, all bets are off. Since relations among states naturally vary over time, order is a matter of degree. Before the modern state system, order was often imposed by force and conquest, taking the form of regional empires such as China and Rome (among many others). Variations in war and peace between powerful empires were more an issue of geography than of norms and institutions. Because they were

contiguous, Rome and Parthia (the area around modern-day Iran) sometimes fought, whereas Rome, China and the Mesoamerican empires did not. Empires themselves depended on both hard and soft power. China was held together by strong common norms, highly developed political institutions and mutual economic benefit. So was Rome, especially the Roman Republic. Post-Roman Europe had institutions and norms in the form of the papacy and dynastic monarchies, which meant that territories often changed governance through marriage and family alliances, regardless of the subject people's wishes. Wars were often motivated by dynastic considerations, though the 16th and 17th centuries brought wars born of religious fervor and geopolitical ambition, owing to the rise of Protestantism, divisions within the Roman Catholic Church and increased interstate competition. At the end of the 18th century, the French Revolution disrupted the monarchical norms and the traditional restraints that had long sustained the European balance of power. Although Napoleon's pursuit of empire ultimately failed after his retreat from Moscow, his armies swept away many territorial boundaries and created new states, leading to the first deliberate efforts to create a modern state system, at the 1815 Congress of Vienna. The post-Vienna "Concert of Europe" suffered a series of disruptions over the following decades, most notably in 1848, when nationalist revolutions swept the continent. Following these upheavals, Otto von Bismarck launched various wars to unite Germany, which assumed a powerful central position in the region, reflected in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. Through his alliance with Russia, Bismarck produced a stable order until Kaiser Wilhelm II fired him in 1890. Then came the First World War, which was followed by the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, whose failure set the

stage for the Second World War. The subsequent creation of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the precursor to the World Trade Organization) marked the most important institution-building episode of the 20th century. Since the US was the dominant player, the post-1945 era became known as the "American Century." The end of the Cold War in 1991 then produced a unipolar distribution of power, allowing for the creation or strengthening of institutions such as the WTO, the International Criminal Court and the Paris climate agreement. Even before Trump, some analysts believed that this American order was coming to an end. The 21st century has brought another shift in the distribution of power, usually described as the rise (or, more accurately, the recovery) of Asia. While Asia had accounted for the largest share of the world economy in 1800, it fell behind after the Industrial Revolution in the West. And like other regions, it suffered from the new imperialism that Western military and communications technologies had made possible. Now, Asia is returning to its status as the leading source of global economic output. But its recent gains have come more at the expense of Europe than the US. Rather than declining, the US still represents a quarter of global gross domestic product, as it did in the 1970s. While China has shrunk the US lead substantially, it has not surpassed the US economically, militarily or in terms of its alliances. If the international order is eroding, America's domestic politics are as much of a cause as China's rise. The question is whether we are entering a totally new period of American decline, or whether the second Trump administration's attacks on the American Century's institutions and alliances will prove to be another cyclical dip. We may not know until 2029.

• **Joseph S. Nye Jr., Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, is a former US assistant secretary of defense**

Architects of PIAs destiny

PAKISTAN International Airlines (PIA) has been a symbol of national pride and ambition, with its slogan, "Great People to Fly With," even receiving endorsement from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Despite its celebrated reputation, a mixture of triumphs and struggles marks the airline's history. PIA's "Golden Era" is often romanticized, but its dominance during the 1960s and 1970s was partially due to the lack of competition in the Asian market. While the airline played a pioneering role in aviation, its unique market positioning also influenced its success. Regardless of the challenges and controversies, PIA has left an undeniable impact on Pakistan's identity and aviation sector. PIA's success can be attributed to the individuals who shaped its legacy, from visionary leaders to skilled pilots and engineers. One of the most influential figures in the airline's history was Nur Khan. Born into a Pashtun family in Peshawar, he received his early education at Aitchison College and later graduated from the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun. His career began in 1942 with the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF), where he flew combat missions during World War II. After Pakistan's independence, he joined the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and quickly rose to prominence. Khan's first tenure as PIA's managing director (1959-1965) marked the airline's transformation into one of the most respected carriers globally. He expanded PIA's fleet, introduced new routes, and ushered in a period of unprecedented growth and innovation. In 1973, he was

again called to revive PIA, which was facing financial difficulties. Under his leadership, the airline introduced state-of-the-art aircraft, including the McDonnell Douglas DC-10 and Boeing 747, expanding its network and capacity. He also facilitated international partnerships, such as assisting in the establishment of Air Malta. His exceptional leadership and commitment to excellence helped solidify PIA's status as a regional aviation leader. Another significant figure in PIA's history is Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Umar Farooq, a distinguished aviation expert. Born in Lahore in 1955, he had a strong military and aviation background. After graduating from the PAF Academy, he served as a fighter pilot, operating aircraft like the F-6, F-16, and Mirage III. Transitioning to PIA in 2000, he quickly ascended the ranks, serving as a captain and later as Director of Flight Operations. His leadership played a crucial role in improving PIA's flight safety and efficiency. He was instrumental in training pilots and received multiple accolades, including the Sitara-i-Imtiaz. Arshad Malik, who served as PIA's CEO from 2019 to 2020, was another key figure in the airline's modern era. Holding a commercial pilot's license and extensive experience in international aviation, he introduced reforms to improve PIA's financial stability and operations. His tenure saw the induction of new aircraft, such as the Airbus A320neo, and the expansion of PIA's route network. However, despite his efforts, the airline continued to struggle with financial challenges and internal resistance. His legacy remains a mix of achievements and

difficulties in implementing necessary reforms. Captain Abdullah Baig was another notable figure in PIA's history. A highly skilled pilot, he was among the elite group of PIA pilots cleared for VVIP flights. His achievements included commanding the first PIA flight to enter Chinese airspace in 1963, marking a significant milestone for Pakistan's aviation sector. He also set commercial air route records with the Boeing 720B and contributed significantly to pilot training. His legacy continues through the Capt. Abdullah Baig Flight Training Wing in Karachi, which provides advanced training for pilots. Captain Shahzada Habibullah, a decorated pilot, further contributed to PIA's success. Born in 1945 in Peshawar, he started his career as a fighter pilot in the PAF before joining PIA in 1978. He flew aircraft like the Boeing 707, 720, and 747, gaining a reputation for exceptional flying skills and leadership. Captain Habibullah was one of the first Pakistani pilots to command the Boeing 747-300 and maintained an impeccable safety record. He also played a significant role in mentoring younger pilots, shaping the next generation of aviators. Throughout its history, PIA has been shaped by the contributions of these extraordinary individuals. From its early years of innovation and growth to its modern-day challenges, the airline remains a crucial part of Pakistan's national identity. While financial struggles and operational difficulties persist, PIA's legacy as a pioneer in the aviation industry endures. The dedication of its leaders, pilots, and staff continues to inspire efforts to restore its former glory.

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Fatima Khalid



Captain Abdullah Baig was another notable figure in PIA's history. A highly skilled pilot, he was among the elite group of PIA pilots cleared for VVIP flights. His achievements included commanding the first PIA flight to enter Chinese airspace in 1963, marking a significant milestone for Pakistan's aviation sector. He also set commercial air route records with...

Briefs

PSX turns bearish, loses 490 points

ISLAMABAD: The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 490.04 points, a negative change of 0.43 percent, closing at 112,253.76 points as compared to 112,743.80 points on the last trading day. A total of 263,963,740 shares were traded during the day as compared to 206,851,125 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs13.731 billion against Rs11.337 billion on the last trading day. As many as 431 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 165 of them recorded gains and 197 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 69 companies remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Pak International Bulk with 53,572,239 shares at Rs.9.58 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 23,567,256 shares at Rs.1.34 per share and Power Cement with 10,979,264 shares at Rs.10.94 per share.—APP

Gold prices increase by Rs.700 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs.700 and was sold at Rs 307,000 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs 306,300 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.601 to Rs.263,203 from Rs. 262,602 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up by Rs.551 to Rs.241,278 from Rs. 240,727. The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs.54 to Rs.3,369 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs.46 to Rs.2,888. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$5 to \$2,921 from \$2,916 whereas the prices of silver in international market increased by \$0.52 to \$32.32, the Association reported.—APP

HRC, IOM sign deal anti-human-trafficking project

RIYADH: The Saudi Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) signed an agreement to implement the third phase of the project aimed at enhancing mechanisms to combat human trafficking in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The agreement seeks to strengthen the existing partnership, build on progress made in previous phases, and address emerging challenges in the fight against human-trafficking crimes. The agreement includes a program to support human-trafficking victims, facilitate voluntary return and reintegration and develop tools to prevent potential exploitation in supply chains, as well as national capacity-building programs in this field. The agreement also seeks to enhance monitoring mechanisms and data collection, while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the joint victim assistance fund. President of Human Rights Commission and Chairwoman of National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, Dr. Hala bint Mazyed Altuwajri said the agreement strengthens national efforts that prioritize protection and support for victims. She highlighted the Kingdom's partnerships with international organizations to unify response efforts against human trafficking through a comprehensive approach. Altuwajri emphasized the multiple human-rights collaborations between UN bodies and Saudi Arabia, including combating human trafficking, demonstrating the leadership's commitment to cooperating with various international organizations to leverage best international practices. IOM Director-General Amy Pope commended the partnership between the organization and the HRC.—APP

Ktrade, Jazzcash partner to make stock trading accessible to people

By integrating KTrade into Pakistan's most widely used digital wallet, this partnership will bridge the financial literacy gap, encourage responsible investing, and support Pakistan's vision of expanding retail participation in capital markets

DNA

BARCELONA: KTrade, Pakistan's most popular and best-rated investment platform, has joined forces with JazzCash, the country's leading digital financial service, to democratize stock trading and investment for millions of Pakistanis. This landmark partnership was announced at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) with a formal signing by Ali Farid Khwaja, Chairman of KTrade, and Murtaza Ali, President of JazzCash, in the presence of Aamir Ibrahim, CEO of Jazz and Chairman of Mobilink Microfinance Bank. This collaboration is set to redefine stock market accessibility in Pakistan by integrating KTrade's seamless trading experience within the JazzCash app. With over 13 million active JazzCash users, this partnership removes key barriers to entry, allowing individuals to open stock trading accounts, deposit funds, trade stocks, and manage investment portfolios—all without a separate brokerage account. Currently, less than 0.15% of Pakistan's 240 million people actively invest in stocks, highlighting a significant opportunity to expand financial inclusion. With growing digital adoption and progressive regulatory support from the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), this initiative



is a game-changer in unlocking retail investment opportunities. Ali Farid Khwaja, Chairman of KTrade, commented: "At KTrade, our mission is to make investing simple, accessible, and re-

warding for everyone. Partnering with JazzCash enables us to bring stock trading to millions of Pakistanis, many of whom have never had access to retail investing before. This collaboration is a major

step toward financial empowerment, allowing individuals to grow their wealth effortlessly through a secure trading experience." By integrating KTrade into Pakistan's most widely used digital

wallet, this partnership will bridge the financial literacy gap, encourage responsible investing, and support Pakistan's vision of expanding retail participation in capital markets.

Deep concern for civilians in Gaza as aid crossings remain shut: UN

NATIONS: UN humanitarian officials warned Tuesday that the continued closure of key border crossings into Gaza is putting civilian lives at risk, just as they begin to recover from months of war, deprivation and hunger. Speaking to reporters at UN Headquarters in New York, Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said that the Kerem Shalom, Zikim and Erez crossings had remained closed for cargo for the third consecutive day, severely restricting the flow of humanitarian supplies into the devastated enclave. "The Israeli authorities have rejected our attempts to collect humanitarian supplies that crossed the Kerem Shalom border crossing before its closure," he said, citing the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Given the huge needs in Gaza, keeping the crossings closed will have devastating consequences," he added, underscoring that Member States and those with influence must use all available means to ensure the ceasefire holds. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), warned on Tuesday that Israel's decision to halt aid should be reversed. "Humanitarian aid must continue to flow at scale similar to what we have seen over the past six weeks when the ceasefire began. This brought respite and relief to people in need," he said in a post on the platform X. He noted that the vast majority of the people in Gaza rely on aid for their "sheer survival", adding that water, medical care and electricity were essential to complement basic food assistance. "Aid and these basic services are non-negotiable. They must never be used as weapons of war," Mr. Lazzarini stated. Despite the restrictions, UN agencies and humanitarian partners on the ground are working to sustain aid operations across the Gaza Strip, Dujarric said. On Monday, the dialysis unit at Al Rantisi Children's Hospital in Gaza City resumed services on Tuesday, alongside a 25-bed in-patient unit. Paediatric services also resumed at the Indonesian Hospital in North Gaza. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 29 child patients, along with 43 companions, were evacuated from Gaza to Jordan via Israel for specialized medical treatment. This marked the first WHO-supported medical evacuation to Jordan since the ceasefire began in January. Inside Gaza, WHO has also provided hygiene and sanitation supplies to thousands of women and girls, warning that the lack of access to clean water and sanitation could worsen mental health conditions for those who have been displaced. In the West Bank, Israeli military operations in Jenin have escalated, leading to more displacement and destruction, Mr. Dujarric reported. Israeli forces ordered residents in one part of Jenin city to evacuate their homes, displacing about 30 families "including at least three, who had been displaced previously," he said. He added that Israeli forces used bulldozers, damaging infrastructure and causing power outages, while intensified access and movement restrictions to and from the city were also observed.—DNA

Trump hails 'unstoppable' America in return to Congress

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump declared that the "American dream is unstoppable" Tuesday in an address to Congress met with Democratic hostility as he touted radical policies and hailed billionaire adviser Elon Musk. With Musk, the world's richest person, among those attending the primetime televised address, the 78-year-old Republican said after less than two months back in power he is "just getting started." "America is back," he declared. Almost every line got loud applause from Republican Party members, including on two occasions when Trump singled out Musk, who stood up to salute the Congress. But protests also began within minutes. One Democratic congressman, Al Green, was ordered ejected because he refused to stop heckling, claiming Trump has no mandate to dismantle healthcare programs, and shaking his walking stick at the president. Other Democrats silently held up placards including "False" and "Musk steals" and "That's a lie!" The president hailed his first six weeks, vowing to press on with his polarizing bid to reshape the US government and end the Ukraine war — whatever the cost. However, in what often sounded more like a campaign speech than an address to the whole nation, he made no attempt to reach out to opponents. He got big cheers from supporters on pronouncing that his culture war on diversity programs and transgender rights meant "our country will be woke no longer." Trump also set out his vision on the economy — even as the trade war he launched against Canada, China and Mexico is prompting jitters on world markets and threatening to raise prices at home.—APP

Deep Seek transformative approach to global innovation

BEIJING: In the rapidly evolving landscape of Artificial Intelligence (AI), open-source models are emerging as a powerful catalyst for technological democratization and global collaboration. "Open-source AI represents more than just a technological strategy - it's a transformative approach to global innovation," said Zhou Hongyi, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and founder of Chinese cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, at this year's Two Sessions, according to a report carried by China Economic Net on Wednesday. Open-source AI fundamentally challenges the traditional closed technological ecosystems. "First and foremost, open-source will triumph over closed-source systems," Zhou asserts. He highlights DeepSeek, an open-source AI model, as a prime example of this paradigm shift. Within a short span, DeepSeek transformed from an unknown entity to an industry standard that companies and developers worldwide are eager to adopt. The open-source approach creates a unique ecosystem of collaborative innovation. "By going open-source, a mechanism is created where companies and developers naturally choose to build applications on top of the platform," Zhou explains. While a company like DeepSeek might not directly monetize its technology, the returns are substantial: global talent, including developers, engineers, professors, and doctoral students, contribute to improving the technology, creating what Zhou describes as a "biological big bang" of technological development. One of the most compelling aspects of open-source AI is its potential to level the technological playing field. "For many countries lacking financial resources and technical expertise, open-source models like DeepSeek provide an opportunity to develop their own foundational AI models," Zhou notes. This model breaks through national boundaries and technological barriers, fostering an open and inclusive innovation ecosystem where all countries can participate equally in AI development. The approach has already shown remarkable success. Major Chinese tech companies like Baidu, Tencent, and the three telecommunications operators have integrated open-source models. Internationally, companies such as NVIDIA, Microsoft, and Amazon, initially skeptical, have begun incorporating these models into their ecosystems. At the international level, China has been proactively championing open-source AI as a model of global cooperation. December, China and Zambia co-chaired a meeting of the Group of Friends for International Cooperation on AI Capacity-building at the UN headquarters. Representatives from over 80 countries and some UN agencies attended, expecting the Group to boost AI capacity building cooperation, governance, and close the digital divide. This vision extends beyond technological competition - it represents a new paradigm of global cooperation, where technological advancement is seen as a shared journey rather than a zero-sum game.—DNA

Pakistan showcases its rich tourism potential at ITB Berlin

BERLIN: Pakistan made a significant impact on the global tourism stage at ITB Berlin 2025, the world's leading travel trade show. The event, which began on Wednesday, saw Pakistan's vibrant participation, underscoring its dedication to showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and adventure tourism opportunities to international audiences. Jointly organized by the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), Green Tourism Private Limited (GTPL), along with provincial tourism departments and the private sector, Pakistan's strong presence at the event highlighted the nation's commitment to becoming a key player in global tourism.

The Pakistan Pavilion, spanning 100 square meters, was formally inaugurated by Ambassador of Pakistan to Germany Saqlain Syedah in a grand opening ceremony. The commercial win, Frankfurt, fully supported in planning & execution of the event, which played a crucial role in facilitating business engagements and promoting Pakistan's tourism industry. The high-profile Pakistani delegation, representing both public and private sector stakeholders, actively engaged with global tourism professionals, highlighting the country's rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and adventure tourism opportunities. The delegation included 13 private sector companies, two provincial tourism departments, Sindh, and Gilgit-Baltistan—alongside

PTDC, TDAP, and GTPL. Among the distinguished attendees were Syed Zulfikar Ali Shah, Minister for Tourism, Sindh Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), and M. Ghulam Muhammad, Minister for Tourism, Tourism Department of Gilgit-Baltistan and Lt. Gen Sardar Hassan Azhar Hayat MD of GTPL, who represented their respective organizations. Speaking at the inauguration, Ambassador Saqlain Syedah said "Pakistan is a land of unparalleled beauty, diverse landscapes, and centuries-old heritage. Our participation in ITB Berlin 2025 reflects our commitment to positioning Pakistan as a top travel destination. We are eager to strengthen partnerships and welcome the world to explore the immense tourism potential our

country has to offer." Managing Director PTDC, Aftab ur Rehman Rana, in his response emphasized Pakistan's tourism vision, stated "Pakistan's presence at ITB Berlin 2025 is a strategic effort to enhance our international visibility and attract global tourists. Through meaningful collaborations and networking, we aim to showcase Pakistan as a must-visit destination on the world tourism map." Throughout the day, the Pakistani delegation actively participated in B2B meetings, networking events, and presentations, engaging with international tourism stakeholders to foster collaborations. A dedicated side event on March 5 is set to further promote business opportunities and enhance industry linkages. Additionally, Pakistan will be represented

in the "Cultural Diplomacy" session, scheduled to take place on March 5 from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM at CityCube Level 3 | M2. This session will provide an opportunity to highlight Pakistan's cultural heritage and its role in international tourism diplomacy. Pakistan's successful participation in ITB Berlin 2025 reaffirmed its dedication to enhancing its global tourism presence, attracting investment, and inviting travelers from across the world to experience the country's unmatched travel destinations. The Pakistan Pavilion received an overwhelming response from trade visitors, tour operators, media representatives, and social media influencers. The country's participation in ITB Berlin 2023 and 2024 laid the foundation for this year's stronger.—APP

Siddiqui, Rahman discuss Pakistan, Bangladesh trade ties

ISLAMABAD: Additional Foreign Secretary (Asia & Pacific) Ambassador Imran Ahmed Siddiqui on Wednesday met with Secretary Commerce of Bangladesh Mahbub Rahman here. In the meeting, both sides discussed various aspects of bilateral economic and trade relations and expressed satisfaction over the growing momentum of these relations. They also discussed prospects of further enhancing these relations in the coming days.—APP

Rain, snow offer hope in Japan's worst wildfire in 50 years

OFUNATO, Japan: Japan battled its worst wildfire in half a century on Wednesday in a region hit by record-low rainfall, as wet weather gave hope for some relief. The blaze around the northern city of Ofunato has raged for more than a week, killing one person and forcing nearly 4,000 residents to evacuate their homes. It has engulfed about 2,900 hectares — around half the size of Manhattan — making it the largest wildfire since at least 1975, when 2,700 hectares burnt in Hokkaido. Columns of white smoke billowed from a mountain through the rain and snow on Wednesday, AFP reporters saw. More wet weather was forecast through Thursday. "The fire was like nothing I've seen before. It was towering and spreading fast," said Mitsuo Otsubo, 85, who fled his home to stay with a relative. "It didn't rain or snow at all this year... Thank goodness it rained today though. I can only hope it will help contain the situation," the seaweed and scallop farmer said. Japan endured its hottest summer on record last year as climate change pushes up temperatures worldwide. Ofunato received just 2.5 millimeters (0.1 inches) of rainfall in February — breaking the previous record low for the month of 4.4 millimeters in 1967 and well below the average of 41 millimeters. Makeshift tents were being set up at a city hall where around 270 people were taking shelter, with bottles of water and food supplies spread out on tables. "Fires are the scariest disaster, because they spring from one place to another, so you don't know where to run," 69-year-old evacuee Fumiko Tanaka said.—APP

Food exporters delegation concludes successful 10-day visit to China

LAHORE: A delegation of food exporters from South Punjab returned on Wednesday after completing a successful 10-day visit to China. Shahid Imran, convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's regional committee on food, and leader of the delegation, informed the media here that the group, consisting of prominent exporters, visited 10 cities across China to explore trade opportunities and strengthen bilateral ties in the food sector. During their trip, the delegation participated in business-to-business (B2B) meetings and toured key food markets and processing units. Shahid Imran noted that Chinese counterparts were impressed with the quality and competitive pricing of Pakistani food products, particularly Zia snacks, which had gained popularity in international markets. The delegation also discussed potential partnerships and joint ventures with Chinese companies to enhance export volumes and optimize supply chains. The primary aim of the visit was to showcase Pakistan's diverse range of food products, including snacks and processed foods, to potential Chinese buyers and investors. The delegation expressed hope that the visit would lead to a boost in Pakistan's food exports to China, one of its largest trading partners, and open new avenues for collaboration.—APP

