



# Islamabad POST

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**Malaysia-Pakistan ties to grow further: envoy**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Pakistan desires to expand ties with France**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Babar breaks his fast at Khana-e-Kaaba**

Detailed News On Page-06



## After Trump

# US military also 'grateful to Pakistan'

Mohammad Sharifullah alias Jafar, a Daesh-Khorasan operative, was arrested by Pakistan on intelligence provided by America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

DNA

KARACHI: The United States Central Command (US Centcom) has thanked Pakistan for helping in the arrest of the main suspect in the 2021 attack on Kabul Airport in Afghanistan, saying that Pakistan and the US share a commitment to combating terrorism. "We are grateful to Pakistan for its cooperation in the arrest of Sharifullah, the main suspect in the attack on the Abbey Gate of Kabul Airport in Afghanistan, and for its cooperation with the United States in bringing the suspect to justice," read a post on US Centcom's Urdu handle on X. The post - by the body which is a unified combatant command of the US military responsible for overseeing operations, security cooperation, and strategic interests across the Middle East, Central Asia, and parts of South Asia - reminded that US President Donald Trump had announced the arrest of the suspect during his address to a joint session of Congress. Mohammad Sharifullah alias Jafar, a Daesh-Khorasan operative, was arrested by Pakistan on intelligence provided by America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as reported by a news agency. The terrorist, allegedly responsible for the deadly suicide attack that killed at least 170 Afghans as well as 13 US troops, has confessed to scouting out the route to the airport. His arrest was announced by US President Trump who thanked the government of Pakistan for helping apprehend the "monster" and added that it was "a very huge day for the affected families. The US Centcom's statement further underscored that

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## Another US flight carrying immigrants to land in Pakistan

Deportees will be flown into Nur Khan Airbase, Islamabad, on special US aircraft

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: A second flight carrying illegal Pakistani immigrants is scheduled to arrive in Pakistan next week, sources from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) revealed, making the impact of United President Donald Trump's stringent immigration policies evident. The Pakistani Embassy in the US has confirmed that eight more undocumented individuals - including Rehman, Saleem, Nawaz, Salman, Azeem, Khan, and Khalid Masih - will return to the homeland aboard a special American aircraft. Notably, only two of the deportees have criminal records, while the remaining six are being deported solely for illegal residency violations. "Two individuals on the deportation list were found guilty of serious crimes, including rape and drug-related offences," the sources added.

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DUBAI: India celebrates victory in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. - DNA

## India clinch CT for record third time

India add to their trophies in 2002 and 2013 to go past Australia, who have two titles

SPORTS DESK

DUBAI: India scripted history by securing their third ICC Champions Trophy title with a thrilling victory over New Zealand in the final of the Pakistan-hosted tournament on Sunday. India added to their trophies in 2002 and 2013 to go past Australia, who have two titles. The world number one ODI team, India finished unbeaten in the eight-nation tournament played in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. India have played all their matches in Dubai after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to political tensions and have been unbeaten at the venue in four matches.

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## Sharaa pleas for peace as clashes continue

Two days of fighting amounted to some of the worst violence for years in

AGENCIES

CAIRO: Syrian leader Ahmed Sharaa called for peace on Sunday after hundreds were killed in coastal areas in the worst communal violence since the fall of Bashar al Assad. "We have to preserve national unity and domestic peace, we can live together," Sharaa, the interim president, said as clashes continued between forces linked to the new Islamist rulers and fighters from Assad's Alawite sect.

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## Call for free elections

# Opp leader announces intensified movement against government

He condemned what he described as fabricated cases against Akhtar Mengal and Siraj Tareen, arguing that these actions reflect widespread public anger

STAFF REPORT

HARIPUR: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Omar Ayub, has announced plans to intensify the movement against the government, citing concerns over the rule of law, increasing corruption, and a lack of investment in the country over the past two years. Speaking in media in Haripur, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader condemned the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), calling it a tool to suppress media freedom. He also declared that protests would be organized in collaboration with various parties under the banner of Tehreek Tahaffuz-e-Ayeeen Pakistan. Ayub stated that a collective strategy was being formulated with different political factions to counter the government's alleged failures. He condemned what he described as fabricated cases against Akhtar Mengal and Siraj Tareen, arguing that these

Continued on Page 06

## Asad Qaiser demands PM's resignation

PTI has not officially decided on a sit-in outside Adiala Jail: Asad Qaiser

DNA

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former national assembly speaker Asad Qaiser has demanded the resignation of prime minister. Qaiser stated that the law and order situation had deteriorated in the country. He urged the government to conduct free and fair elections immediately. He announced that PTI would hold a meeting with all allied parties this week to formulate a comprehensive national

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## Briefs

### President to address joint session today

The joint session would be held at 3 PM

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari summoned the joint session of parliament scheduled to be held today (Monday). According to the National Assembly secretariat, the joint session would be held at 3 PM. All the arrangements have been completed for the joint sitting of the parliament, the NA secretariat said. National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq will preside the joint session that would be addressed by President Asif Ali Zardari. The second parliamentary year will start with the address of President Zardari. It merits mention here that President Zardari summoned the joint session of parliament on the advice of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

### Ex-Senator's brother shot dead

Swabi DPO stated that suspect is a drug addict and mentally unstable

DNA

PESHAWAR: Former Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan's elder brother, Shakeel Ahmad Khan, was shot dead in Swabi's Ahad Khan village, police confirmed on Sunday. According to police, a dispute erupted at the residence of Shakeel Ahmad Khan's neighbor, where the accused, Kamran, allegedly shot and killed his own father. Shakeel Ahmad Khan intervened to defuse the situation but was caught in the line of fire, resulting in his tragic death. Swabi DPO Muhammad Azhar stated that the suspect is a drug addict and mentally unstable.

## Amid surge in terrorism Punjab government puts province on high alert

During past 24 hours, 436 search and sweep operations conducted in different parts of Punjab, say police

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Against the backdrop of the recent spike in incidents of terrorism in the country, security across Punjab was put on high alert, a police spokesperson confirmed on Sunday. The development came days after the terror attack on Bannu Cantonment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. At least five soldiers and 13 civilians were martyred while 16 militants were killed in the attack. In addition to this, as many as 32 others sustained injuries as a result of destruction caused by suicide blasts during the clash. Later, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir visited KP's Bannu district and vowed to bring the planners and facilitators of the recent terrorist attack to justice "wherever they may be". In a similar development, hardcore Daesh commander Mohammad Sharifullah alias Jafar, accused of 2021 attack on US troops at Kabul airport, was arrested by Pakistan on intelligence provided by America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

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## Govt launches inquiry into Port Qasim scandal

The probe seeks to determine if market rates were considered in the deal

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formed a three-member inquiry committee to investigate the Port Qasim Authority (PQA) land scandal. Senator Faisal Wadwa had alleged that valuable land belonging to Port Qasim Authority was leased at undervalued prices during the tenure of the current government, Express News reported. According to a notification issued by the Prime Minister's Office, the land in question was allocated for small and medium industrial

Continued on Page 06

# Pakistan, Egypt call for a viable Palestinian state

Pakistan, Azerbaijan agreed to continue the upward trajectory of the bilateral relations

FOREIGN DESK

JEDDAH: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a meeting with Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Expatriates,

Badr Abdelatty on the sidelines of extraordinary meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Saturday in Jeddah. Both Foreign Ministers expressed their appreciation for the strong cooperation between Pakistan and Egypt at both bilateral and mul-

tilateral levels. They praised the enduring and multifaceted relationship between the two nations, which is founded on shared beliefs, values, and cultural connections. They agreed to further strengthen their political, defense, cultural, and economic ties, as well as enhance people-to-people interactions. The two Foreign Ministers also shared perspectives on regional and global issues of common concern. They voiced their deep alarm regarding the ongoing Israeli violence in the West Bank and the genocide being perpetrated in Gaza. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar acknowledged Egypt's crucial role in providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza and its efforts to mediate a temporary ceasefire in the occupied territory.

Continued on Page 06



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## Shakeel's brother killed by neighbor: DPO

SWABI: District Police Officer (DPO) Swabi, Muhammad Azhar on Sunday said that Senator Mushtaq Ahmed's brother, Shakeel Khan was fatally shot by a neighbor during a violent altercation. He said the incident took place when a dispute erupted between a father and son in the neighborhood. "Shakeel Khan was going to mediate and resolve the conflict when the accused, Kamran, opened fire. Prior to this, Kamran had allegedly killed his own father," said the DPO. The firing also left one person injured. The police officer further stated that the suspect, Kamran, is reportedly a drug addict and has an unstable mental condition. DPO Muhammad Azhar assured that the suspect's arrest would be ensured soon and that justice would be served.

## Mohabat Khan Mosque renovated

PESHAWAR: Peshawar has been remained a strategic city where invaders constructed worship places to freely perform religious obligations and use its peoples' strong bonds with religion in their favour to prolong their rule. Being a gateway to the subcontinent and central Asian states (CARs), Peshawar was always a strategic city where kings, warriors and invaders constructed mosques, churches and gurdwaras at prime locations to worship in accordance with their faith besides molding public opinions after conquering it before extending their influence to the subcontinent. The Muslims commanders and kings of different dynasties passed through the historic Khyber Pass from Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan stayed first at Peshawar where they constructed scores of mosques and worship places for Muslims and minorities to promote interfaith harmony and bring people of all faith closer. —APP

## Seminar on cervical cancer awareness

LAHORE: In observance of International Women's Day, the Society for Public Health Education, Research, and Engagement (SPHERE) at the Department of Public Health, University of the Punjab, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Primary & Secondary Healthcare Department, organised a seminar to raise awareness about cervical cancer and the importance of HPV vaccination. According to a spokesperson for the Punjab University, the event was held under the supervision of Dr Noman, in-charge of the Public Health Department, and brought together prominent public health experts to discuss the growing threat of cervical cancer—the third most common cancer among women in Pakistan. In her welcome address, Prof Dr Rubeeza Zakar stressed the urgent need for increased awareness and encouraged public health students to play an active role in advocacy and education efforts. —APP

## Siri Paye: A delight for food lovers at Iftar parties

PESHAWAR: Renowned for its hospitality and warmth, Peshawar is particularly known for siri paye—a mouthwatering dish prepared from the pure meat of sacrificial animals, which is being sold like a hot cake for Iftar parties. With the start of holy month of Ramadan, the demand for siri paye for Iftar parties has increased manifold in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Peshawar where the city's rich culinary tradition heats up, drawing food enthusiasts from far and wide. The delicious dish is famous for its deep, rich flavors and high nutritional value, making it a perfect choice for Iftar. The visitors are seen in large numbers on its shops in Qissa Khwani Bazaar, Hashtnagri, Namak Mandi in city and Fawara Chowk in the cantonment of Peshawar. These bazaars are bustling with tourists and visitors alike, eager to savor the delicacy during Iftar to sehri. The dish is



ISLAMABAD: Families of diplomats posing for a picture on the occasion of an iftar dinner hosted by the High Commissioner of Malaysia.— DNA

# Foreign investment to pave way for macro-economic stability

ISLAMABAD: With the government's economic managers pushing hard to steer country out of economic challenges, the fiscal year 2025 witnesses a progress in foreign direct investment trends with number of countries showing willingness in different sectors. Therefore, as compared to last three years, during 2025, the experts see a progress in the trend of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Pakistan, due to the government's holistic and comprehensive economic policies and recent bilateral and multilateral negotiations for foreign investment, has raised hopes for increased investment during days ahead. As the country is also gradually heading towards macroeconomic

stability, now its economy is building on a strong foundation for sustainable economic growth. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb also received special confidence from investors during his last visit to Middle East, European Union, United States, Central Asian States and Azerbaijan. The Minister emphasized collaboration in areas of digital infrastructure, digital economy, digital foreign direct investment (FDI), digital skills and digital governance leading the country towards greater digitalization, modernization and e-commerce, the real factors of a smart and knowledge-based economy in the days to come. Apart from this

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are also showing willingness to come with a huge portfolio of investment of more than \$12 billion and now Saudi Arabia's popular fast-food chain Al Baik is gearing up to enter the Pakistani market soon. Saudi investments are growing and agreements between both the countries have now exceeded US\$ six billion. Al Baik is on its way to Pakistan, and Aramco has already opened its fuel stations in Pakistan. Additionally, Qatar intends to invest \$3 billion, Azerbaijan plans to contribute \$2 billion as Pakistan has also signed a port development agreement with Abu Dhabi. Recently Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Privatization and Communications, Abdul

Aleem Khan, along with his delegation held a meeting with Israfil Mammadov, CEO of the State Oil Fund, in Baku, Azerbaijan. After the visit, talking to the media Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan had said that Azerbaijan signed an agreement to invest US\$ two billion in different sectors including energy and oil. According to Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, Khazar Farhadov during recent meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, a US\$ two billion investment in Pakistan was announced by an MOU was signed. "This will bring dividends to both of the countries. One-month time had been given to finalize the projects and agree-

ments in various sectors would be signed in April this year during the visit of the Azerbaijan President to Pakistan," the ambassador told APP. He said that this will be the first quantum jump in our trade and investment relations and will be a huge reflection of bilateral economic and trade ties between both sides. It is worth mentioning that during fiscal year 2024, Pakistan received \$568.20 million from various friendly countries including China, \$358 million from Hong Kong, \$268 million from the UK, \$137 million from the USA, \$100 million from Singapore, \$87 million from UAE, \$74 million from Saudi Arabia, \$33 million from Malaysia and \$10 million from South Korea. — Agencies

## Senator calls for importance of respect for institutions

The senator affirmed his support for the production orders, encouraging all parties to voice their perspectives within the Privileges Committee, thus fostering a spirit of cooperation and collective responsibility within the Senate

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfanul Haq Siddiqui has called for the importance of unity and respect for the institution's traditions, regardless of differing opinions within the assembly. Speaking on the floor of house, he asked the Chairman Senate, "We stand with you, and there is no doubt about that. Whether someone sit on one side or the other, once a ruling is given, it should not be

viewed as merely an individual opinion—it represents the voice of the Constitution and this assembly." The senator praised the decision regarding the production orders for two fellow senators Aon Bappi and Ejaz Chaudhry, expressing no disagreement with the measures taken. He highlighted the long-standing traditions of the Chairman Senate, noting, "Your names have always been associated with upholding the dignity of the House. You strive to

enhance its respectability while following rules and regulations." He commented on the referral of both senators to the Privileges Committee, stating that it is essential to observe what role the committee plays in this matter. "We should not turn this into a contentious issue, as fundamentally, we have no disagreement," he remarked. The senator reiterated the need for collaboration and support amongst members during these challenging times.

The senator also reflected on historical hardships faced by political leaders in past like Nawaz Sharif, and Maryam Nawaz, emphasizing that many have endured significant struggles. He noted that "imprisonment has been a part of the political landscape," referencing the lengthy sentences served by various leaders in the past. While acknowledging these challenges, he urged that such experiences should not be used to elicit sympathy in their current context.

## Women's economic participation must for progress

ISLAMABAD The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has pointed out that Pakistan ranks 145th out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index, second only to Afghanistan, as the country continues to face significant challenges in achieving gender equality. Women's economic participation can promote agricultural productivity, enterprise development at the micro, small and medium enterprise levels, as well as enhance business management and returns on investment. This was stated by FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, while talking to a reception hosted by the Businessmen Panel's Women Wing to mark the International Women Day here on Sunday. He emphasized the need for separate representation and appropriate quotas for businesswomen in every sector. He stated that women should be given 30 to 40 percent representation in business institutions so that they can demonstrate their abilities in all fields of life.—APP

## PM Youth Program successfully achieves targets

ISLAMABAD: The Prime Minister's Youth Program has successfully implemented initiatives to empower the country's youth, achieving all set targets. According to available official document, the focus of the program was to empowering young individuals through its comprehensive 4E framework, which encompassed four pivotal pillars, Education, Employment, Engagement, and Environment. The document claimed this holistic approach was designed to foster a well-rounded and skilled youth population, equipped to drive positive change and progress. These initiatives included the Youth Laptop Scheme, which connects the youth with technology and provides support for education to the Pakistan Education Endowment Fund (PEEF) talented students. The PMYP Laptop Scheme helped the youth start freelancing and set up a digital Skills Institute. Prime Minister Youth Skills Development Program benefited 56,000 young people. The number of members of the Prime Minister National Youth Council is 113, 71,422. Youths were loaned from PM Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme while 70 startups from PM National besides Innovation Award. The Youth Skills Development Program provided training in various businesses and technologies, while the Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme offered free loans to businessmen. The National Innovation Award promoted startups, and supports the development in the IT Startups and Venture Capital Project IT sector. The Youth Internship Program provided job opportunities to young people in Academia and the labor market, while the National Youth Council advised policy making. The National Volunteer Corps voluntarily encouraged positive change, and digital Youth Hubs connected young people with digital skills and opportunities. In addition, Talent Hunt Sports League and Sports Academies played a vital role in the development of sports and the Green Youth Movement trains young people with environmental protection.—APP

## Schools of six snow hit UCs of Galyat to reopen

ABBOTT ABAD, Mar 09 (APP): Following a four-day closure due to heavy snowfall and blocked roads in the Galyat region, the district administration has announced the reopening of schools in six Union Councils (UCs) from tomorrow, March 10. The decision comes after improved weather conditions and the clearance of snow from major access roads. The District Education Officer (Male) confirmed that schools in the previously affected areas, including Beeran Gali, Nagri Bala, Nathiagali, Tajwal, Pattan Kalan, and Kokmang, will resume normal operations. Additionally, educational institutions in UC Namli Maira, such as GPS and GHS Namli Maira, GPS Juster, and GPS Maira Kalan, as well as schools in Khanaspur, Khairagali (UC Palak), GMS and GPS Seri Khan Kalan, GHS and GPS NAKAR Khan Kalan, and GMS Topa Khan Kalan, will also reopen. The district administration has assured that all necessary measures have been taken to ensure the safety of students and staff. Residents are advised to remain cautious while traveling and to follow any further updates from local authorities.—APP

## I have no conflict with the Sindh govt

KARACHI: The Governor of Sindh Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori arrived in Shah Faisal Colony for his eighth Sehri, where he received a warm welcome from the local residents. He mingled with the people, listened to their concerns, and took selfies with them. The Governor also had Sehri with the locals at a nearby hotel. Talking the media afterward, The Governor said that he enjoys being among the people, listening to their issues, and sharing moments with them. He expressed happiness over having Sehri and Iftar with the public, which has earned him the title of a "People's Governor." He announced that 50,000 students are receiving IT training at Governor House and offered IT courses to the youth of Shah Faisal Colony without any entry test. Additionally, he stated that 9.5 lakh (950,000) ration bags have been distributed, and arrangements have been made for Iftar dinners for 1 million people. Every night after the Iftar dinner, a plot and an Umrah ticket are awarded through a lucky draw. Addressing the people of Shah Faisal Colony, he said, "If anyone troubles you, tell them that your brother is the Governor, and for the elderly, I am your son. The doors of Governor House are always open to you." He added that he is not a Governor who remains silent on public issues but will continue to raise his voice for the rights of the people and the city's problems. The Governor of Sindh also mentioned that the Prime Minister of Pakistan is making tireless efforts to improve the country's economy, and once the economy stabilizes, its benefits will reach the people. In response to a question from the media, he highlighted that Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, China, UAE, and other countries are bringing investments into Pakistan, which will further strengthen the economy.—APP

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### MARCH

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

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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  
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Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
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CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

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



### Departments

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CDA.....9208301-04  
Met Office.....9250360-6  
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TMA.....5770886  
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Govt enhances Hajj facilities, digital services

The government has established a Minority Welfare Fund to support marginalized communities, offering financial assistance to those in need and providing funding for the maintenance and repair of religious sites

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony continues its efforts to enhance Hajj arrangements and promote interfaith harmony across the nation, ensuring pilgrims can perform their religious duties with ease. Under the Rules of Business 1973, the ministry coordinates with various organizations in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to improve Hajj facilities while also working towards fostering mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and protecting minority rights as outlined in the Constitution. It is also engaged in Islamic studies, organizing seminars, ensuring accurate Quran printing, and facilitating international cooperation on religious matters. The government has established a Minority Welfare Fund to support marginalized communities, offering financial assistance to those in need and providing funding for the maintenance and repair of religious sites. Scholarships are extended to minority students, while initiatives such as the promotion of Seerat-un-Nabi (Peace Be Upon Him), sectarian harmony, error-free Quran printing, and raising awareness about the sanc-

tity of sacred texts remain a key focus. Additionally, the ministry addresses Ruet-e-Hilal matters and monitors digital platforms, reporting blasphemous, anti-Islamic, and sectarian content. In 2024, the ministry successfully organized the National Seerat Competition, awarding Rs. 3.5 million in cash prizes. A Seerat-un-Nabi Conference was held on 12th Rabi-ul-Awwal, attended by senior government officials, with the deputy prime minister and chairman Senate presenting awards to winners of the Seerat Book Competition. A nationwide Millaad-un-Nabi celebration featured various activities in educational institutions, and prize-winning articles on economic stability based on the Holy Prophet's (Peace Be Upon Him) teachings were distributed in libraries. A significant initiative launched by the ministry includes the establishment of a recycling plant for the proper disposal of damaged Quranic pages. Efforts to promote sectarian harmony were highlighted through the observance of 'Tahaffuz-e-Namoo-e-Risalat' and awareness campaigns on health and nutrition. Recommendations

for civil awards were put forth for religious scholars and members of minority communities. The ministry also addressed religiously objectionable content via its e-portal, reporting 16,634 links in 2024. Regular meetings of the Ruet-e-Hilal committees were conducted to ensure moon sighting for key religious events. The ministry has been allocated a total budget of Rs. 1.83 billion for the current financial year, with an expenditure of Rs. 582.12 million incurred by December 31, 2024, across all departmental heads and subordinate units, accounting for 32 percent of the total budget. During Hajj 2024, the ministry provided extensive support to pilgrims, ensuring quality accommodation, catering services, and transportation. Reception offices were established at Jeddah and Madinah airports, along with medical facilities in Makkah, Madinah, and Jeddah, offering 24/7 assistance. Special provisions were made for the elderly, sick, and children, with lost-and-found services in place. Zamzam water bottles were distributed, while low-cost Hajj options and digital solutions, including a mobile app

for updates and complaint redressal, were introduced. Under the Government Hajj Scheme, 68,804 pilgrims received training, vaccination, and travel gifts. Compensation and refunds were also processed for families of deceased pilgrims, and 1,200 welfare staff were deployed to facilitate smooth operations. The newly introduced Hajj Policy 2025 includes significant enhancements such as an expanded procurement committee, strengthened financial controls, and the introduction of the Hajj Nazim Scheme. Compensation for death during Hajj has been increased from Rs. 1 million to Rs. 2 million, and mandatory insurance for Hajj dues has been implemented. The ministry has also proposed the inclusion of the Khatm-e-Nabuwat Oath in the Nikahnama Form, a move approved by the Federal Cabinet. Legislative developments include the Hajj and Umrah (Regulations) Act 2024, for regulating Umrah operators, and the ongoing formulation of related rules. Bills for error-free Quran printing and the Pakistan Ruet-e-Hilal Bill 2023, which seeks to standardize the observance of religious festivals,

are also in progress. The ministry continues to enforce key legislative measures such as the Ehtaram-e-Ramazan Ordinance 1981, which mandates restrictions during Ramazan, and the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, governing family law procedures. The Marriage Functions Ordinance 2000 is also in effect to curb extravagant wedding expenses. Public engagement remains a core component of the ministry's efforts. For Hajj 2024, various initiatives were introduced, including short-stay provisions, diverse accommodation options, restructured Hajj Group Organizer (HGO) allocations in line with Saudi regulations, standardized baggage with QR coding, mandatory mobile roaming packages, and an online registration system. To promote interfaith harmony, the ministry organizes annual conferences and celebrates 10 minority religious festivals, including Christmas, Holi, and Diwali. August 11 is observed as 'Minorities Day' to acknowledge their contributions. Currently, there are 10 reserved seats for minorities in the National Assembly and 23 in provincial assemblies.

## 450 cops ensuring security at Churches

RAWALPINDI: As many as 450 police officials were providing security at the Churches to ensure the protection of worshippers on Sunday. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, effective security arrangements had been made to ensure the safety of the Christian community and special teams of the respective police stations, Elite Force and Dolphin Force were also performing patrol duties in the surrounding areas of the churches. Senior officers remained alert to monitor that the strict security arrangements for the churches were in place and continuously check the presence of personnel at the place of their duty, the spokesman said.—APP

## 2 shopkeepers arrested in crackdown

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration have arrested 102 vendors for overcharging essential goods during Ramazan, according to a district report released on the seventh day of the holy month. Officials conducted 397 price inspections, filed 8 legal cases, and imposed fines totaling Rs 87,000 to enforce government-set rates. The Islamabad district administration has intensified efforts to control prices during Ramazan, targeting shops violating official price lists. In this regard, price control magistrates carried out 397 inspections across markets, leading to 102 arrests and registered 8 cases against the accused. Meanwhile, fines worth Rs 87,000 were issued to businesses for overcharging edibles like flour, cooking oil, and pulses. A district helpline received multiple complaints about inflated prices, prompting immediate raids and penalties. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon said that 6 dedicated Ramazan bazaars and 20 subsidized "fair price shops" are operational to ensure affordable access to essentials. Special stalls selling sugar, ghee, and eggs at reduced rates have also been set up. Shoppers can buy sugar and ghee at Rs 30 less per kilogram from these stalls compared to market rates, Memon added. At fair price shops, 15 types of vegetables and fruits are being sold with government subsidies to further ease costs for families. The deputy commissioner urged citizens to report violations via the helpline, emphasizing strict monitoring of markets. "No exploitation of consumers will be tolerated," he said, highlighting daily inspections by magistrates and administrative teams.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry President and other office bearers in a group photo with children of Pakistan Sweet Home. The RCCI together with the management of Pakistan Sweet Homes arranged iftar for children.—DNA

## AIOU to host 14th Biennial CESA moot

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will host the 14th Biennial Conference of the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA) this year, reflecting the university's commitment to promoting academic dialogue at both national and international levels. According to the AIOU, the conference will bring together over 400 participants, including 200 international scholars and researchers from Asia, Europe, and the United States. This diverse gathering will provide a unique opportunity for attendees to engage in meaningful discussions, share research findings, and advance collaborative initiatives in the field of comparative education. Under the visionary leadership of the Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood, the university has demonstrated outstanding academic and research performance over the past two years. Hosting the CESA conference is a testament to AIOU's dedication to strengthening global academic partnerships and enhancing comparative education studies. According to the conference coordinator Dr. Zahid Majeed, the event will take place from November 23 to 25 this year, with preparations already underway. The conference will feature keynote speeches, panel discussions, and research paper presentations, focusing on contemporary challenges and innovations in education. The participants will have the opportunity to discuss topics such as educational policy reforms, cross-cultural studies, and the integration of technology in education. The university extends an open invitation to all scholars, educators, and policymakers to attend this historic conference. Details regarding registration, paper submissions, and the full conference program will soon be available on the university's official website. This conference is not only a milestone for the university but will also help position Pakistan as a significant contributor to the global educational landscape.—DNA

## Award ceremony held for best teacher, students

QAZI SHOAIB KHAN

ATTOCK: The Chief Executive Officer, District Education Authority ATTOCK Dr. Ikhlaq Ahmed has said that it was a matter of great pride and joy that the talented and hardworking teacher of Government Boys Elementary School Haji Shah, Sohail Akhtar Sahib, has won the "Best Teacher Award," named the "Hero Award," at the Tehsil Attock level. Along with this prestigious award, he has also been honored with a gold medal. He said this while addressing the best award ceremony and laptop to the brilliant students of the district. He said that this honour was bestowed upon him by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Attock, in a grand ceremony where the Deputy Commissioner of Attock, Mr. Rao Atif Raza, and the DEO Secondary, Mr. Muhammad Altaf Sahib, were present as distinguished guests. He said that this achievement is not only a source of pride for Haji Shah School but also for the entire region. His remarkable success marks a historic moment not just for our school but for the whole Haji Shah area. Dr. Ikhlaq said, "We pray to Almighty Allah to bless him with even greater success and to always grant us the company of such hardworking, honest, and talented teachers.

غیر لائسنس یافتہ ایل پی جی باؤرز کے لئے  
اگر (OGRA) کا  
آخری انتباہ  
لائسنس کے حصول کے لیے فی الفور اگر (OGRA) کے ساتھ رجسٹرڈ ہوں



ایل پی جی باؤرز کے کاروبار سے منسلک تمام افراد جن میں ایل پی جی مارکیٹنگ کمپنیاں، پروڈیوسرز اور کنٹریکٹ کیئر وغیرہ شامل ہیں کو آخری مرتبہ متنبہ کیا جاتا ہے کہ وہ اپنے ایل پی جی باؤرز کے لائسنس کے حصول کے لیے فوراً اگر (OGRA) کے ساتھ رجسٹرڈ ہوں تاکہ کوئی بھی خلاف کوئی بنایا جاسکے۔ مزید برآں ایسے تمام باؤرز جن کے پاس اگر (OGRA) کی رجسٹریشن نہ ہوگی انہیں 30 اپریل 2025 کے بعد کسی بھی ایل پی جی پروڈیوسر یا کنٹریکٹرز سے رجسٹریشن کرانی پورٹ اور باؤرز سے گیس لوڈ کرنے اور ملک میں ترسیل کرنے کی اجازت نہیں ہوگی۔ ایسے تمام قانون کی پاسداری نہ کرنے والے باؤرز کے خلاف صوبائی اور وفاقی انتظامیہ کی مدد سے سخت کارروائی عمل میں لائی جائے گی جس میں ہماری جرمانے، ہاؤزری ضبطی اور قوائین کے مطابق سخت کارروائی شامل ہے۔ اس سلسلے میں اگر (OGRA) کے تمام رجسٹرڈ افسیروں کو اپنی، لاہور، پشاور، کوئٹہ، ملتان اور سکھر میں بھی درخواست جمع کروائی جاسکتی ہے۔

سہیل احمد طارق  
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## Briefs

## ITP organizes road safety workshop

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) organized a one-day road safety workshop at its driving school on Sunday.

A public relations officer told APP that citizens attended the workshop, where experts delivered detailed lectures on road safety, traffic laws, and accident prevention. Participants were also briefed on safe driving principles for both professional and general circumstances. Following the session, practical driving tests were conducted to assess their driving skills, adherence to traffic regulations, and ability to handle emergency situations. SP Traffic stated that the objective of such training and awareness programs is to instill safe driving habits, ensuring the safety of both drivers and other road users. He further emphasized that the ITP will continue to conduct similar awareness initiatives to promote road safety and reduce traffic accidents.—APP

## Police host Iftar dinner for officers

ISLAMABAD: An Iftar dinner was organized at the Islamabad Police Lines Headquarters for police officers, members of the Chamber of Commerce, journalists, and the civil community. A public relations officer told APP on Sunday that Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, along with attendees, fostering camaraderie among law enforcement, media, and business representatives. The event provided an opportunity for informal discussions on strengthening cooperation between the police, business community, and media for the collective well-being of society. Senior officers expressed gratitude to the attendees and reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring public safety and security during Ramadan.—APP

## Opposition urged to play constructive role

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Religious Affairs Khail Das Kohistani Sunday urged opposition parties to play their constructive role in the nation's advancement and unity as collective efforts can drive the country towards progress and prosperity. In an interview with PTV news, he emphasized that the country and nation yearn for political stability, which is essential for achieving progress and underscored the need for a proactive and sensible approach to address the nation's challenges. He criticized PTT's chaotic and uncivilized culture of politics, accusing it of misleading the youth and perpetuating a destructive approach to politics. He emphasized negotiation is the best way forward to resolve issues, stressing the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding in finding peaceful and sustainable solutions. Minister noted that Quaid PML-N Muhammad Nawaz Sharif maintained a close relationship with Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, underscoring his dedication to democratic principles.—APP

## Ramazan month of reflection and patience, says Bhandara

He emphasized that this sacred month teaches the values of self-discipline, compassion, and caring for others, reinforcing the spirit of unity and goodwill among people

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Federal Parliamentary Secretary and CEO of Murree Brewery, Ispahanyar M. Bhandara, hosted an Iftar dinner, bringing together a large number of guests to observe the spirit of Ramazan. Speaking on the occasion, Ispahanyar Bhandara highlighted the significance of Ramadan as a month of reflection, patience, and generosity. He emphasized that this sacred month teaches the values of self-discipline, compassion, and caring for others, reinforcing the spirit of unity and goodwill among people. Bhandara extended his best wishes to all attendees and expressed his hope that the blessings of Ramadan would bring peace, prosperity, and harmony to the nation. He reaffirmed his commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where all individuals can come together in mutual respect and solidarity.



RAWALPINDI: Federal Parliamentary Secretary and CEO of Murree Brewery, Ispahanyar M. Bhandara with guests at Iftar dinner.

## PIDE study calls for smart meters to improve efficiency

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's electricity sector stands at a crucial juncture as a recent study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), conducted under the Research for Social Transformation & Advancement (RASTA) program, underscores the pressing need to modernize the country's electricity billing system. The study advocates for the adoption of smart meters as a solution to address financial losses, billing inaccuracies, and inefficiencies in the power grid. For nearly two decades, Pakistan's reliance on a manual billing system has led to significant financial deficits, exacerbated by outdated infrastructure and rampant electricity theft. Power distribution companies (DISCOs) struggle with revenue recovery, while consumers frequently encounter billing discrepancies. A transition to Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) offers a transparent, data-driven

approach to electricity management, ensuring efficiency and accuracy. Dr. Nadeem Javaid, Vice Chancellor of PIDE, emphasized the urgency of this transition, stating, "Our electricity billing system's inefficiencies are a major cause of financial losses and consumer frustration. Smart meters provide a modern solution that reduces theft, enhances billing accuracy, and empowers consumers to manage electricity consumption more effectively. The transition is necessary for a more sustainable and efficient power sector." The study, authored by Afia Malik, Tehmina Asad, and Ghulam Mustafa, highlights the benefits of shifting to smart meters. A survey conducted across major cities, including Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, and Sukkur, revealed that 79% of respondents were willing to adopt smart meters, even if they had to bear the initial cost. The findings suggest that households using smart meters could reduce their electricity

costs by up to 17%, while DISCOs could significantly improve revenue collection. Case studies demonstrate the potential impact, with LESCO estimated to save PKR 960 million from FY2016-17 to FY2023-24 on three high-loss feeders, and MEPCO generating an additional PKR 2.2 billion in revenue within 11 months of installing 150,000 smart meters. International examples further reinforce the effectiveness of smart meters, with Ghana witnessing a 13.2% increase in reported electricity consumption following the installation of smart prepaid meters, exposing previously undetected electricity theft. While the advantages of smart meters are clear, the study stresses that successful implementation requires strategic execution. A survey of 800 consumers from LESCO and MEPCO indicated that consumer awareness and engagement are critical to adoption. To ensure a smooth transition, the report recommends initiatives such as consumer education programs to build trust.

## ICCI delegation meets Railways minister

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), led by its President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, visited the residence of Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, Federal Minister for Railways to congratulate him on his induction into the federal cabinet. The ICCI delegation included Senior Vice President Abdul Rahman Siddiqui, Chairman Founder Group Tariq Sadiq, former Presidents Zubair Ahmed Malik, Abdul Rauf Alam, Khalid Javaid, Mian Shaikat Masood, Shahban Khalid, former Senior Vice President Faad Waheed, former Vice President Ifukhar Anwar Sethi, executive members Zulqurnain Abbasi, Ishaq Sial, former Executive member Chaudhry Waheed ul Din along with special advisor to the ICCI President Naeem Siddiqui. On behalf of the business community, President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi extended

warm congratulations to Muhammad Hanif Abbasi and expressed confidence that his inclusion in the cabinet would lead to policies that promote economic growth, ease of doing business, and better facilitation for trade and industry. Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, while appreciating the gesture, acknowledged the pivotal role of the business community as the real engine of the economy said that the government is committed to addressing the business community's challenges to ensure the ease of doing business environment. He noted that the business community's contributions reflect their strong commitment to national economic development. He also praised the ICCI leadership for their proactive role in resolving business community issues and acting as a bridge between the private sector and the government to create a conducive business environment. The ICCI delegation assured full cooperation with the government to boost economic progress and improve the business environment.

## Ramazan continues to bring hustle &amp; bustle

ISLAMABAD: As the holy month of Ramazan continues, the country is witnessing a hustle and bustle like never before, with the streets filled with people rushing to prepare for their fasts, while shopkeepers are working tirelessly to meet the demand for traditional Ramazan delicacies. A report aired by PTV News highlighted the festive atmosphere in cities across the country, including Islamabad and Rawalpindi. "The streets are filled with the sweet scent of traditional Ramazan treats like samosas, pakoras and dates," said the report. "People are rushing to buy these delicacies to break their fasts in the evening, Shopkeepers commented, adding, It is a mad dash in the evenings, but we are happy to serve the community during this blessed month.—APP

## Pak manufacturer showcases surgical instruments at expo

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Sabir Jan, President of Sawat Surgical, a leading Pakistani manufacturer of dental surgical instruments, showcased his company's innovations at Dental South China 2025 International Expo. It marks his company 15 consecutive years of participation in the prestigious event. Sawat Surgical holds the distinction of being the first Pakistani manufacturing company registered with the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA), now known as the National Medical Products Administration (NMPA) of China, and boasts certifications for all 22 categories of medical devices as per CFDA regulations. "China is a huge market for the world. Not only Chinese but also many worldwide buyers are here to see and promote my brand," said Sabir Jan, emphasizing the significance of the Chinese market for his company. "My brand has become a well-recognized Pakistani brand in China, and participating in these exhibitions has been instrumental in achieving this," he added, sharing insights on building a successful brand. Pakistan has cemented its position as a key contributor to the global healthcare industry, gaining recognition for its production of high-quality surgical instruments. Sialkot, the central hub of this sector, plays a critical role in facilitating the export of a wide range of medical tools to hospitals, clinics and healthcare professionals worldwide. Sabir Jan highlighted the favorable alignment of Chinese policies with Pakistani manufacturers, further enhancing Pakistan's influence and competitiveness in this field. "There are countless opportunities for Pakistani manufacturers in the Chinese dental surgical industry," he noted.—DNA

## Banks' credit to private sector drops to 8.4%—half in 20 years

LAHORE: The Ferozpur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) Chairman Shahbaz Aslam has observed that banks' credit to the private sector has declined to 8.4 percent in fiscal year of 2024, which is almost half the level seen in 2004. He said that the country's bank deposit and private-sector credit-to-GDP ratios have also remained among the lowest compared to the regional countries. He appealed the central bank to persuade the commercial banks to diversify their lending beyond the government sector, stressing that no country can achieve sustainable economic growth with low levels of private credit. FRIA Chairman said that Pakistan's banks allocate around 75 percent of their lending to established sectors, while only 5 percent goes to small and medium enterprises. This imbalance highlights the need for banks to reassess their strategies, he said. With a more stable economy, he hoped that the government's borrowing would be curtailed and the banking sector could look towards increasing credit to the private sector, particularly the SMEs and agriculture sector. Countering the common argument that government lending has crowded out the private sector, Shahbaz Aslam noted that in some countries, despite equally high or even greater government borrowing from commercial banks, the private sector still holds a significant share of the financial sector's portfolio. However, he also acknowledged the banking sector's role in expanding bank account coverage, which has risen from 47pc of the adult population in 2018 to 64pc today. The gender gap has also narrowed from 47pc to 34pc. By 2028, the government aims to increase bank account coverage to 75pc of the adult population and reduce the gender gap to 25pc. Achieving these targets will require the financial sector to enhance its services' depth, breadth, and quality.—APP



## Recurrent deaths spur demand for pedestrian bridge at COMSATS

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The tragic death of Samna Hassan, an MS student, in a recent road accident near the COMSATS educational hub has once again underscored the urgent need for a pedestrian crossing bridge. This incident, reportedly the fourth fatality in recent years at the busy junction of Park Road, Chak Shehzad, an area surrounded by schools and colleges, has made it impossible to ignore the severe dangers students face as they navigate these treacherous roads daily. Samra Batool, a BS Student at COMSATS University, speaking to APP, highlighted the daily ordeal students face crossing the road: "With private hostels located di-

rectly across from COMSATS University, students must cross dangerous intersections daily, often without proper safety measures." The recent tragic loss of a young life has sparked a call to action. "We urge local authorities to implement a permanent solution to safeguard students' lives. We cannot wait for another tragedy. We demand the immediate construction of a pedestrian bridge to ensure the safety of all students. The time for change is now, let's protect our future by providing the safety we deserve." Samra added that her mother remains worried every day until she safely reaches her private hostel, located opposite of the university, and calls from her hometown, Haripur, to check on her. The area surrounding multiple educational institutions is plagued by chaotic traf-

fic, with students often forced to walk alongside speeding vehicles. The tragic incident that claimed the life of this young girl a couple of weeks back highlights the life-threatening risks students face as they navigate these hazardous streets, particularly given that many private hostels are located directly across the road from the university. For years, students have raised concerns about the lack of safety measures at the busiest intersections. Currently, there is no pedestrian bridge or controlled crossing at this dangerous crossing point, and even there is no traffic signal for pedestrian crossing like civilized countries to control the fast-moving vehicles, especially during peak hours when the streets are crowded with students. The tragic incident has not only deepened the

grief of the university community but has also amplified the urgency for action. "It's terrifying," said Rizwan, a senior at COMSATS. "Every day, I feel like my life is at risk when crossing the road. I've had to sprint across many times to avoid being hit by cars. A pedestrian bridge could save lives, and we don't want to wait for another tragedy before something is done." "As educators, our primary responsibility is the well-being of our students," said Ali, a senior faculty member at COMSATS. "It's heartbreaking that one of our own has lost her life in a preventable accident. I urge the authorities to act swiftly to create a safer environment for the students, especially when they are crossing such dangerous roads on a daily basis..

ان مسکراہٹوں میں شامل کئی ثواب ہیں

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## US foreign policy challenges

**L**AST month's meeting in Riyadh between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sparked a vital discourse on the future of American foreign policy, particularly in relation to the conflict in Ukraine. The talks underscored the urgent need for diplomatic solutions that prioritize peace over confrontation. While some analysts caution that hasty peace agreements risk undermining longstanding principles against territorial expansion through force, others argue that the US must recalibrate its strategies to respond effectively to a rapidly changing global environment. Historically, the US has upheld the principle that acquiring territory through force is illegitimate, a belief enshrined in the UN Charter created after the Second World War. However, inconsistencies in the application of this principle have raised significant concerns about its universal relevance. The plight of the Palestinian people and the experiences of Iraqis and Afghans expose a stark contrast between American rhetoric and actual policy, leading to questions about whether US foreign policy genuinely reflects its declared values. The current trajectory of US foreign policy indicates a decline in global influence, as traditional grand strategies become less effective amid the rise of new powers and shifting alliances. Although the US retains a formidable military presence and a significant role in international institutions, an impending financial crisis threatens to reduce funding for military and diplomatic initiatives, potentially leading to grave long-term consequences. This scenario raises urgent questions about the US's ability to project power on the global stage, and whether it must adopt a more pragmatic approach. The stakes are incredibly high, not just for Americans but also for citizens worldwide. The Middle East remains a volatile and strategically significant region, and US policies here will have far-reaching repercussions. As evidenced by the wars in the region, misguided US policies can inflict severe damage on both American interests and the lives of countless individuals. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the driving forces behind US policy in the Middle East and determine its future direction. A significant factor is the political influence of the Israel lobby. In their influential work, "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy," John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt argue that this lobby has played a pivotal role in shaping American policy on the Israeli Palestinian conflict and was instrumental in facilitating the controversial invasion of Iraq. Critics contend that such policies may not only diverge from US national interests but may also undermine Israel's long-term security.

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## Why is "China threat" narrative invalid?

**F**ROM proposing an array of pro-development initiatives to mediating reconciliation in the Middle East and promoting peace on the Ukraine crisis, China's concrete actions have spoken volumes for its commitment to global peace and stability, as well as shared prosperity. China's ongoing "two sessions" have once again highlighted its steadfast commitment to working with all countries to uphold international equity and justice, and safeguard world peace and stability in a world of changes and chaos. Speaking Friday at a press conference on the sidelines of the annual session of the country's national legislature, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi affirmed that China will be a just and righteous force for world peace and stability, a progressive force for international fairness and justice, as well as a constructive force for the common development of the world. Despite the so-called "China threat" narrative that has been hyped by some Western politicians and media, China's visions and actions have consistently demonstrated its dedication to global stability and cooperation, just as the foreign minister has pledged. From proposing an array of pro-development initiatives to mediating reconciliation in the Middle East and promoting peace on the Ukraine crisis, China's concrete actions have spoken volumes for its commitment to global peace and stability, as well as shared prosperity. While some Western media dismiss China's global economic engagement as "exploitative," the facts reveal a starkly different picture. The nature of China's cooperation with other countries has always been mutually beneficial. China has prioritized empowering developing nations through tangible investments in infrastructure, trade access and collaborative frameworks that address historical inequities imposed by Western exploitation. A key example of this approach is China's investment in global infrastructure, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative, which has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of the Global South. Over the past 25 years, Chinese companies have helped African countries build or upgrade more than 10,000 km of railways, nearly 100,000 km of highways, roughly 1,000 bridges, almost 100 ports and 66,000 km of power transmission and distribution lines. China has also taken significant steps to empower the least developed countries through win-win trade. China's vast consumer base and commitment to openness make it a key driver of global economic growth. Rather than seeking unilateral gains, China has been sharing its development dividends with other countries, especially developing ones, and giving them access to its immense market. Take the China International Import Expo (CIIE), a trailblazing initiative launched in 2018 to transform China's market scale into shared opportunities for the world.

## Europe between the war and peace

Dr Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The current Trump administration has now taken an active role in seeking an end to the protracted conflict. However, for this initiative to succeed, the United States and its European allies must bridge the widening trust deficit. European engagement is critical not only for ensuring a viable and for just resolution for Ukraine but also for preventing a broader strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy focus away from Europe toward China. Rebuilding trust will require prompt diplomatic reconciliation with Zelensky and Ukrainian leadership following the February 28 White House confrontation

**T**HE meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, U.S. President Donald Trump, and Vice President JD Vance at the White House on February 28 resulted in a profound moment of reckoning for the Western alliance. In European political circles, anxiety has intensified, with some policymakers and analysts expressing concerns over the potential dissolution of NATO or the broader decline of the Western alliance. Uncertainty regarding U.S. strategic intentions has fueled apprehension about whether Washington seeks to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty or if the Trump administration aims to execute a diplomatic realignment by engaging Russian President Vladimir Putin in a manner reminiscent of a reversal of Henry Kissinger's Cold War strategy. This crisis of confidence has widened the rift in transatlantic trust, posing significant risks to Washington's global influence, its credibility as a stabilizing hegemon, and the cohesion of NATO.

Despite the gravity of the present crisis, historical precedents suggest that the Western alliance has withstood profound challenges in the past. NATO's endurance, particularly following Russia's revisionist actions over the past two decades, exemplifies the alliance's resilience. Since the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Donbas in 2014, NATO has not only persisted but has expanded in both membership and deterrence capacity. However, the Trump administration's policies have introduced an unprecedented trust deficit, with European leaders now uncertain about the United States' commitment to NATO and its leadership role within the alliance. The complexity of the situation necessitates a nuanced assessment of Trump's contributions to Ukraine's defense. During his first term, the provision of lethal military assistance, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, played a crucial role in enabling Ukraine to resist Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The survival of Kyiv

in the critical early days of the war can, in part, be attributed to this prior U.S. support. Given this precedent, it remains unclear why Washington would now choose to abandon a successful strategic partnership that demonstrated mutual resolve in defending Ukraine's sovereignty.

The current Trump administration has now taken an active role in seeking an end to the protracted conflict. However, for this initiative to succeed, the United States and its European allies must bridge the widening trust deficit. European engagement is critical not only for ensuring a viable and for just resolution for Ukraine but also for preventing a broader strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy focus away from Europe toward China. Rebuilding trust will require prompt diplomatic reconciliation with Zelensky and Ukrainian leadership following the February 28 White House confrontation. The broader security equation also necessitates a reevaluation of Europe's role in collective defense. Although the U.S. military presence in Europe has been reinforced in recent years, it remains insufficient relative to Russia's force posture in Ukraine and its western military districts. Given Washington's firm stance against deploying ground forces in Ukraine, European states must assume a more proactive role in securing any prospective peace arrangement. The Trump administration's request for European forces to enforce a settlement must be met with a reciprocal European demand for meaningful participation in the negotiation process, ensuring that any agreement aligns with Europe's long-term security interests.

An equally significant challenge lies in engaging Russia in a sustainable peace process. Moscow has yet to signal substantive concessions, instead articulating maximalist demands that complicate negotiations. A durable settlement cannot be achieved merely by solidifying the existing lines of conflict in eastern Ukraine, as Russia is likely to introduce additional strategic conditions, including limitations on U.S.

military deployments in Eastern Europe. The United States and Europe must prepare for a prolonged and arduous diplomatic engagement to address these security concerns comprehensively. A fundamental recalibration of European leadership in security affairs is imperative. To reinforce their strategic autonomy and strengthen alliance cohesion, European states—particularly France, Germany, and Poland—must spearhead a major defense initiative. A proposed European Defense Union (EDU) could serve as the institutional framework for such efforts, emphasizing joint defense procurement, military training, and collective deterrence. Furthermore, the participation of nuclear-armed European states, notably France and the United Kingdom, could enhance the EDU's strategic deterrence capabilities.

From a diplomatic perspective, the most effective mechanism for integrating Europe, Ukraine, and other key stakeholders into the peace process would be the reestablishment of a multilateral contact group under U.S. leadership. The historical precedent of such diplomatic frameworks, successfully employed in past conflict resolution efforts, underscores their utility in fostering unity and purpose within the alliance. Washington should recognize the efficacy of this approach in ensuring a sustainable resolution to the Ukraine conflict. The reflections of diplomat Richard Holbrooke remain relevant in this context. In his seminal work "America, a European Power," Holbrooke emphasized that sustained American engagement remains a critical component of European stability. The contemporary geopolitical landscape reinforces the validity of this assertion: while Europe requires U.S. leadership to secure a lasting peace in Ukraine, the United States equally depends on a strong transatlantic partnership to achieve this objective. Whether the Trump administration acknowledges this interdependence will be a defining factor in shaping the future of the Western alliance.

## West Bank must not become another Gaza

Yossi Mekelberg

To make things worse, if in Gaza the far right is still only fantasising about building Israeli settlements and resettling there, Israeli settlers are already scattered all across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and have an unquenched appetite for more land and new settlements. The more extreme among them are constantly provoking friction with the local population, either through violence or through their representatives in government and the Knesset who have been advancing policies...

**F**OR a brief moment when the Palestinian-Israeli documentary "No Other Land" was announced as this year's best documentary at the Oscars ceremony, the spotlight again shone on the daily hardships of Palestinians in the West Bank, which otherwise are generally neglected. For most of the past 18 months, for obvious reasons, the attention had been on the war in Gaza, at least as far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, and there have been many other headline-grabbing issues on a packed international agenda. Nevertheless, if there is one thing decision-makers with an interest in this conflict should have learned from events in Gaza, it is that ignoring and neglecting this conflict comes at a price — a very heavy one. Throughout the current extreme hostilities on both sides of the Israel-Gaza border, as well as the Israel-Lebanon border, the security situation has also been deteriorating in the occupied West Bank, especially in its northern parts, and thousands of Palestinians have already been forced out of their homes, raising the fear not only of escalation, but

also of Israeli annexation. Israel's playbook regarding the West Bank appears to be similar to the manner in which it is currently conducting its war in Gaza. It is not necessarily in the magnitude and intensity of the military operations, but in the disproportionate use of force in combating militants there while being insensitive to the lives and human rights of civilians. More recently, Israel has been increasingly keen to uproot the Palestinians from their houses without setting a time frame for their return.

To make things worse, if in Gaza the far right is still only fantasising about building Israeli settlements and resettling there, Israeli settlers are already scattered all across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and have an unquenched appetite for more land and new settlements. The more extreme among them are constantly provoking friction with the local population, either through violence or through their representatives in government and the Knesset who have been advancing policies and legislation that are further entrenching the occupation and leaving little hope for Palestini-

ans to believe that one day they will be free and independent on their own land. There is no denying that Israel is facing increased threats from militant groups in the West Bank, and this can be backdated to long before Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, and comes mainly from relatively recently formed groups that are not affiliated with any of the more established political organizations. They are mainly composed of a youth that is frustrated by living under an oppressive occupation, that does not trust its own (Palestinian Authority) leadership and consequently has been radicalized and has turned to armed resistance. An Israeli government that was less fanatic, less dogmatic, and capable of more nuanced policies than those of the current leadership, would have done everything in its power to reduce tensions in the West Bank, as it is overstretched on a number of other fronts, with an unfinished war in Gaza, a fragile ceasefire in Lebanon, its efforts to establish a military presence deep inside Syria, and, it has been suggested, the plans it is hatching to attack Iran's nuclear installations. But not this government.

## Briefs

US military  
also 'grateful  
to Pakistan'

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Islamabad and Washington had a "common interest in the war on terrorism". Meanwhile, the terrorist, who has since been produced before a Virginia court, has also admitted to involvement in several other attacks, the Justice Department said, including the March 2024 Moscow Crocus City Hall attack, in which he said "he had shared instructions on how to use AK-style rifles and other weapons to would-be attackers" by video.

Another  
US flight  
carrying...

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The deportees will be flown into the Nur Khan Airbase, Islamabad, with FIA officials and security personnel ensuring a smooth reception and verification process upon arrival. Additionally, authorities confirmed the recent deportation of 56-year-old Syed Rizvi, a Pakistani national who had been residing illegally in Dallas, Texas. He had entered the US in 2017 but was found to be in violation of immigration laws. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested him on January 31, and he was officially deported to Pakistan on February 25. Following his deportation, the FBI shared his photograph and details with Pakistani authorities for record-keeping.

Pakistan,  
Egypt call  
for a viable..

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The two Foreign Ministers reaffirmed their opposition to the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. They concurred that a lasting resolution to the crisis lies in the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State based on the borders prior to June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. The DPM also invited Dr. Badr Abdelatty to visit Pakistan on mutually convenient dates. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Sunday separately met Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov and Foreign Minister of Indonesia Sugiono on the margins of the Extra Ordinary meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Punjab  
government  
puts....

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The Daesh commander was later handed over to the US as a token of cooperation with the US in the war against terrorism. The spokesperson of Punjab police said: "Intelligence-based search and sweep operations and exercises are underway [across the province]." During the last 24 hours, 436 search and sweep operations were conducted, the spokesperson said, adding that 8 exercises were also conducted across Punjab. As many as 123 suspects and 38 proclaimed offenders were arrested during the operations, police said, adding that two Kalashnikov rifles, 12 guns and a huge cache of ammunition were also recovered by law enforcers.

Govt  
launches  
inquiry...

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and the three-member committee will probe financial irregularities in its leasing process. The Chairman of the Prime Minister's Inspection Commission has been appointed as the convener of the committee, while Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director Sirajuddin Amjad and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director Syed Shahid Husain will serve as members. The inquiry committee will examine financial irregularities in the leasing of PQA land, which was allocated for small and medium-sized industrial parks.

Gillespie hits back at Gavaskar's  
'rhetoric' on Pakistan team

Former Pakistan head coach calls Gavaskar's statement "absolute nonsense"

DNA

DUBAI: As the Green Shirts come under scrutiny following their exit from ICC Champions Trophy 2025, former Pakistan head coach Jason Gillespie has strongly rejected the comments of legendary Indian batter Sunil Gavaskar regarding Pakistan cricket team. Speaking after Pakistan's disappointing exit from the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, where they suffered defeats at the hands of New Zealand and India, Gavaskar said that even a second or third-string Indian team could outplay Pakistan's current ODI side. Gillespie, however, dismissed this statement, calling it "absolute nonsense." He went on to state that Pakistan's team, if managed and supported properly, has the potential to defeat any opponent, including India.

"I don't buy this rhetoric. I saw some comments from Sunil Gavaskar about the Indian B team or Indian C team beating Pakistan's top team. That's nonsense. Ab-



solute nonsense. If Pakistan pick and stick with the right players and gives them time to shine, time to learn, and time to develop their games, they can beat anyone. I have got no doubt about that," he said.



"They have immense talent. The key is selecting the right kind of players, supporting them, and being patient. In my opinion, there's far too much impatience in Pakistan cricket," he added. The for-

mer Australian pacer further emphasised the importance of stability in team selection and management. "If the PCB, as a board, wants to change and get the right results, they need to get the right people, the right selection panel, and give players time to flourish and do their job. If you are hiring a new coach, give him the opportunity to do something meaningful, give him the time. Otherwise, the results are going to be the same," he stated. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan's campaign in the Champions Trophy was highly disappointing, as they became the first team to be knocked out of the tournament despite being the hosts.

The Men in Green suffered back-to-back defeats, first against New Zealand in the tournament opener on February 19 in Karachi, followed by a crushing loss to arch-rivals India on February 23 in Dubai. Their final group-stage match against Bangladesh on February 27 in Rawalpindi was washed out due to rain, leaving them winless in the competition.

Babar Azam breaks his  
fast at Khana-e-Kaaba

Star batter's brother shares video, pictures showing them spending time at Islam's holiest site

DNA

MAKKAH: Pakistan's star batter and former skipper Babar Azam has performed Umrah and was seen attending iftar at the holiest site, Masjid Al Haram in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. In a video posted on Safer Azam's - Babar's brother - Instagram account, the right-handed batter can be seen enjoying a date while sitting in the open area near the Kaaba.

"Alhamdulillah," read the caption of the video. Meanwhile, in another post on the same account, Safer shared multiple pictures with Babar with the hashtag "Umrah 2025" - confirming that the duo were in Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage. This isn't the first time images have surfaced

of Babar spending time in the holy cities of Makkah and Medina during Ramadan. The former captain had also performed Umrah

in the holy month of Ramadan back in 2024. The cricketer, known for his prowess on the pitch, has been in the limelight owing



to his performance in the Champions Trophy 2025 and subsequent snub from the team for the upcoming T20I series against New Zealand. The New Zealand tour will run from March 16 to April 5, with the T20I series set for March 16-26 and the ODI series scheduled from March 29 to April 5. However, the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) decision to exclude Babar from the side didn't sit well with his father who took to social media to highlight his son's achievements, pointing out that he was named in the ICC T20I Team of the Year and awarded the team's cap, yet was still dropped. He expressed confidence that Babar would make a strong comeback by performing well in the upcoming National T20 and Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Al-Hilal return  
to winning ways,  
Al-Nassr stumble

RIYADH: Al-Hilal defeated Al-Fayha 2-0 on Friday to cut Al-Itihad's lead at the top of the Saudi Pro League to just four points while, despite another Cristiano Ronaldo special, Al-Nassr were held to a 2-2 draw by Al-Shabab in the Riyadh derby. With just two wins in the last six league games, the pressure was on Al-Hilal but a first-half goal from Mohamed Kanno eased the worries of the defending champions. The midfielder was left unmarked near the penalty spot from a Ruben Neves corner from the right and headed home powerfully. It put a spring in the step of the visitors but it was not until the 90th minute that Al-Hilal were certain of the three points. Aleksandar Mitrovic has been injured since January but was never going to miss when Salem Al-Dawsari pulled the ball back and the Serbian striker stroked home. It was not a vintage performance but the win was more than welcome for under-fire coach Jorge Jesus. Back in Riyadh, Al-Nassr drew 2-2 with Al-Shabab and are now 10 points behind the leaders Al-Itihad. It all happened toward the end of the first half. Abderrazak Hamdallah opened the scoring against his former club, putting Al-Shabab ahead from the penalty spot. Daniel Podence was brought down just inside the area and up stepped the Moroccan to smash the ball into the corner. But Al-Nassr were ahead by the break. Two minutes into added time, the Yellows equalized. Al-Shabab cleared a left-sided Ronaldo free-kick that bounced out to Ayman Yahya who lashed it home from just inside the area. Seven minutes into added time Ronaldo put Al-Nassr ahead. The 40-year-old picked up possession on the right side of the area and then smashed the ball home into the roof of the net for his 18th league goal of the season. It was all looking good but, seven minutes into the second half, Al-Nassr were reduced to 10 men as Mohammed Al-Fatih was adjudged to have bundled over Podence as the Portuguese star ran for goal. - Agencies

Opp leader  
announces  
intensified..

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actions reflect widespread public anger. The opposition leader emphasised that the issue of missing persons remains a major concern. He said that the matter was raised during a recent meeting with the chief justice and stressed that upholding constitutional and legal supremacy is imperative. He reiterated that the opposition's movement for the rule of law will now gain further momentum. Ayub painted a bleak picture of Pakistan's economic situation, stating that the rupee's depreciation has resulted in a loss of Rs4,000 billion. He accused the government of allowing corruption to rise across various departments, noting that no significant investment has entered the country in the last two years. He further claimed that an additional 20 million people have fallen below the poverty line during this period.

Asad Qaiser  
demands  
PM's...

FROM PAGE 01

agenda, which will be presented to the public to mobilise support. The former speaker also demanded the withdrawal of FIRs against PTI workers and the release of those detained. Speaking to Dunya News, Qaiser clarified that no decision or meeting had been held regarding a protest outside Adiala Jail. He revealed that a detailed action plan would be announced next week in coordination with opposition parties, and a protest strategy would be devised in collaboration with the grand alliance.

India clinch  
CT for  
record...

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Set to chase 252, the 2013 champions comfortably knocked the winning runs for the loss of six wickets and six balls to spare. The men in blue got off to a flying start to the pursuit as their in-form opening pair of captain Sharma and top-ranked ODI batter Shubman Gill sedated a brisk 105-run partnership. The opening stand was majorly dominated by Sharma, while Gill held the other end firmly until falling victim to Mitchell Santner, courtesy of a stunning catch by Glenn Phillips at short cover.

Sharaa pleas  
for peace as  
clashes...

FROM PAGE 01

"Rest assured about Syria, this country has the characteristics for survival," Sharaa said in a circulated video, speaking at a mosque in his childhood neighborhood of Mazzah in Damascus. "What is currently happening in Syria is within the expected challenges." Syrian security sources said at least two hundred of their members were killed in the clashes with former army personnel owing allegiance to Assad after coordinated attacks and ambushes on their forces that were waged on Thursday. The attacks spiralled into revenge killings when thousands of armed supporters of Syria's new leaders from across the country,

Syria president calls  
for unity after reports  
of mass killings

DNA

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa called for national unity and peace on Sunday, after more than 1,000 people were reportedly killed in coastal Syria in the worst clashes since the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. The violence erupted on Thursday between the new security forces and loyalists of the former government along the Mediterranean coast in the heartland of the Alawite minority to which Assad belonged. It has since escalated into the largest challenge to the new government's forces since Sharaa's coalition toppled Assad in December. "We must preserve national unity (and) civil peace as much as possible and, God willing, we will be able to live together in this country," Sharaa said from a mosque in Damascus. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor has reported that 745 Alawite civilians were killed in Latakia and Tartus provinces.

The Britain-based Observatory said they were killed in "executions" carried out by security personnel or pro-government fighters, accompanied by the "looting of homes and properties". The fighting has also killed 125 members of the security forces and 148 pro-Assad fighters, according to the Observatory, taking the overall death toll to 1,018. The official SANA news agency reported on Saturday that security forces had deployed to Latakia, as well as Jableh and Banyas further south, to restore order. Banyas resident Samir Haidar, 67, told AFP two of his brothers and his niece were killed by "armed groups" that entered people's homes, adding that there were "foreigners among them". Though himself an Alawite, Haidar was part of the leftist opposition to the Assads and was imprisoned for more than a decade under their rule. Defence ministry spokesman Hassan Abdul Ghani said the security forces had "reimposed control" over areas that had seen attacks by Assad loyalists.

Ministers  
distribute  
minority  
cards

SIALKOT: Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif, alongside Provincial Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora, distributed minority cards to 1,547 families in Sialkot district. The ceremony was held here on Sunday, where the defence minister praised Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's efforts in promoting equal rights for religious and ethnic minorities. Khawaja Asif emphasised that a healthy society ensures equal rights for minorities without discrimination. He called for national unity, stating that loyalty to Pakistan must transcend religious affiliations. He highlighted that in a truly just society, minorities not only enjoy equal rights but are also provided additional support and protections. The defence minister noted that Sialkot is home to a significant number of Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs who have lived there freely since the establishment of Pakistan. - Agencies

Djokovic crashes out at Indian  
Wells as Alcaraz sails through

INDIAN WELLS, California: Five-time champion Novak Djokovic tumbled out of the Indian Wells ATP Masters on Saturday, falling in his first match to lucky loser Botić van de Zandschulp as two-time defending champ Carlos Alcaraz advanced. "No excuses for a poor performance," 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic said after 37 unforced errors in a 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 defeat. "It doesn't feel great when you play this way on the court," he added. "But congratulations to my opponent - just a bad day in the office, I guess, for me."

Djokovic is just the latest in van de Zandschulp's string of superstar victims. He stunned Alcaraz at the US Open last year before beating Rafael Nadal in Davis Cup in what proved the Spanish great's last match. "I think I kept my cool during the whole match," said van de Zandschulp. "I know if I go into the match and lose my cool, especially against the big players, it's going to be a really tough day. That's always one thing I'm trying to do well."

After 14 unforced errors in the first set, Djokovic cleaned things up in the second, grabbing a quick break on the way to a 3-0 lead. Djokovic pumped his fist after belting a forehand winner to the corner for his first break chance of the match and after consolidating the break nodded his head in satisfaction. The rallies remained tense affairs and Djokovic's frustration was clear at times, but after he was broken when serving for the set he closed it out on his next service game. It was only a brief respite. Van de Zandschulp kept the pressure on both from the baseline and at the net and Djokovic's errors began to pile

up again. Van de Zandschulp took control with a break for 3-1, reeling off the last five games as Djokovic was unable to stop the bleeding. "The first three games, four games of the third set were quite close," Djokovic, seeded sixth, said. "Had my chances. Was just some awful mistakes."

Italian Matteo Arnaldi sprang another upset, beating seventh seed Andrey Rublev 6-4, 7-5. Djokovic and Rublev followed to seed Alexander Zverev and fourth seed Casper Ruud as second-round casualties.

With Zverev out and world No. 1 Jannik Sinner serving a three-month drugs ban, world number three Alcaraz is the highest seed left in the men's draw. Alcaraz, trying to join Djokovic and Roger Federer as the only men to win three straight Indian Wells titles, eased into his defense with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over France's Quentin Halys. He admitted he was feeling some nerves to start the match, but they evaporated amid a strong all-around performance. One early break staked Alcaraz to the first set. He roared to a 4-0 lead in the second behind a formidable service display and wrapped up the win in 67 minutes. "I was nervous at the beginning of the match," he told a supportive crowd. "The first match is never easy so I was trying to be focused on my game. I just tried to be relaxed, as relaxed as I can. Can always be better, but I'm ready for the (next) round and excited." Women's world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka opened her campaign with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over rising US talent McCartney Kessler. - Agencies

## Serena Hotels celebrates Spirit of Ramadan



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels hosted its Annual Corporate Iftar Dinner, a cherished tradition celebrating the spirit of Ramadan, under the gracious hos-

pitality of CEO Serena Hotels Mr. Aziz Boolani and Mrs. Wiqar Boolani. The event brought together a distinguished gathering of government officials, members of the Armed Forces, Diplomats, Heads of International Agencies, Corporate Executives, and media personnel. Guests enjoyed a wide varie-



ty of traditional food from different cuisines, including traditional Pakistani flavors, Middle Eastern specialties, East Asian delicacies, and classic continental dishes. The ambiance was further enriched with live folk music, adding a cultural touch to the memorable evening. As the event unfolded, it high-

lighted Serena Hotels legacy of impeccable service and commitment to excellence, reaffirming its role as a leader in hospitality. Serena Hotels remains dedicated to organizing memorable events that bring people together, strengthen connections, and create a welcoming atmosphere for its valued guests.

## Briefs

## Jaishankar's remarks on Kashmir contrary to reality: Raza

BRUSSELS: Ali Raza Syed, Chairman of the Kashmir Council Europe (KCEU) has strongly reacted to the recent statement made by the Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, stating that the Indian Minister's remarks regarding occupied Kashmir and Azad Kashmir are completely contrary to reality.

In his recent remarks at Chatham House, UK, the Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said, "Removal of Article 370 and the restoration of growth, economic activities, and ensuring social justice in Kashmir were significant steps. This was followed by the successful conduct of elections with a high voter turnout." Jaishankar added, "We are now on the path toward the eventual return of stolen part of Kashmir which remains under illegal Pakistani occupation. Once this is achieved, I assure you, the Kashmir issue will be resolved."

Chairman of KCEU said, Indian external affairs minister remarks are totally vicious and unacceptable. He described, by abrogating Article 370, New Delhi has violated Indian promise with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and its longstanding stance, which granted special status to Kashmir. Ali Raza Syed said, the Indian Minister speaks of prosperity and economic recovery, the situation in occupied Kashmir is disastrous and utterly contradictory to his claims. Ali Raza Syed said, talking about prosperity while oppressing Kashmiris is nothing while a laughingstock. —APP

## Qatar demands IAEA oversight of Israel's nuclear facilities

DUBAI: Qatar has called for international efforts to bring all Israel's nuclear facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The foreign ministry of Qatar, in a statement, called on Israel "to subject all its nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards" and for Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The statement followed a meeting of IAEA governors in Vienna attended by Jassim Yacoub Al-Hammadi, Qatar's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations in Vienna. The meeting addressed "the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel's nuclear capabilities." Al-Hammadi noted during the meeting that "some of these resolutions explicitly urged Israel to join the NPT as a non-nuclear state." He also pointed out that "all Middle Eastern countries, except Israel, are parties to the NPT and have effective safeguard agreements with the agency." —APP

## Phone bans sweep US schools despite skepticism

ALEXANDRIA, United States: At a red-brick school in Virginia, Hayden Jones is one of 1,000 students banned from using their phones as part of a trial hoping to boost learning. But the 12-year-old's verdict on the restrictions — a shrug of his shoulders — reflects the skepticism shared by some students and parents. The phone ban at Twain Middle School is among a wave of measures implemented around the United States, and is part of a global movement replicated in Brazil, France and beyond. Supporters believe restrictions will guard pupils from the apparent harms of smartphone use while at school, but opponents say the measures fail to prepare teenagers for the digital world they will inevitably enter. Since September, Jones must now place his Android phone in a magnetic pouch each morning, which is locked until the end of the school day as part of a pilot scheme this academic year. —APP



ISLAMABAD: The embassies of Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece came together to celebrate International Women's Day. The ambassadors of Romania and Bulgaria, along with the head of the Greek embassy's mission in Islamabad, joined their staff members to mark the occasion in a fitting and memorable way. — DNA

## China's digital boom opens global markets for Pakistani businessmen

Platforms like Alibaba, JD.com, and Pinduoduo have opened doors to markets I couldn't access before," Sajid explained. "What's more transformative is the integration of AI tools like DeepSeek

## DNA

BEIJING: China's digital boom opens global markets for a Pakistani businessman who lives in Yiwu City, that is a global small commodity hub in eastern China. Here Pakistani businessman Rana Sajid found his life's calling. By importing and exporting commodities worldwide, he has built a prosperous career, providing a comfortable life for himself and his family. According to a Gwadar Pro's report, having settled in China for over 20 years, Sajid has witnessed the rapid evolution of China's commercial sector, benefiting from its convenient and business-friendly environment. In recent years, the digital boom has further propelled his business to new heights. "Through e-commerce, I can connect with clients on a much broader scale, reaching customers not just locally but

across the globe. Platforms like Alibaba, JD.com, and Pinduoduo have opened doors to markets I couldn't access before," Sajid explained. "What's more transformative is the integration of AI tools like DeepSeek. These tools allow sellers to create professional-quality promotional videos in multiple languages within just 10 minutes. This not only saves time and resources but also helps tailor marketing strategies to specific cultural and linguistic preferences, making it easier to engage with diverse audiences. For instance, I can now target customers in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East simultaneously, all while maintaining a personalized touch." China has been the world's largest online retail market for 12 consecutive years, offering vast opportunities for both domestic and international businesses. Yiwu, a city with a population of over 1.9 million, including

1.4 million migrants and 18,000 long-term foreign residents, is a microcosm of this thriving ecosystem. The city is home to more than 1.1 million market entities and over 260,000 cross-border e-commerce businesses. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into e-commerce has become a game-changer. In Yiwu alone, nearly 30,000 merchants are already using AI tools to enhance their operations. Last month, an AI-powered promotional platform was launched, offering free services to local businesses. Meanwhile, in nearby Hangzhou, the government aims to develop over 100 demonstration cases of "AI + cross-border e-commerce" by 2026. The digital economy has become a focal point in China's development strategy. During the ongoing Two Sessions, the annual meetings of China's top legislative and advisory bodies, policymakers emphasized

plans to unleash the creative potential of the digital economy, including goals to foster digital industrial clusters. "For international businesses, AI tools can generate promotional content tailored to Chinese consumers quickly and cost-effectively," said Yang Debin, a deputy to the National People's Congress and president of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) International Information Technology Association. The Greater Bay Area, comprising Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao, has emerged as a powerhouse for cross-border e-commerce. According to Mohammed Mustafa, Vice President of the Shenzhen Cross-border E-commerce Association, the development of digital infrastructure—such as high-speed internet and advanced payment systems—is critical to realizing the full potential of e-commerce. "This is especially important for rural areas in other countries, where

e-commerce adoption remains relatively low," Mustafa noted. "For countries like Pakistan, which has a strong agricultural sector, there is growing demand in China for high-quality agricultural products, including fruits, spices, and meat. Developing efficient supply chains for these products will be a priority." To support this growing partnership, a cross-border e-commerce talent training program is underway for Pakistani students, entrepreneurs, and experts. The initiative seeks to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the rapidly evolving e-commerce landscape. "With expertise in areas like AI-driven logistics, big data analytics and customer relationship management, China can vitalize businesses in countries like Pakistan to compete more effectively in global market," Mohammed said.

## SAARC Secy Gen stresses urgent action for sustainable uplift

KATHMANDU: During the plenary session of the World Sustainable Development Summit 2025, His Excellency the Secretary General delivered an impactful address, emphasizing the critical imperative of integrated action to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) achievement, with a particular focus on the challenges and opportunities within South Asia. Recognizing that the South Asian region is currently off track to meet most of the SDGs and has even witnessed regression in key areas, the Secretary General stressed the urgent need for a coordinated and holistic approach that acknowledges the deep interconnections between the SDGs and the specific vulnerabilities of the region to climate change. He underlined the necessity of strong regional cooperation and integrated strategies to build resilience and foster sustainable socio-economic development. The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship multi-stakeholder event organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi. The twenty-fourth edition of the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) was held in New Delhi under the theme "Partnerships for Accelerating Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions" from 5th to 7th March 2025. The Secretary General highlighted the crucial role of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its initiatives in addressing the challenges of achieving SDGs. —DNA

## China, Iran, Russia to hold joint naval drill

BEIJING: Chinese Defense Ministry announced on Sunday that China will soon hold a joint naval exercise with Iran and Russia near Iran, with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy sending a destroyer and a replenishment ship. A Chinese expert said the drill will help safeguard security in the strategically important energy shipping region. In early and mid-March, navies of China, Iran and Russia will hold the Security Belt-2025 joint exercise in areas near Iran's Chabahar Port, the Chinese Defense Ministry announced in its official Weibo account on Sunday. The drill will feature training courses including maritime target strike, VBSS (visit, board, search, and seizure), damage control as well as joint search and rescue operations, according to a statement from the ministry. It aims to deepen military mutual trust and pragmatic cooperation among the participating countries' troops, according to the statement. Security Belt-2025 will be the fifth China-Iran-Russia joint naval exercise since 2019. Joint exercises among China, Iran and Russia have become routine, Song Zhongping, a Chinese military affairs expert, told the Global Times on Sunday. As revealed by the Chinese Defense Ministry, the drill will mainly focus on training courses in non-traditional security fields, and this is conducive to the safeguard of security in the region, Song said. The exercise will take place off the Iranian port of Chabahar in the Gulf of Oman, a crucial gateway between the Strait of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean, making it a strategic pathway crucial to energy shipping, Song said, noting that the three countries participating in the drills have energy cooperation as well as important strategic interests in maintaining peace and stability in the region. China will send the destroyer Baotou and the replenishment ship Gaoyouhu from the PLA Navy's 47th escort task group, the Defense Ministry stated. The Baotou is a Type 052D guided missile destroyer, and the Gaoyouhu is a Type 903A comprehensive replenishment ship. Before this drill, the two PLA Navy warships also took part in the AMAN-2025 multinational maritime exercise in Pakistan in early to mid-February. Zhang Junshu, another Chinese military affairs expert, told the Global Times that warships from the PLA Navy's escort task groups to the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia frequently participate in joint exercises with foreign countries. The Type 052D destroyer and Type 903A replenishment ship form a flotilla capable of diverse military operations with strong combat power and endurance, Zhang said. —DNA

## Bangladeshi businesses seek closer ties with UAE

DHAKA: Bangladeshi businesses are seeking closer ties with the UAE on skills development, trade and investments, the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry said on Sunday after it signed agreements with its Emirati counterparts to strengthen economic cooperation. The UAE is Bangladesh's largest trading partner in the Middle East, with their bilateral trade volume valued at around \$2 billion in 2024. The Gulf state — home to about 1.2 million Bangladeshi expats — is also Bangladesh's fifth-largest foreign investor. DCCI President Taskeen Ahmed led a 29-member business delegation to the UAE last month, where he signed preliminary agreements with the Dubai Chambers and the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry to boost trade and investments between

their two countries. Bangladeshi businesses are eyeing cooperation in a number of key areas, including trade and market access, energy and financial sectors, tourism and hospitality, infrastructure and logistics, Ahmed said. "Closer trade relations between Bang-

ladesh and the UAE present a significant opportunity to strengthen our economic landscape across multiple sectors. I firmly believe that enhanced trade ties with the UAE can be a game-changer for Bangladesh," he told foreign media. "The UAE serves as a major

gateway to the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. Expanding our trade partnership will create greater market access for Bangladeshi products." The Dhaka Chamber is also seeking stronger collaboration in technology and skills development. "The UAE is highly advanced in digital infrastructure, logistics, and financial services. Stronger collaboration can facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity-building, helping Bangladeshi industries adopt global best practices, enhance productivity, and become more competitive," Ahmed added. Under the newly signed memoranda of understanding, DCCI is set to collaborate with its Emirati counterparts "to promote bilateral trade, investment matching and joint economic discussions," with activities focused on exchanging trade

delegations and strengthening business networking platforms. "To further boost collaboration, Bangladesh aims to activate the Bangladesh-UAE Business Council, focusing on trade finance, private equity, and expanding Islamic finance," Ahmed said. Business leaders from the two countries are also involved in discussions to set up training centers "to improve the skill set of Bangladeshi workers" who are seeking employment in the UAE, while a direct shipping route between Chattogram and Dubai is being discussed to enhance trade efficiency. "I believe that this mutual cooperation will enhance the value of our national bilateral relations... These initiatives will further deepen the economic and trade relationship between Bangladesh and the UAE following the MoU signing." —Agencies



## Syria forces beef up security amid reports of mass killings of Alawites

BEIRUT, Lebanon: Syrian security forces deployed heavily in the Alawite heartland on the Mediterranean coast on Saturday, after a war monitor reported that government and allied forces killed nearly 750 civilians from the religious minority in recent days. Residents of the region continued to report killings of civilians after deadly clashes broke out on Thursday between Syria's new authorities and gunmen loyal to toppled president Bashar Assad, himself an Alawite. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 745 Alawite civilians were killed in "executions" carried out by security personnel or pro-government fighters, accompanied by the "looting of homes and properties." The civilian deaths took the overall toll from violence in the region since Thursday to 1,018, after fighting killed 125 members of the new government's security forces and 148 pro-Assad fighters, according to the Observatory's figures. The official SANA news agency reported that security forces had deployed to Latakia, as well as Jableh and Baniyas farther south, to restore order. Baniyas resident Samir Haidar, 67, told MEDIA two of his brothers and his niece were killed by "armed groups" that entered people's homes, adding that there were "foreigners among them." He managed to escape to a Sunni neighborhood, but said: "If I had been five minutes late, I would have been killed... we were saved in the last minutes." Though himself an Alawite, Haidar was part of the leftist opposition to the Assads and was imprisoned for more than a decade under their rule. The Observatory, which relies on a network of sources in Syria, has reported multiple "massacres" in recent days, with women and children among the dead. —APP

## Russia says captures another east Ukraine village

MOSCOW: Russia announced Sunday the capture of another eastern Ukrainian village, in the Donetsk region, as its forces advanced toward the central Dnipropetrovsk region. The defence ministry said in a briefing that its troops had captured the village of Kostyantynopil, about 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of the Russia-controlled city of Donetsk. Russian troops have been advancing steadily in the Donetsk region and are now close to Dnipropetrovsk, which so far has been free of fighting. Kostyantynopil is around 13 kilometres (eight miles) from the regional border line. The village was founded in the 18th century by Greek settlers from Crimea, who named it after the ancient city of Constantinople. —APP

## Some 200 detained after Istanbul Women's Day march

ISTANBUL: Police detained some 200 demonstrators in Istanbul late on Saturday after more than 3,000 women marched peacefully through the city center under tight security to mark International Women's Day, organizers said. For years protests have been banned in the city's central Taksim Square, which is habitually fenced off with barriers, but the authorities have in recent years tolerated rallies nearby albeit under a heavy security presence. The Feminist Night March rally began at sunset near Taksim Square, with many demonstrators wearing purple and waving banners with slogans including "We won't be silenced, we're not afraid and we won't obey" and "Long live our feminist struggle." Although the march ended without incident, organizers said police then started rounding up a number of protesters. —APP

**Briefs**

**Police foil another attack by terrorists on KP Border**

DNA

DG KHAN: Police on Sunday foiled another terrorist attack on the Lakhani border post near the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa border. According to police, this was the second attack in 24 hours and the third major assault in a week. Around 20 to 25 heavily armed terrorists, equipped with rocket launchers and advanced weaponry, launched the attack. Thermal imaging cameras detected the terrorists in time, allowing police personnel to retaliate effectively. The attackers were forced to retreat, reportedly suffering heavy casualties. Regional Police Officer (RPO) Capt (R) Sajjad Hassan Khan led the operation, while District Police Officer (DPO) Syed Ali commanded the Quick Response Force (QRF) teams. DPO Syed Ali stated that cowardly attacks would not shake the police resolve, while RPO Capt (R) Sajjad Hassan Khan reaffirmed that every terrorist assault would be thwarted. Inspector General of Punjab Police praised the force's bravery, vowing to prevent terrorists from entering Punjab and ensuring public safety at all costs. A search operation has been launched in border area.

**Hamas says 'positive' signs for start of phase two Gaza truce talks**

CAIRO: Hamas group said on Saturday that there were "positive" signs regarding the start of negotiations for the second phase of the fragile Gaza ceasefire, as a delegation from the Palestinian militant group met with mediators in Cairo. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Israel would send a delegation to Doha on Monday for truce talks. Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanouna said in a statement that "efforts of the Egyptian and Qatari mediators are ongoing to complete the implementation of the ceasefire agreement". "The indicators are positive regarding the start of negotiations for the second phase," he added, without providing further details. In a statement, Netanyahu's office said that Israel had accepted an invitation from US-backed mediators and would "send a delegation to Doha on Monday in an effort to advance the negotiations". The first phase of the Gaza ceasefire ended on March 1 after six weeks of relative calm that included exchanges of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, though widespread hostilities have not resumed. - APP

**Govt plans digital prize bonds**

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: In a major move aimed at documenting the country's economy, the Finance Division has instructed CDNS (Central Directorate National Savings) to introduce digital prize bonds to address the void left by the discontinuation of bearer prize bonds. The initiative is particularly noteworthy due to its paperless nature which eliminates the need for expenses related to printing and logistics and would enhance transparency and accountability. Additionally, a digital prize bond is registered under the purchaser's name, which mitigates the risk of theft, damage or loss. The move would also ease access for both purchasing and selling, streamlining the entire process for efficient management. According to a summary prepared by the finance ministry for approval from competent forums and official documents available with this correspondent, initially, the digital prize bonds of Rs500, 1,000, 5,000 and 10,000 will be issued in denominations as notified by the Finance Division from time to time.

**Malaysia-Pak iftar celebrates "Two Nations, One Ummah"**

In his welcoming remarks, the High Commissioner underscored the excellent ties between Malaysia and Pakistan. He stated that Malaysia placed high regard to its strong brotherly relationship with Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Dato' Mohamad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan and To' Puan Amelia Amani Lee Abdullah hosted the Iftar Reception themed "Two Nations, One Ummah: Malaysia & Pakistan". Dr. Mufti Akeel-Ur-Rehman Pirzada, Grand Mufti of Islamabad/Chairman Ulama Aman (Peace) Committee of Pakistan graced the occasion as a Guest Speaker. Distinguished guests present were senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, Islamabad-based ASEAN Heads of Mission, heads of think tank, members of the media, Malaysian diaspora, Friends of Malaysia, and staff members of the High Commission with families. Apart from celebrating the blessed month of Ramadan, the gathering was a testimony of the strong fraternal ties between Malaysia and Pakistan bonded by one faith, shared traditions, and a commitment to upholding Islamic values. In his welcoming remarks, the High Commissioner underscored the excellent ties between Malaysia and Pakistan. He stated that Malaysia placed high regard to its strong brotherly relationship with Pakistan. Going forward, he was confident that with the ongoing collaborative efforts, the relationship would soar to a higher level.



ISLAMABAD: The High Commissioner of Malaysia, Dato Azhar Mazlan, hosted an iftar dinner for friends, bringing together a distinguished gathering, including the heads of missions from ASEAN countries. Former Foreign Secretary and head of ISSI, Sohail Mahmood, was also among the attendees. - DNA

During the event, the guests enjoyed an array of specially curated Malaysian cuisines such as beef rendang, bubur lambuk, fried chicken, fried spaghetti, mutton curry, scented rice, as well as traditional Malaysian savoury and desserts.

**E&P firms to invest \$5 bln into Pak petroleum sector**

From January 2024 to December 2025, Pakistan collected substantial revenues: Rs. 54.7 billion in oil royalties, Rs. 1.46 billion in gas royalties, and Rs. 2.07 billion in production bonuses, among other sources

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Local and international firms in Pakistan's oil and gas exploration and production (E&P) sector have expressed strong interest in investing over \$5 billion in the country's energy sector in the next three years. This surge in investor confidence is attributed to recent amendments in the Petroleum Policy and the introduction of an exclusive Tight Gas Policy, offering enhanced incentives and a more investor-friendly regulatory framework. These strategic reforms are set to unlock new opportunities, bolster domestic energy production, and attract significant foreign and local investment. According to official documents, during the last one year, the revision of gas prices has significantly stabilized the financial health of key entities like Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) and Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), ensuring uninterrupted gas supplies across industrial and domestic sectors. The inclusion of RLNG (Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas) diversion in revenue requirements has effectively curbed the accumulation of tariff differentials, further streamlining the energy sector's finances. The allocation of gas from newly discovered reserves has enabled Sui companies to mitigate the impact of natural depletion, supporting the growing demand during critical winter months. In a landmark move, the signing of the Consortium Agreement for the Machike-Thalian-Taru Jabba White Oil Pipeline Project on September 4, 2024, underscores the government's commitment to achieving self-sufficiency in oil, gas, and mineral supply. The Petroleum Division's vision emphasizes fostering an investor-friendly environment through progressive policies, advanced technologies, and effective regulatory frameworks. Once grappling with challenges such as declining exploration, outdated policies, and circular debt, the ministry has embarked on comprehensive reforms. These include allowing E&P companies to sell up to 35%

**'Economy steered to growth path'**

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Finance Minister, Khurram Schehzad said here on Sunday that country's economy has successfully been prevented from bankruptcy and steered in the right direction to sustainable growth as indicated by various economic indicators. The advisor, in an exclusive interview with APP, highlighted positive developments of several economic indicators and the success of key reforms introduced by the incumbent government to put the country on growth path. The advisor noted that inflation has decreased significantly, with the overall inflation rate previously reaching a historic high of 38%. The food inflation rate had also surged to 49%. He said, owing to government measures, the inflation rate has decreased to around 1.5%, hence providing relief to the public. He compared Pakistan's inflation rate to other countries, including Turkey, Argentina, Egypt, and Nigeria, which had ranged from 35% to 36% a year ago while it was 38% in Pakistan. However, currently Pakistan's eight-month average inflation rate is now around 6% whereas it is still around 35% in the above mentioned countries. He said, the inflation in Pakistan was even lower compared to our neighbouring country India as well as Bangladesh. He attributed this decrease to government measures, as well as decline in international commodity prices and the stabilization of the rupee. - APP

**Pakistan desires to expand relations with France: envoy**

*Pakistan envoy to France Mumtaz Zahra presents credentials to French President*

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch officially assumed her role as Pakistan's Ambassador to France by presenting her letters of credence to French President Emmanuel Macron. The formal Presentation of Credentials ceremony took place at the Elysee Palace, the official residence of the French President, in a dignified and traditional setting. During the ceremony, Ambassador Baloch conveyed the warm greetings and best wishes of Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to President Macron. Emphasizing the historical and strategic importance of Pakistan-France relations, Ambassador Baloch reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening bilateral ties across multiple sectors, including trade, investment, education, culture, and defense cooperation. She also highlighted the need for enhancing people-to-people exchanges, fostering diplomatic engagement, and promoting mutual understanding between the two nations. Ambassador Baloch expressed confidence that under her tenure, Pakistan and France would continue to explore new avenues of cooperation, reinforcing their diplomatic, economic, and cultural partnerships.

**PDMA predicts heavy rainfall warning**

ISLAMABAD: Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Punjab on Sunday issued a high alert for heavy rainfall across the country from March 9 to 16. While talking on a private news channel, the PDMA spokesperson cautioned the citizens to stay updated with the weather advisory available on media channels. He emphasized the importance of staying informed and taking necessary precautions in the current heavy rainfall to ensure safety during their travel plans. Spokesperson also mentioned that PDMA DG Irfan Ali Kathia also had instructed commissioners and deputy commissioners across Punjab to be on high alert due to the anticipated heavy rainfall. To ensure readiness for any potential emergencies, alerts have been issued to key departments, including WASA, Rescue 1122, Irrigation Department, Managing water resources, Live-stock Department and for ensuring animal safety and well-being. He said these measures aim to minimize risks and facilitate prompt responses to any situations that may arise. - Agencies

**Pakistan-Iran N-40 Highway remains closed for ninth day**

MONITORING DESK

QUETTA: The N-40 National Highway, which serves as the main trade route between Pakistan and Iran, remained closed for the ninth consecutive day as the families of 10 missing youths from Kardgap continued to protest in Noshki. The road closure has severed the country's land connection with Iran and disrupted travel between Noshki, Rakhshan Division, and Quetta. Additionally, the supply of LPG gas to Punjab and Sindh has been suspended due to road closure. Protesters also broke the windows of a car attempting to use an alternative route. Meanwhile, the Pakistan-Afghan Torkham border also remained closed for the 16th day due to tensions between the two countries. Customs authorities said on Sunday. The closure, triggered by tensions over construction in disputed areas, has severely impacted cross-border movement, while all kinds of trade are also suspended between Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to customs officials, the halt in trade over the past 16 days has resulted in an estimated loss of \$3 million on a daily basis. The immigration authorities further revealed that nearly 10,000 people cross the Torkham border daily, with the closure leaving thousands stranded on both sides. The Torkham border was closed on Saturday (February 22) for all kinds of movement after tension escalated between Pakistani and Afghan forces over the construction of a bunker by the latter near Zero-Point. According to security sources, Afghan forces attempted to build a bunker in a disputed area near the border, prompting Pakistan's Frontier Corps (FC) to respond.

**Ukraine committed to dialogue with US**

DNA

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that Ukraine was "fully committed" to having a constructive dialogue with the United States representatives in Saudi Arabia next week over ways to end the war with Russia. Since taking office in January, US President Donald Trump has paused US military aid to Ukraine as well as intelligence-sharing with Kyiv. He has accused Zelensky of not being serious about reaching a peace agreement with Russia, which invaded Ukraine three years ago and has seized about 20% of its territory. "Ukraine has been seeking peace from the very first second of this war. Realistic proposals are on the table. The key is to move quickly and effectively," Zelensky said in a post on X on Saturday.