



# Islamabad POST

Friday, March 28, 2025

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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### Philippine wild card Eala stuns Swiatek to reach Miami semis

Detailed News On Page-06

### US condemns Jaffar Express terror attack

Detailed News On Page-08



### Pakistan, US agree to hold dialogue

Detailed News On Page-08



## Welcomes Russia-US talks

# FO dismisses anti-Pakistan bill in US Congress

### FO also criticises US sanctions on Pakistani entities as unilateral and baseless

ANSAR M BHATTI / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday welcomed the recently agreed upon limited ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, prohibiting attacks on energy infrastructure and ensuring safe navigation in the Black Sea. Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan, at his weekly press briefing here, appreciated the active engagement of the US administration and its leadership in securing the agreement between Russia and Ukraine. He expressed optimism that the new momentum generated by these initial steps would eventually lead to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire. "Pakistan's position on the Ukraine conflict has been consistent. Pakistan has enjoyed friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine. We have always advocated dialogue and diplomacy, immediate cessation of hostilities and peaceful resolution of this conflict," he remarked. The spokesperson said that Israel's continued and repeated incursions and air strikes into the Syrian territory, continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, and its declared intent for an indefinite presence and full demilitarisation of Syria were unacceptable, "constitute blatant violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and undermine

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## US not interfering in Pakistan's affairs, says PML-Q Chief

### Shujaat also expressed gratitude for China's ongoing investment initiatives in Pakistan

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain dismissed speculations regarding interference by the new US administration in Pakistan's internal affairs, calling them "baseless." He made these remarks during a meeting with a delegation of Chinese investors led by Madam Scarlett Xiang at his residence. The meeting was attended by Punjab's Provincial Minister Chaudhry Shafay Hussain and other party officials.

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## Relief for inflation-hit masses

# IMF approves Rs 1 per unit electricity tariff cut

MEHTAB PIZRADA

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a reduction of Re1 per unit in electricity tariffs, providing relief to all consumers. The tariff relief, as per IMF officials, will be extended to all electricity users and will be financed through revenue generated from the levy imposed on captive power plants using gas. The development follows the staff-level agreement (SLA) reached between the Washington-based lender and Pakistani authorities concerning the first review of the ongoing 37-month bailout programme. The deal, awaiting IMF's Executive Board's approval, will see Islamabad securing access to approximately \$1 billion under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), bringing total disbursements under the programme to around \$2 billion. Meanwhile, with regard to the power tariff cut, the lender has clarified that this measure aims to offset financial pressures while maintaining fiscal stability. Furthermore, the government is also working on a broader relief package for electricity consumers,

Continued on Page 06

## IMF agreement a key to long-term prosperity

### Advisor assured that a public-friendly and timely budget will be presented

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Finance Minister Khurram Shahzad on Thursday welcomed the staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), paving the way for a significant influx of financial support and marking a crucial milestone in the country's quest for long-term economic stability and growth. In an interview with a private news channel, Advisor Khurram Shahzad expressed optimism that the nation will reap positive and fruitful results from

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Ceremony held for Russian humanitarian aid delivery to the needy people of Pakistan. The ceremony was attended by the Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Albert P. Khorev, the MoFA Spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the NDMA. - DNA

## Three killed, 21 injured in Quetta blast

### Explosion in Quetta leaves three dead, several injured, including two children

DNA

QUETTA: A powerful explosion struck Quetta's Double Road, killing at least three people and injuring 21 others, including security personnel, shopkeepers, and bystanders. The blast targeted a police van on routine patrol, severely injuring officers inside the vehicle. According to Police Surgeon Dr Ayesha Faiz, three people lost their lives in the attack, while multiple injured individuals remain in critical condition. Dr Abdul Hadi, the Medical Superintendent (MS) of Sandeman Hospital, confirmed that four victims are in critical condition. Meanwhile, Dr Arbab Kamran, the Managing Director of the Trauma Centre, said that emergency medical aid is being provided to all the injured. Following the explosion, authorities declared an emergency at Sandeman Hospital, summoning all doctors and medical

Continued on Page 06

## PM vows to cut expenses

# PM: nations don't progress through IMF programmes

### "We must transform this debt-ridden existence into a life of dignity and honour," says premier

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said that nations do not progress through International Monetary Fund (IMF) programmes, emphasising that the stability that Pakistan requires has already been achieved. Speaking at the launch ceremony of the Prime Minister Digital Youth Hub, he reiterated that the \$1 billion loan from the IMF is not Pakistan's earned income but borrowed funds. He expressed hope that this would be the country's last IMF programme in history. "We must transform this debt-ridden existence into a life of dignity and honour through skill and hard work," the premier said. PM Shehbaz further pledged to reduce government expenditures while making substantial investments in training the younger generation, asserting that "we will dedicate billions and even trillions for their future." The prime minister said that during his time as chief minister of Punjab, he disbursed 400,000 laptops among the students who were high achievers in their schools and colleges. "This was the vision for which he worked hard," he remarked.

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan foreign exchange reserves drop \$ 540 mln

### SBP-held foreign reserves stood at \$10.61 billion of March 21, 2025

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan's liquid foreign exchange reserves retreated to \$15.55 billion as of March 21, 2025 - a significant drop in the central bank's holdings owing to external debt servicing, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported on Thursday. The SBP-held foreign reserves fell by \$540 million during the week, settling at \$10.61 billion. The fall was attributed to debt obligations. Meanwhile, commercial banks' net foreign reserves were reported at \$4.94 billion. Despite the dip, SBP's reserves remain above the crucial \$10 billion mark, providing an import cover of over two months. Analysts say that upcoming inflows, including expected

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# HRCP urges govt to address 'HRs crises'

### "Increasing state authoritarianism, suppression of dissent by force, restrictions on press freedom and the rapidly growing influence of the establishment over governance have led to widespread discontent

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and other civil society groups on Thursday urged the government to immediately address the prevalent "human rights crises" affecting the country, including the clampdowns on protesters and the misuse of blasphemy and cybercrime laws. The demand came amid a recent crackdown on protesters of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) demonstrating against enforced disappearances and arrests of its leadership in Karachi and Quetta, as well as a spate of other human rights issues from the targeting of journalists to an uptick in cases under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, and blasphemy laws. The HRCP and other civil society and rights groups held a press conference at the Karachi Press Club today to bring attention to the issues and called on the federal and provincial governments to urgently address the "multiple human rights crises across the country", according to a press release issued after the media talk. "Increasing state authoritarianism, suppression of dissent by force, restrictions on press freedom and the rapidly growing influence of the establishment over governance have led to widespread discontent. "The short-term enforced disappearance of journalists and rights activists is now significant cause for alarm," the press release said. It added that the establishment's alleged role in politics had "snowballed at the cost of democratic governance" while allegations of political interference in the judiciary had also shaken public confidence in the legal system. "Religious extremism continues to be weaponised against marginalised groups, particularly in Punjab against the Ahmadi community. The growing influence of militants in Pakistan's border regions, especially in

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# Pakistan hails Russia-Ukraine accords banning attacks on energy sites

“We remain optimistic that this new dynamic and the momentum generated by these initial steps would eventually lead to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire,” he said during a debate on the humanitarian situation in war-shattered Ukraine

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has welcomed the diplomatic progress towards settling the “tragic” Russia-Ukraine conflict, highlighting the recent limited agreement prohibiting attacks on energy infrastructure followed by another to ensure safe navigation in the Black Sea, hoping the parties would honour their commitments.

“We appreciate the United States and its leadership’s active engagement, also involving the Russian and Ukrainian leadership, in bringing this to fruition,” Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative-designate of Pakistan to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

“We remain optimistic that this new dynamic and the momentum generated by these initial steps would eventually lead to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire,” he said during a debate on the humanitarian situation in war-shattered Ukraine.

The Pakistani envoy also commended the role of Saudi Arabia and its leadership in facilitating dialogue for promoting peace. Earlier, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also welcomed the diplomatic progress, saying his good offices remain available to support all efforts towards a lasting peace in Ukraine.

In his remarks, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad reiterated Pakistan’s position on the Ukraine conflict, saying Islamabad has enjoyed friendly relations with both the parties, advocating dialogue and diplomacy, cessation of hostilities and peaceful resolution of this conflict. “We believe that the security concerns, which remain at the center of this conflict, can only be addressed through an inclusive approach, which in turn would ensure the sustainability and durability of peace in the wider region.”

Voicing deep concern over the humanitarian situation, the Pakistani envoy said that the conflict, now in its fourth year, has caused immense human suffering and massive damage to infrastructure, economy, and society that has had vast consequences for the global economy, particularly for the developing countries.

“Every human life matters, and is not merely a number.” Pakistan’s position on these as other conflicts, he said, was based on adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, self-determination for peoples, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and non-acquisition of territory by the threat or use of force.

“Consistent with the Charter, states must also implement international agreements and abide by their respective obligations, and respond to the legitimate security interests of

all states.” The ambassador pointed out that the protection of civilians and infrastructure was an obligation under international law and international humanitarian law, urging full and consistent adherence to these principles by all parties.

In this regard, he underscored the need for ensuring access and protection for humanitarian workers in conflict zones, and said the Third Geneva Convention, which governs the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), was binding on all parties. Opening the debate, a senior UN official warned that continuing daily attacks and humanitarian aid cuts were hitting Ukrainian civilians hard. Since March 1, there has not been a single day in Ukraine without an attack in which civilians were harmed, Joyce Msuya, deputy head of the UN humanitarian affairs office, told the Council.

“This, and the severe global funding cuts for humanitarian operations, including for Ukraine, is further reducing our capacity to provide life-saving aid,” she said.

The UN humanitarian programme for Ukraine this year calls for \$2.6 billion in aid, but it is only 17 percent funded so far. “Recent funding cuts have led to a reprioritization of Ukraine response efforts,” said Msuya, expressing concern in particular about women and girls.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Uzbekistan Alisher Tukhtaev meeting with IT Minister Sahza Fatima, on Thursday. — DNA

## Ulema urged to promote tolerance, unity

LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Auqaf and Religious Affairs Chaudhry Shafay Hussain met with Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad at his office on Thursday to discuss key religious and social issues. The meeting focused on the role of ulema (religious scholars) in promoting patience, tolerance, and brotherhood, as well as addressing the ongoing law and order challenges in the country. Chaudhry Shafay said that Pakistan continues to face security threats and terrorism, and tackling these challenges requires collective efforts. He praised the sacrifices made by the Pakistan Army, security forces, and all segments of society in the fight against terrorism. He reiterated that Islam is a religion of peace, with no room for terrorism, and stressed the importance of unity in overcoming the enemies of humanity. “The entire nation must stand together to defeat those who seek to disrupt peace. Religious scholars have a crucial role in fostering harmony and tolerance,” he stated. The minister also highlighted that renovation and beautification projects for mosques and shrines across Punjab are progressing rapidly. He assured that the affairs of the Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department would be improved through consultation with religious scholars and spiritual leaders. —APP

## Muqam vows to thwart anti-state elements

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Kashmir, Gilgit-Balistan Affairs and SAFRON, Amir Muqam on Thursday said that those obstructing Balochistan’s development have failed, emphasizing that the Prime Minister and Army Chief remain committed to national security. He was speaking at the resumption of Jaffer Express operations from Peshawar to Quetta after a 16-day suspension due to an attack in Bolan, Balochistan. The service was restored from Peshawar under the supervision of Federal Minister Hanif Abbasi, with 300 passengers onboard. The Jaffer Express train service to Quetta resumed operations following the Balochistan incident, on special directives

of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. “The enemies of Pakistan want to paralyze life in the country but will never succeed,” Amir Muqam declared while paying tribute to journalists martyred in KP’s war against terrorism. He credited public cooperation for defeating terrorist designs. The minister criticized PTI for what he called prioritizing political agitation over governance, alleging the party was pursuing foreign agendas instead of addressing KP’s development needs. He particularly slammed PTI for what he described as politically-motivated distribution of Ramadan relief packages. Amir Muqam confirmed the government would continue repatriating illegal Afghan refugees as per policy. He lamented KP

leadership’s absence during positive developments like the train service restoration. Addressing the gathering, the Minister said that terrorists and anti-state elements would not be allowed to disrupt normal life in the country. “While terrorism remains a national challenge, certain groups continue to prioritize their agendas over peace and development,” he remarked. The minister criticized Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s provincial government, alleging misappropriation of Rs 10 billion earmarked for Ramadan and Eid relief. “Unlike Shehbaz Sharif’s nationwide equitable distribution, KP government reportedly channeled these funds to political workers in preparation for post-Eid agitation,” he said.

## Theatre a mirror of art, culture: CM

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has emphasized the cultural significance of theatre, calling it a mirror of art and society. In her message on World Theatre Day, the CM said that theatre not only reflects social values but also serves as a powerful tool for awareness and education. The CM said that in a progressive society, quality theatre holds a respected place. She added that the Punjab government is committed to revitalizing the theatre, ensuring it becomes a source of dignified and meaningful entertainment. She announced that steps are being taken to restore and promote theatre as a vibrant platform for artistic and cultural expression. An Artist Welfare Fund has also been established to support artists’ well-being, underscoring the government’s dedication to their prosperity. CM Maryam Nawaz stressed that theatre can play a vital role in projecting Pakistan’s rich cultural heritage and positive global identity. —APP

## Products made by inmates displayed in exhibition

LAHORE: Home Secretary Punjab Noorul Amin Mengal on Thursday visited the Central Jail Lahore and assessed the exhibition of products made by inmates in jails across Punjab. The products on display were part of the jail industry, which includes a variety of goods produced by the prisoners. During the visit, the secretary was accompanied by IG Prison Mian Farooq Nazir, Additional Secretary Prison Asim Raza, DIG Lahore Region Naveed Rauf and Jail Superintendent Ijaz Asghar. They reviewed a wide range of products, including carpets, tiles, furniture, soap, phenyl, LED bulbs, shoes, gloves, footballs, clothes, and trunks—all made by prisoners. In a statement,

Secretary Mengal highlighted the efforts being made by the Punjab Home Department to enhance the social and economic development of prisoners. “We are focusing on providing prisoners with skills that will enable them to secure dignified employment once they are released,” he stated. He further added, “Inmates involved in the jail industry are not only learning skills but are also becoming economically independent post-release.” Secretary Mengal emphasized that these efforts are helping inmates avoid returning to a life of crime by providing them with constructive skills and the opportunity to become contributing members of society. He also revealed that the products made by the prisoners

are being marketed and sold, with citizens able to view and purchase these items through the official website www.prisonstore.com.pk and the mobile app “Prison Store.” In addition, display centres have been established outside all jails to showcase and sell the products. The government has also opened up investment opportunities for the private sector within the jail industry. The revenue generated from the sale of these products is directly credited to the prisoners’ jail bank accounts as compensation, ensuring they are financially supported during their time in prison. Secretary Mengal praised the initiative as a significant step toward the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society.

## Better health facilities foremost priority: Randhawa

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad has said provision of better and improved health facilities to CDA employees and general public of Islamabad is the foremost priority of CDA. He said these remarks during a meeting with a delegation of ADB led by its Country Director Emma Fan at CDA Headquarters and discussed upgradation of health care facilities at Capital Hospital.

After the meeting, Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a landmark agreement to transform Islamabad’s Capital Hospital into a modern healthcare facility through its upgradation as well as provision of better and improved state of the art health facilities. The Agreement was signed today by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa and ADB Country Director Emma Fan at a ceremony which was attended by Member Administration, CDA Talat Mahmood, Member Planning, Dr. Khalid Hafeez, Member Estate Esfundyar Baloch and other the senior officers of CDA and ADB. Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Chairman CDA said that CDA intends not only to improve overall performance of different services which are being provided by CDA through specialists and qualified doctors of their specific fields as well as wanted to upgrade quality of healthcare so that employees of CDA will get state of the art health facilities on modern lines under one place, thus saving precious lives of people at large.



## Car’s fall leaves 5 dead

PESHAWAR: At least five people, including women and children were died after a car fell into a canal near Muhajir Camp Khat-tako Shah in Malakand district, police informed on Thursday. The accident initially resulted in serious injuries to three women, two others, who were shifted to THQ Dargai by the rescue teams. However, doctors at the hospital pronounced all the victims as dead. The victims included three women, a young girl from Khambu Sakhakot and the driver, named Sahil. —APP

## Moot on fundamentals of India’s contemporary strategic culture held

ISLAMABAD: The India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Seminar on ‘Understanding Fundamentals of India’s Contemporary Strategic Culture’ with the objective to comprehend fundamentals of contemporary strategic thought in India, and evaluate its impact on Pakistan. The keynote speaker for this seminar was Dr. Naem Salik, Executive Director, SVI. The panel of expert speakers included AM Farooq Habib, Former Senior Director, CASS; Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja, Executive Director, CISS AJK; and Ms. Anum A Khan, Associate Director, CISS Islamabad. The Seminar was moderated by Dr.

Khurram Abbas, Director ISC at ISSI who posed key questions for the panel on New Delhi’s regional and global views and analysis of its strategic culture. DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcome remarks, stated that strategic culture refers to the shared beliefs, norms, values, and historical experiences of a nation’s strategic community. It acts as a lens for interpreting threats and making decisions. He emphasized academic, research and policy communities in Pakistan to enhance their overall analytical focus on India. Among other things, he stressed, it was essential to develop a critical mass of knowledge about India’s demography,

economy, politics, social transformation, internal security, defence, foreign relations and so on. Keynote speaker Dr. Naem Salik also stressed the need for deeper study for better understanding of Indian strategic culture. The term strategic culture, coined by Jack Snyder, refers to enduring beliefs and norms shaping security policies. He stated that while strategic culture evolves slowly, strategic policy adapts to international environments but remains influenced by cultural foundations. India’s strategic culture, rooted in Arthashastra and Mandala theory, emphasizes realpolitik, expansionism, and covert tactics. Historical figures like Chandragupta

and Ashoka shaped India’s nationalist identity. AM Farooq Habib asserted that the Indian strategic culture, shaped by ancient texts like Arthashastra, emphasizes realpolitik, national security, and dominance in South Asia. He debated that while George Tanham argues about lack of cohesive India strategic culture, others trace its roots to historical traditions of strategic thinking. He emphasized that the key elements of Indian strategic culture include a desire for regional hegemony, dominance over the Indian Ocean as a vital area, the use of soft power such as yoga and Indian film industry, indigenization initiatives, cultural nationalism and Hindu hegemony.

Growing confidence and assertiveness in international dealing has reduced the desire for passivity and strategic restraint. He concluded that this implies regional chaos and potential instability. Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja stated that strategic culture provides valuable perspectives of state’s behavior and policy choices. Indian strategic culture, shaped by Hindu Brahmin traditions, mythological texts, classical realism, and geography, emphasizes statercraft, military preparedness, complete destruction of the enemy, and Indian supremacy. She rejected the famous notion that India had lacked a strategic culture, considering such claims a myth. —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. Patricks Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
- March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

### Hotels & Restaurants



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Marriott.....051- 2826121  
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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Bomb Disposal.....15  
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16  
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### Hospitals

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RGH.....9290301-7  
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TMA.....5770886  
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## CDA, education ministry partner to modernize schools

CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa stated, "These initiatives reflect our commitment to a modern, skilled, and eco-friendly Islamabad. By upgrading schools, empowering youth, and promoting green practices, we are building a brighter future for the capital."

### STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training signed three key agreements on Thursday to revolutionize education, enhance vocational training, and promote environmental sustainability in Islamabad. The signing ceremony, attended by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa and Federal Education Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, marked the launch of ambitious programs aimed at modernizing schools, empowering youth with job-ready skills, and engaging students in large-scale tree plantation drives. Under the first agreement, CDA Model School will be transformed into a modern educational hub equipped with an IT Park, Robotics Lab, and AI Room, Google Classroom, integration for digital learning, upgraded classrooms, a modern library, and sports facilities. An on-site dispensary and a dedicated Cultural room to promote arts and heritage. The second initiative focuses on providing skill development programs for youth (ages 18-45) living near Margalla Hills National Park. Trainees will learn, stitching, electrical work, plumbing, and IT skills, hands-on training through e-Rozgar labs, and job placement support from CDA upon completion. The third agreement introduces a massive tree plantation drive involving schools and colleges. Key features include, free saplings, tools, and technical support from CDA. The students will earn extra marks and certificates for participation long term maintenance plans to ensure sustainability. CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa



wa stated, "These initiatives reflect our commitment to a modern, skilled, and eco-friendly Islamabad. By upgrading schools, empowering youth, and promoting green practices, we are building a brighter future for the capital." Federal Education Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani added, "This partnership aligns with our mission to create a progressive education system that prepares students for 21st-century challenges, including climate change." The programs are set to roll out in the coming months, with CDA and the Education Ministry working closely to ensure successful implementation.

Meanwhile, Capital Development Authority (CDA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed an agreement on Thursday to upgrade Islamabad's Capital Hospital into a modern, state-of-the-art medical facility. The agreement was signed by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa and ADB Country Director Emma Fan during a ceremony at the CDA headquarters. Senior officials from both organizations attended the event. Chairman Randhawa emphasized that providing better healthcare for CDA employees and the general public is a top priority. "This project reflects our commitment to delivering world-class medical

services," he said. "With ADB's support, we will transform Capital Hospital into a facility that meets international standards while remaining accessible to all." Under the agreement, ADB will provide technical expertise and financial structuring support to expand and modernize the hospital. The upgrades will include renovations, new construction, and advanced medical equipment, increasing the hospital's capacity beyond its current 500 beds. ADB Country Director Emma Fan praised the initiative, stating, "ADB is committed to supporting Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure.

## Satellite internet to enhance connectivity in remote areas

ISLAMABAD: Modern solutions like satellite internet will greatly improve connectivity, particularly in remote and underserved regions of the country. An official from the Ministry of IT said that Starlink has received temporary registration in Pakistan following directives from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. "With the approval of all security and regulatory bodies, Starlink has been granted a temporary No Objection Certificate (NOC)," the official said. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) will oversee the company's compliance with fee payments and licensing requirements. He expressed optimism that Starlink's entry into Pakistan will mark the beginning of satellite internet services, ushering in a new era of digital connectivity and helping bridge the digital divide.—APP

## ICT admin cracks down on high prices

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration launched city-wide crackdown on price gouging Thursday, targeting vendors who illegally inflate prices and exploit consumers. In a sweeping operation that covered multiple market areas, city officials conducted 344 inspections, resulting in significant enforcement actions. Authorities arrested 75 individuals for illegal pricing practices and imposed fines totaling 118,000 Pakistani rupees. Four shops were immediately sealed for serious pricing violations, sending a clear message to traders about the consequences of overcharging.—APP

## ICT cracks down on beggars

ISLAMABAD :The Islamabad district administration on Thursday launched a comprehensive enforcement operation targeting street beggars and price control violations in the capital city, resulting in the arrest of 47 individuals across multiple sectors. In the first phase of the crackdown, 28 beggars were apprehended from strategic locations including Blue Area, Sector G-13, and Sector F-7. During subsequent operations conducted specifically during the holy month of Ramadan, Assistant Commissioners and Price Control Magistrates arrested an additional 19 price vendors.—APP

## Rawalpindi turns into festive shopping hub

### DNA

RAWALPINDI :As the Eid is approaching closer, Rawalpindi's bazaars have turned into a vibrant shopping hub. Just a few days away from the Eid ul Fitr, a massive population rush to the markets for Eid shopping regularly to shop fabrics, embroidered clothes, and jewelry. Raja Bazaar, Saddar, Murree Road and Tench Bhatta bazaar have been decorated with attractive lighting to provide an appealing shopping environment. Zara, a young student shares her rejoicing shopping experience in the city's mega shopping malls located on main Murree Road saying "I have gathered a lot of dresses, shoes and jewelry". She urged the youth to have a 'must stopover' at famous Rehmanabad and Commercial Market to witness the variety of their choices. Ayesha Tahir also collected Eid gifts for her cousins

and friends. "I visited Moti Bazaar and I was amazed to experience a peaceful environment and attractive presents available in the market at appropriate prices", she said. Ayesha said that iconic Raja Bazaar has been transformed into a superb pedestrians market, which she thinks has increased the clientage. The last 10 days of the month of Ramadan are always connected with magnificent sales in the markets which are filled with the customers. Abdullah Malik has bought some perfumes from Saddar, to be gifted to his friends. "You must visit Saddar's Bank Road which has turned into a pedestrian paradise", he said while highlighting the attractive environment after its conversion into a vehicle free zone. He said he has bought some T-shirts and trousers from Saddar at amazing affordable prices. Since a considerable population visit their hometowns to spend Eid days with their loved ones, the tendency to purchase gifts increases

during the last ten days of Ramadan. One of the oldest and longest old bazaars of the city, Tench Bhatta is equally witnessing flood of customers at evening. "Soon after the Iftar, people rush to the market for shopping", said Asad who works on a garments mall. Asad said this year, the market was witnessed huge increase in the sales. However he demanded the city traffic and administration to play their role in providing the people with smooth movement in the market. Arshad who sells artificial jewelry every Ramadan, said that he has hired an extra salesman to manage his stall due to heavy rush of customers. "Young girls and ladies are eager to visit my stall as I bring the variety from Lahore on every Eid", he said while sharing his joy for being one of the best sellers. Besides locals, people from nearby areas like Rawat, Mandra, Taxila and Murree also visit Pindi's famous markets. City's shopping malls are well cou-

pled with food stalls where people enjoy the tasty foods. "I would say that those who have not tasted the burgers from Ciro's Cinema market, have missed the flavours", said Rayan, a college student. He said that he regularly visits the Saddar market with his friends to eat famous Lobia Chaat and Karim Samosa plates. Some are even fond of having ice cream of Saddar. Usman Jamil, an overseas Pakistani student said that he had arrived in Pakistan on Eid holidays. "I specially visit Bani Food street to enjoy Nihari and Channay (grains) in my Sehri with friends, and then a strong tea at Saddar", he said. The festive shopping season in Rawalpindi injects billions of rupees into the national economy, increasing a much-needed GDP share. The city's security and traffic flow management are also being supervised according to a specially devised plan, yet the citizens share the difficulties they are facing like parking issues and congestion.

## Islamabad Convent School celebrates recognition day

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Convent School hosted a grand Recognition Day ceremony for its Primary Level students, celebrating their achievements in academics, discipline, and values. The event, themed "Dream Big, Work Hard, and Let Your Achievements Speak for You," was graced by the esteemed presence of Madam Farah Naz Akbar, Parliamentary Secretary, as the Chief Guest. In her inspiring address, Madam Farah Naz Akbar lauded the dedication and perseverance of the young students, emphasizing that their hard work and commitment are paving the way for a brighter future. She highlighted that this event was not just about recognition but also about inspiration, encouraging students to continue striving for excellence in all aspects of life. The Chief Guest also paid tribute to the tireless efforts of the school's teachers and the unwavering support of parents, acknowledging their critical role in shaping young minds. "Behind every successful student, there is a dedicated teacher and a supportive parent," she remarked, expressing gratitude for their contributions to the students' educational journey. She further emphasized the importance of education beyond academics, underscoring the values of unity, service, and discipline as fundamental to personal and national growth. "Education is not just about acquiring knowledge; it is about shaping character. I am pleased to see that Islamabad Convent School instills these values in its students, preparing them to become ethical and compassionate individuals," she added. Addressing the students, Madam Farah Naz Akbar encouraged them to view their achievements as a stepping stone to future success. "The certificates you receive today symbolize your efforts and determination. Keep dreaming, keep working hard, and always believe in yourself," she urged, reinforcing the importance of resilience, kindness, and lifelong learning.—DNA

## Teachers lauds govt's support

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government College Teachers Association (FGCTA) has welcomed the Federal Cabinet's decision to reinstate the 25% tax rebate for full-time teachers and researchers. The approval for the restoration of this tax relief was granted on Wednesday, reversing an earlier government decision that had abruptly discontinued the rebate two months ago. The move comes as a relief to teachers across the country, who had been protesting against what they viewed as an unfair financial burden imposed on them. Professor Akram Khan Khosa, the president of FGCTA, while talking to APP, hailed the decision as a positive step but emphasized that further measures were needed to support teachers. "While the restoration of the 25% tax rebate is appreciated, it is merely a small relief. Teachers remain a deprived class in need of substantial financial support," he stated. He added that despite their crucial role in shaping the future of the nation, teachers continue to face economic challenges due to inadequate salaries, poor service structure and a lack of proper financial incentives. He urged the government to introduce additional measures to ease the financial strain on educators, such as salary revisions, housing allowances, and healthcare benefits.—APP

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## Briefs

## SC cautions law raduates in opting for internship

ISLAMABAD :The Supreme Court of Pakistan has contradicted all notions of internship programs sponsored by the SCP and cautioned students to remain careful and to report to the Registrar SCP if anyone comes across such a malicious campaign. A written statement issued by the media office of the SCP Thursday says that it has come to the notice of the Chief Justice of Pakistan that certain quarters have launched Harvard Law School Seasonal internship program, projecting it as being sponsored by the Supreme Court of Pakistan which is not true. This is to clarify that the Supreme Court of Pakistan does not sponsor any seasonal internship for students of any institution including Harvard Law School. This is to caution the students to remain careful and should report to the Registrar of office if anyone come across such malicious program. It is also clarified for the information of all interested Students, that the Supreme Court runs a yearly internship program which is conducted through a proper process and handled by a Committee of Senior Supreme Court Judges. Other than this, the Supreme Court of Pakistan does not sponsor nor own any internship program.—APP

## Inter-university drama competition held

RAWALPINDI: Punjab Arts Council (PAC) in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission will host the inter-university drama competition titled "Say No to Drugs, Love Life", which will be held on April 22, 23, and 24. These competitions aim to raise awareness among the younger generation about the harmful effects of drug abuse and to encourage them to play an active role in building a healthy society. According to the spokesman PAC, The registration process is currently open for students interested in participating in the competition, with the last date for submitting the registration forms set for April 10. Notably, there is no registration fee for participation, ensuring that a maximum number of students can take part in this activity and showcase their creative talents. Participants who perform exceptionally in the drama competition will be awarded cash prizes. The winning team will receive a cash prize of PKR 100,000, while the second and third-place teams will be awarded PKR 75,000 and PKR 50,000, respectively.—APP

## Sweets take center stage as Eid festivities unfold

ISLAMABAD:As Muslims across the country celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr, sweets have taken their traditional place at the heart of the festivities, bringing joy and delight to people of all ages. From traditional desserts like gulab jamun and barfi to modern creations, sweets are an integral part of Eid celebrations. Sweets have become the star attraction of Eid celebrations, captivating the hearts and tantalizing the taste buds of people from all walks of life, regardless of age or background. From young children to elderly grandparents, everyone is indulging in the sweet treats, savoring the flavors and textures that bring immense joy and satisfaction. A housewife Naila Seemab enthusiastically shared, "Eid is incomplete without sweets and I love the traditional desserts like gulab jamun and barfi, but my kids are more fond of the modern sweets like chocolate cake and cupcakes." She said for many, sweets are a way to share the joy of Eid with loved ones adding that she buys sweets for family and friends on Eid. With their colorful decorations, delicious flavors, and joyful atmosphere, sweets are an integral part of Eid celebrations, making the festival even more special and memorable, she stated.—APP

## Water and hygiene facilities for girls schools demanded

The technical consultation workshop on the subject of "Advancing Gender-Responsive, Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Approaches in Legal and Policy Frameworks and Promoting Women's Leadership in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)" was organized by Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) and funded by WaterAid Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD : "A large number of female students are forced to discontinue education due to lack of water, washrooms and hygiene facilities in Middle and High schools in rural areas of Punjab that often results in early marriages of girls" said Ms. Sameena Nazir, director of PODA organization adding that "the government and civil society must take concrete steps to provide safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities to girls in schools and women in offices and public buildings". Addressing the consultation workshop, Mrs. Sajida Farooq Tarrar, a senior member of Pakistan Muslim League (N) informed the audience that Punjab government is preparing a comprehensive action plan to provide WASH facilities in girls' schools in the province especially in rural areas. The technical consultation workshop on the subject of "Advancing Gender-Responsive, Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Approaches in Legal and Policy Frameworks and Promoting Women's Leadership in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)" was organized by Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) and funded by WaterAid Pakistan. A total of 83 participants attended the workshop on Tuesday 25 March 2025 at Flaetti's Hotel in Lahore including legislators, lawyers, women with disabilities, officials from Punjab government's department of Literacy, Education, Health, Environment, Water Management and senior professors from



University of the Punjab, Lahore University for Women and University of Central Punjab and University of South Asia. Also present were representatives of UNICEF and Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) and civil society members among others. Rural women from Bahawalpur, Chakwal, Multan, Pakpattan, rural Lahore and Rawalpindi also spoke at the workshop and gave practical examples of challenges and offered solution

strategies. Ms. Uzma Khardar, Member Provincial Assembly (MPA), Punjab congratulated PODA and WaterAid for forming the partnership to address the inclusion and leadership of women and vulnerable segments of society to find solutions for climate, water and hygiene challenges in Pakistan. She said with PODA's presence and grassroots level work in rural Pakistan and WaterAid's international

learning from other countries facing similar challenges, we can identify best practices and use them in Pakistan. She emphasized the essential role of women in water management and household sanitation, calling for greater community engagement to address WASH-related challenges. She said as legislator, she is always working to ensure that our laws and policies are enforced to ensure provision of constitutional rights to all women and girls.

## Call for equitable globalization at Boao Forum for Asia

The Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2025 is being held from March 25 to 28 in Boao, Hainan Province in south China. Nearly 2,000 representatives from over 60 countries and regions are attending the four-day event

ISLAMABAD,: Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb has emphasized that "inclusive globalization is a necessity" and urged the international community to create a fairer system for all nations. He was addressing the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) panel session titled "Inclusive Globalization that Benefits All: Pathways and Actions. According to China Economic Net (CEN) on Thursday, he outlined four major challenges hindering inclusive globalization: unfair trade practices and market access barriers, financial inequality and debt crises, the digital and technological divide, and climate change disparities. He stressed that without addressing these issues, sustainable global growth remains unattainable. To achieve equitable globalization, the minister proposed a four-point action plan: trade reforms to level the playing field for developing economies, reforming WTO dispute settlement mechanisms to ensure fairness, restructuring the global financial architecture to reduce inequality, and advancing greener and sustainable globalization through climate-conscious policies. Mr. Aurangzeb also highlighted the importance of strengthening regional economic partnerships and leveraging technology to drive effective globalization. Mr. Aurangzeb expressed his vision for a globalization model that fosters fair trade, sustainable growth and equitable financial systems and a multilateral, sustainable and innovation-driven global economy that promotes the development and prosperity of all nations. The Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2025 is being held from March 25 to 28 in Boao, Hainan Province in south China. Nearly 2,000 representatives from over 60 countries and regions are attending the four-day event. —DNA

## Police launches campaign against overloading

ISLAMABAD:In an effort to ensure safer travel for the public, the National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) has launched a campaign to control overcharging and overloading in public service vehicles, on the eve of Eidul Fitr. The initiative, directed by Inspector General NH&MP Riffat Mukhtar Raja, aims to raise awareness among drivers about the dangers of violating traffic rules, especially during the Eid period. According to Motorway Police spokesperson, IG Riffat Mukhtar directed patrolling officers to take strict action against public service vehicles which were overcharging and overloading. The passengers will be asked to report any instances of overcharging. If complaints are verified, passengers will be reimbursed immediately. Under the National Highway Safety Ordinance of 2000, any vehicle caught violating these rules

could face a fine of Rs 5000. IG Raja has made it clear that there will be zero tolerance for such violations during the festive period. As part of the campaign, Motorway Police officers were holding briefings at different sections of motorways for passenger vehicle drivers. The officers outlined the consequences of overloading and speeding, emphasizing the importance of adhering to regulations for a safer journey. The drivers were educated on the potential consequences of breaking traffic regulations, with pamphlets distributed to provide further details on the penalties for non-compliance. In addition to these efforts, in a recent meeting, IG Riffat Mukhtar visited the North Region Office to discuss operational strategies with regional officers. The session, led by the Additional IG and DIG Motorway North, focused on several key initiatives to improve traffic management

and commuter safety in the region. The meeting also discussed the introduction of the Passenger and Vehicle Management Information System (PSVMIS) on motorways. This system is designed to monitor traffic flow more effectively and enhance the overall travel experience. Security measures were also strengthened ahead of Eid, with the NH&MP deploying rapid-response patrol teams to assist commuters in case of emergencies. These teams will ensure quick reaction times to incidents on major routes, improving safety during peak travel periods. The meeting also focused on addressing issues of overloading and overcharging in public transport. With the conclusion of Ramadan and the onset of Eid, the NH&MP is set to take firm action against any transport operators who violate regulations related to passenger capacity and fares.

## Huawei's ICT training program to boost IT exports: PM

DNA

ISLAMABAD :Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that Huawei's Information and Communication Technology training program for Pakistani youth would help boost the country's IT exports and create employment opportunities. The prime minister, in a meeting with a five-member delegation led by Huawei's Chief Executive Officer Ethen Sun, said that skill training of the country's youth in the IT sector was among the

government's priorities. He said that the government desired a solid and long-term partnership with Huawei. During the briefing on Huawei's ICT training to Pakistani youth, it was told that out of the 300,000 youth, 240,000 will receive basic training, while the remaining 60,000 will receive high-tech training. It was told that training for all 300,000 youth will be completed by the year end. Besides, the third-party validation of the training programs will be conducted. The participants of the meeting were told that Huawei, in collaboration with

the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, has introduced courses in Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Big Data, and Cybersecurity at 15 Pakistani universities. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, and other relevant senior government officials.

## CTO inspects traffic arrangements in F-10

ISLAMABAD :Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Capt. (R) Syed Zeeshan Haider conducted a surprise late-night visit to F-10 Markaz to review traffic arrangements firsthand. An official told APP on Thursday that the CTO assessed the flow of traffic and directed the on-duty officers to ensure smooth movement. CTO Zeeshan emphasized that all possible measures must be taken to maintain uninterrupted traffic flow in the area. He instructed that strict legal action be taken without discrimination against elements causing disruptions. Zeeshan ordered intensified operations against illegal parking to prevent congestion. CTO Zeeshan urged officers to treat shoppers with courtesy and assist them in every possible way. He advised citizens to report any complaints to the Islamabad.

## AIUO extends admissions' deadline

ISLAMABAD: Many students were unable to take admission at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIUO) within the initial deadline due to Ramadan, Eid shopping and other commitments. Considering this situation, students requested the university's Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood to extend the deadline, said a press release on Thursday. Acknowledging the commitment to education, the Vice Chancellor approved an extension of the admission deadline until April 10, 2025. Now, new applicants can enroll themselves in Matric, FA, Associate Degree, B.Ed, BS, BBA, Postgraduate Diploma programs, and various certificate courses with a late fee until April 10. It is important to note that continuing students of these programs can also complete their enrollment within the extended period. According to Director Admissions, Syed Zia-ul-Hasnain, enrollment for face-to-face programs offered in Spring 2025 semester has been completed for both new and continuing students, and no further admissions are possible in these programs. However, admissions are still open for the mentioned programs under the distance learning system. Students have been advised to complete their registration on time to ensure uninterrupted academic activities.—APP


## IRSA releases 59,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 59,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 59,600 cusecs.


According to the data released by IRSA, River Indus stood at dead level of 1402 feet at Tarbela Dam. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,400 cusecs and 16,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1070.00 feet, which was 20.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 18,200 cusecs and 18,300 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 27,000, 18,700, 18,000 and 6,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,400 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 3,000 cusecs from River Chenab at Marala.—DNA

## China-Pak trade surges as Khunjerab Pass opens year-round


ISLAMABAD: Following customs clearance, a convoy of 25 domestically manufactured tractor trucks, valued at a total of USD 1.5 million, departed from Khunjerab Pass in Xinjiang, China. These "Made in China" machines will travel along the Karakoram Highway to reach Sost Port in Pakistan, serving as a gateway for distribution along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to global markets, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. Since the beginning of this year, 1,271 vehicles have crossed the border, transporting 12,432 tons of goods valued at over USD 95.26 million, according to local customs data. Located in Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County in Kashgar, Khunjerab Pass is the only land border crossing between China and Pakistan. Previously, due to high-altitude conditions and severe winter weather, it operated for only eight months each year. However, as of December 1, 2024, the pass has transitioned to year-round operations, making it the first high-altitude land port under BRI to function continuously throughout the year. "The winter opening of the Karakoram Highway has created new business opportunities for China-Pakistan trade," said a Pakistani truck driver with the surname Khan. He observed that the ongoing operation of the highway has significantly lowered the costs associated with refrigerated transportation. "Goods can now be transported from Karachi to Kashgar in just eight days. When considering factors such as cargo value, transit time, and cost, land transport presents a more competitive option than sea or air freight." Khan frequently drives refrigerated trucks northward from Karachi along the Karakoram Highway.—DNA



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## SHINGLES VACCINE, SHINGRIX

Shingles vaccine, SHINGRIX, is now available at our practices. This is an FDA approved and CDC recommended vaccine designed to help protect patients (above 50 years of age) against the risk of Shingles/ Herpes Zoster.

This vaccine requires two doses for optimal protection.

Most of us had chickenpox in childhood, although we may not remember it. Once you've had chickenpox, the virus remains dormant in the nerves. You may not be aware of it for most of your life, but occasionally the virus can reactivate and cause shingles, which appears as a painful rash on the skin.

Shingles can be very painful and is more likely to affect older individuals. This is often due to a weakened immune system, which can happen with age, stress, or certain medical conditions and treatments.

The vaccine is recommended for those over 18 with a weakened immune system and for older patients above 50 years of age.

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## Cooking up steadfastness

IN Gaza, the struggle for food is about more than satiating hunger; it is a battle for human dignity. Israel has tightened its chokehold on Gaza's crossings, preventing the entry of commercial goods and humanitarian aid. The renewed attacks, which have killed hundreds of people over the past week, signal a resumption of the war in which starvation was used as a deadly weapon. Not that the war ever really ended – the struggle to fill our bellies is one that families are still up against, with no reprieve during Ramadan, during which our fasts are traditionally broken by communal meals. Finding new ways to prepare familiar dishes with extremely limited ingredients is one means by which people are resisting. They improvise on recipes by using canned instead of fresh meats, or onion and garlic powder when the vegetables – basic ingredients in our cuisine – are nowhere to be found. With sugar expensive and scarce, people turn to honey or date molasses, received by some families in aid packages, to create dishes that satisfy their bodies and ease their psychological pain. Traditionally a staple food in our cuisine, fish has been extremely difficult to obtain because of the siege on Gaza's coastal waters that is enforced by lethal fire by the Israeli navy. My father, who knows that it is my favorite food, looks for fish in the market but finds none. Food in Gaza is not merely sustenance; it is a symbol of steadfastness. The kitchen is not just a place for cooking; it is an open arena to protest the harshness imposed by Israel's genocide and severe restrictions which remain ongoing. One of the greatest challenges faced by Palestinians living in Gaza is the exorbitant cost of basic items. Cooking oil has become a luxury good, with families sometimes going months without being able to purchase any. A liter can cost \$30 or more, depending on the status of Gaza's crossings and the prices demanded by exploitative traders, forcing people to use it sparingly. When Ramadan began earlier this month – which was soon followed by Israel's total closure of the crossings – the price of cooking oil spiked once again and fresh food such as chicken and meat became prohibitively expensive or unavailable once more. This phase of struggle has been the hardest, with shortages of essentials and prices still sky high, no reconstruction and our only option to get anywhere is on foot. And now that Israel collapsed the January ceasefire, which didn't last for a full two months, there is little relief to be found in Gaza, where there is little to be found of much of anything. With meat and chicken currently unavailable, families are resorting to some of the approximations of familiar dishes that have characterized our cuisine during the war. One of these dishes involves chicken or beef mortadella, a processed food product more readily available than fresh meat, to prepare alternative recipes mimicking roasted chicken. Known as "fake chicken," the dish is prepared by slicing the mortadella into long, thin pieces. The strips are seasoned with chicken or shawarma spice blends, salt and black pepper. After that, we coat it with bread crumbs and deep fry it in oil. The technique is similar to how chicken breasts were commonly prepared before the war.



## US shipbuilding ambitions

THE US wants to build more ships. Indeed, this is not simple, especially since the US is not able to achieve this by undermining the ability of others, notably China. A public hearing on the US administration's proposed levies on Chinese ships docking in the US was held on Monday. Business interests, from US farmers to global ocean carriers, have already warned of severe economic damage from this proposal. From a practical standpoint, the plan to build more ships faces numerous challenges due to the decline of the manufacturing industry and the issue of labor shortages. Reversing the decline of the manufacturing sector is not an easy task, and addressing the labor shortage will also require long-term efforts. Despite the fact that the goal of bringing more shipbuilding back to the US is at odds with reality, the proposal is part of a broader and ambitious White House strategy to revive US shipbuilding, something the new administration has been obsessed with since taking office. Early this month, the Trump administration promised to establish a new office of shipbuilding within the White House to revitalize the industry and bolster American naval strength. The not-so-subtle subtext of these moves is, like so many other ones from the US in recent years, to target China as a supposed threat to US national security. These actions are just the latest in a series of recent inflammatory and poorly planned moves by the US, which names another country as an enemy but will only serve to further destabilize our own economy. The US attempts at tariffs this year on goods from Mexico, Canada and China have contributed to a great deal of uncertainty in American markets, as confused companies are left unsure of what the US' actual long-term posture will be on tariffs. Without that certainty, US companies are unlikely to have the confidence needed to invest the billions of dollars required to create new domestic shipbuilding plants. Penalizing the use of Chinese-made ships is akin to fighting the wind, as China accounts for about half of all globally delivered ships. The new US measures and classifications are heavy on nationalist rhetoric but lacking in details, and experts suggest that they are likely to face legal challenges, which may further dissuade American companies from engaging in shipbuilding. At the same time, American media and think tanks have been quick to label China's naval dominance a threat to US national security, without any substantial evidence. A report released in mid-March by the Center for Strategic and International Studies claimed that China having grown to be the dominant player in shipbuilding poses serious economic and national security challenges for the US and its allies. Apparently, the purpose of this report aligns with the government's attempt to counter China. While it is true that China has had the good sense to build its seafaring capacity both of the military and commercial variety, this type of public-private partnership was once a hallmark of American economic strategy and led to our own golden age of prosperity in the mid-20th century. To summarize, the US is in no position to call other nations a threat to global security. All of the US' moves to revive its shipbuilding are very much in the spirit of the tabled SHIPS for America Act which explicitly states that its main goal is to build the US' war-making capacity by increasing our current meager shipbuilding capacity.

# The Pakistan Democracy Act: An exercise in futility?

Qamar Bashir



If diplomatic tensions escalate to the point of severely impacting military cooperation between Pakistan and the United States, Pakistan's armed forces—including the Army, Air Force, and Navy—could face significant operational and strategic challenges. The Pakistani military relies heavily on American technology, training, spare parts, and logistical support, particularly in its Air Force, which operates...

IN March 2025, a bold and controversial bill titled the "Pakistan Democracy Act" was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressmen Joe Wilson (Republican-South Carolina) and Jimmy Panetta (Democrat-California). The bill calls for targeted sanctions against individuals in Pakistan, particularly within the military and judiciary, accused of manipulating the 2024 elections and repressing democratic institutions, including the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Imran Khan. One of the most prominent figures named in the bill is General Asim Munir, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, who is alleged to have played a key role in orchestrating the political crackdown. Institutions such as the Pakistan Army, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and elements within the Election Commission of Pakistan are also indirectly implicated for facilitating or turning a blind eye to anti-democratic practices. This move, though rooted in a commitment to democratic values, opens a Pandora's box of questions about international law, bilateral relations, historical precedent, and strategic fallout. According to the official bill, the key provisions include requiring the U.S. President to submit a report within 180 days of enactment identifying individuals in Pakistan responsible for undermining the democratic process, unjust detainment of political opponents, and restriction of freedoms. It authorizes targeted sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act, such as asset freezes and visa bans, restricts property transactions in the U.S., and denies entry to the identified individuals. Additionally, it proposes suspension of U.S. security or economic aid unless democratic norms are restored and encourages increased funding for democratic movements and independent journalism in Pakistan. If the bill is passed by Congress in its current form, the President could sign the bill, making it law but still maintaining flexibility in enforcing its sanctions, especially regarding identifying targeted individuals and the scope of measures applied. Alternatively, the President might veto the bill, sending it back to Congress with stated objections; Congress would then need a challenging two-thirds majority in both chambers to override this veto. Each presidential choice carries significant diplomatic and domestic consequences: signing signals firm democratic accountability but risks diplomatic conflict with Pakistan; vetoing demonstrates strategic caution but may attract domestic criticism for perceived inaction. If passed, it could result in travel restrictions and asset freezes for Pakistani officials,

including General Asim Munir and other unnamed military, intelligence, and judicial actors. This could strain U.S.-Pakistan diplomatic and military cooperation and lead to reciprocal measures from Pakistan. If Pakistan's parliament responds by introducing a counter-bill imposing sanctions on U.S. government officials and companies operating within its territory, it would signify a substantial escalation in bilateral tensions. Such retaliatory sanctions might involve visa restrictions, asset freezes, operational limitations, or expulsion of American NGOs and businesses, severely straining the economic and diplomatic relationship. In turn, should the U.S. government escalate further by imposing additional tariffs or restrictive economic measures on Pakistani imports, the consequences would be severe and multidimensional. Economically, if the U.S. imposes additional tariffs or sanctions under the Pakistan Democracy Act, Pakistan could face significant reductions in exports, diminished foreign exchange earnings, inflationary pressures, and slower economic growth, adversely impacting employment and overall public welfare. Industries particularly vulnerable include textiles, apparel, surgical instruments, and agriculture, which represent a substantial share of Pakistan's exports to the U.S. Such economic distress could lead to deepening financial instability, further escalating inflation and intensifying domestic political unrest. It may lead to the U.S. withdrawing support for Pakistan's financing through the IMF, World Bank, or other international institutions, the consequences for Pakistan would be severe. Such a scenario could severely restrict Pakistan's ability to secure essential financial assistance, as the U.S. holds substantial influence over these international financial institutions. Without IMF or World Bank backing, Pakistan could face immediate financial instability, including rapid currency devaluation, depletion of foreign reserves, and difficulties in servicing external debt. Should U.S. allies join sanctions, the cumulative impact on Pakistan would be considerably more severe. Economically, coordinated sanctions or restrictions could sharply reduce Pakistan's access to international markets, financial services, and foreign investment, amplifying economic instability and further deteriorating currency value. If diplomatic tensions escalate to the point of severely impacting military cooperation between Pakistan and the United States, Pakistan's armed forces—including the Army, Air Force, and Navy—could face significant operational and strategic challenges. The Pakistani military relies heavily on American technology, training, spare parts, and logistical support,

particularly in its Air Force, which operates a fleet largely composed of American-built F-16 fighter jets. Without continuous technical support, spare parts, or maintenance assistance, the readiness and effectiveness of these aircraft would be severely compromised. Similarly, the Pakistani Army's capabilities in areas like surveillance, counterterrorism, and armored warfare could decline, given its reliance on U.S.-supplied equipment and joint training programs. The Navy would also experience reduced operational effectiveness, as maritime surveillance, coastal defense systems, and equipment upgrades often depend upon U.S. technical cooperation and support. Overall, the deterioration in military relations could impair Pakistan's defense readiness, hinder counterterrorism operations, and reduce strategic deterrence capabilities. There is precedent for such actions. The U.S. imposed the Magnitsky Act in 2012 on Russia for human rights abuses, leading to strained relations. In 2020, the U.S. passed the Hong Kong Autonomy Act against China, resulting in retaliatory sanctions and a deepened diplomatic rift. Sanctions were also imposed on Saudi officials post-Khashoggi, though the Crown Prince was spared for strategic reasons. After Myanmar's 2021 coup, the U.S. froze assets and sanctioned military leaders, though the regime remained in control. Given the deep strategic alignment between the United States and the Pakistani military—particularly the reliance on Pakistan's armed forces as a crucial regional asset for counterterrorism operations, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan—the probability that the U.S. President would ultimately sign the Pakistan Democracy Act into law appears relatively low. Washington recognizes that destabilizing Pakistan, especially considering the sensitive nature of its nuclear arsenal and recent cooperative actions, such as the handing over of key terrorists to U.S. authorities, poses substantial security risks to both regional and global stability. Consequently, despite congressional momentum and symbolic pressure for democratic reforms, pragmatic security considerations, entrenched military ties, and concerns about inadvertently fueling regional extremism and nuclear insecurity suggest that the President will likely exercise diplomatic caution and restraint, favoring alternative avenues for encouraging democratic accountability without rupturing vital strategic partnerships.

— Press Secretary to the President (Rtd)  
Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan in France  
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# Australia, China and the Indo-Pacific chessboard

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The dramatic shift in Australia-China relations began in 2017, marking the end of a period of economic optimism and the beginning of heightened political tensions. The catalyst for this change was a combination of internal and external factors, including growing concerns within Australia about Chinese political influence, security risks and the broader regional security environment. The deterioration of relations was triggered by Australian politicians' increasing...

AUSTRALIAN relationship with China has evolved considerably since the 1990s, moving from a focus on economic cooperation to a more complex, multifaceted relationship characterized by both interdependence and strategic rivalry. Initially, Australian approach to China was dominated by a desire to strengthen economic ties and expand institutional cooperation. However, by 2017, tensions between the two nations began to escalate, marking a sharp shift from a prosperous economic partnership to a strategic and political contestation. This essay examines the trajectory of Australia-China relations, highlighting the key factors that have shaped the bilateral dynamic, from the initial economic cooperation in the 1990s to the geopolitical tensions of the present. In the 1990s, Australia sought to position itself as an active economic partner in Asia, capitalizing on the region's growing economic power. China, undergoing significant reforms and opening its market to the global economy, became an increasingly important trading partner for Australia. By 2007, China overtook Japan as Australian largest trading partner, driven largely by Chinese demand for raw materials such as iron ore, coal and natural gas. In 2009, China emerged as a key market for Australian exports, solidifying economic ties and fostering a sense of mutual benefit. The economic interdependence between the two nations reached a peak with the signing of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) in 2015. This agreement, which sought to lower trade barriers and enhance economic cooperation, was a pivotal moment in bilateral relations. It exemplified Australian commitment to strengthening its economic ties with China, while also positioning Australia as an essential partner in Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Despite some initial concerns within Australia about the implications of Chinese growing economic influence, the trade relationship flourished in the years following the agreement, with China becoming Australia's largest trading partner in terms of goods and services. The dramatic shift in Australia-China relations began in 2017, marking the end of a period of economic optimism and the beginning of heightened political tensions. The catalyst for this change was a combination of internal and external factors, including growing concerns within Australia about Chinese political influence, security risks and the broader regional security environment. The deterioration of relations was triggered by Australian politicians' increasing criticism of the Chinese political system, particularly concerning issues such as human rights and governance. However, the most significant moment came when then-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull publicly accused China of interfering in Australian domestic politics. This statement was followed by the implementation of new legislation aimed at countering foreign interference, which was widely perceived as targeting Chinese influence. The new laws were intended to curb espionage, cyber-attacks

and attempts to influence Australian politics and they were seen as a direct response to growing concerns over Chinese activities in the region. The relationship further deteriorated in 2018 when Australia made the controversial decision to exclude Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei from its 5G network development. This move was motivated by security concerns, as the Australian government feared that Huawei's involvement could lead to Chinese surveillance and data breaches. This decision was met with a strong response from China, which saw it as an act of hostility and an example of Australia aligning with the United States against Chinese interests. The situation worsened in 2020, when Australia called for an independent inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, a move that was viewed by Beijing as provocative. In retaliation, China imposed a series of sanctions on Australian exports, including barley, beef, wine and other agricultural products. The sanctions were a direct response to Australian stance on the pandemic and its growing alignment with the United States in opposing Chinese actions on the global stage. Amid the growing tensions with China, Australia sought to strengthen its strategic alliances, particularly with the United States. The increasing uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region, driven in part by Chinese assertive actions in the South China Sea and its growing military presence, prompted Australia to reconsider its defense posture. The signing of the AUKUS agreement in 2021 marked a significant step in this direction. The agreement, which involves the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, allows Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, enhancing its military deterrence capabilities in the face of Chinese growing influence. The AUKUS agreement was seen by Beijing as a direct challenge to its ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. China criticized the deal, accusing the three countries of adopting a "cold war mentality" and destabilizing the region. The move was also perceived as a demonstration of the United States' commitment to containing Chinese rise and reinforcing its strategic dominance in the Indo-Pacific. Despite the strategic alignment with the U.S., Australian leadership under Prime Minister Scott Morrison did not entirely abandon efforts to maintain economic ties with China. However, the government continued to take measures to secure Australian national interests, including a greater focus on strengthening security relationships and increasing military spending. In 2022, Australia saw a change in leadership with the election of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and the return of the Australian Labor Party to power. Albanese's administration made it clear that it sought to de-escalate tensions with China, signaling a shift toward a more diplomatic approach. One of the first signs of a thaw in relations came in 2022, when Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles held talks with Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. In the same year, Albanese met

with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Bali, marking the first meeting between leaders of both nations in six years. This was followed by the visit of Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong to Beijing, signaling a return to diplomatic engagement. The series of meetings and reciprocal visits in 2023 and 2024 further demonstrated the willingness of both nations to restore ties. Australian trade ministers visited Beijing and Prime Minister Albanese made his first visit to China since 2016. In 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Canberra and Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited Australia, marking the first visit by a Chinese Premier since 2017. These developments indicated that both countries were committed to rebuilding diplomatic relations, though challenges remained. Despite the positive signs of normalization, Australia continues to view China through a lens of strategic competition. Official documents, such as the 2023 Defence Strategic Review and the 2024 National Defence Strategy, highlight Australian concerns over Chinese growing regional influence and military modernization. The need to strengthen security ties with the U.S. and enhance Australian military capabilities reflects the ongoing apprehension about Chinese rise and its potential to disrupt the existing regional order. At the same time, Australian economic dependence on China remains undeniable. In 2023, China accounted for 26% of Australian goods and services trade and the bilateral trade volume continues to grow. This economic interdependence presents a significant challenge for Australian foreign policy, as it must balance the need for economic cooperation with the reality of Chinese growing assertiveness on the global stage. Public opinion in Australia has also shifted in response to Chinese growing influence. According to a 2024 survey by the Lowy Institute, there has been a noticeable increase in the perception of China as a security threat. While a segment of the Australian public remains optimistic about the economic benefits of the relationship, a growing number of Australians view China with suspicion and concern. Australian relationship with China is characterized by a delicate balancing act between economic cooperation and strategic rivalry. While the bilateral relationship has experienced significant growth in terms of trade and institutional cooperation, the rise of China as a regional power has created tensions that threaten to undermine this partnership. The Australian government must navigate this complex dynamic by continuing to strengthen its strategic ties with the United States while seeking to maintain economic engagement with China. The path forward for Australia will require deft diplomacy, as it seeks to reconcile these competing interests and ensure its security in an increasingly uncertain Indo-Pacific region. As Chinese influence continues to grow, Australia will need to carefully calibrate its foreign and security policies to safeguard its national interests in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.



## Briefs

## FO dismisses anti-Pakistan bill in US...

FROM PAGE 01 international law and regional stability." He said that durable peace in Syria hinged on a credible political transition, national unity and reconciliation and inclusive governance. Spokesperson Khan expressed concerns over the series of raids by the Indian authorities on the residences belonging to members of different constituents of All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) which he said were aimed at crushing dissent and intimidating the local people. "We urge the Indian authorities to stop these oppressive measures, and respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Kashmiri people, including their right to self-determination," he said.

## US not interfering..

FROM PAGE 01 During the discussion, Madam Xiang briefed the participants on her proposed investment projects in Pakistan and Punjab. The meeting also covered topics such as the recent U.S. elections, their outcomes, China's policies, and bilateral relations. Chaudhry Shujaat emphasized that the United States has its policies and will not interfere in Pakistan's internal matters. He noted that China has maintained a clear stance on such issues and highlighted the deep-rooted friendship and strong trade ties between Pakistan and China.

## IMF approves...

FROM PAGE 01 which will be announced with the IMF's approval. Sources say that the reduction in electricity price by Re1 per kilowatt is expected to ease the financial burden on consumers by approximately Rs100 billion in total. An average household consuming 500 units of electricity per month, would see a reduction of Rs500 in their electricity bill under the revised tariff.

## IMF agreement...

FROM PAGE 01 the IMF agreement, with significant benefits expected in the energy, investment and business sectors. He further added that following the IMF board meeting, Pakistan will receive a payment, which will provide a substantial boost to the economy. Moreover, the Advisor assured that a public-friendly and timely budget will be presented, aiming to cater to the needs of the general public and promote economic growth.

## HRCP urges govt...

FROM PAGE 01 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has left ordinary people increasingly vulnerable to violence and extortion, creating a climate of constant fear. It said that in Balochistan, what began as a "struggle for fundamental rights" is now being labelled "terrorism" by the state. "Rather than initiating a political dialogue with stakeholders in the province, the authorities have continued to use disproportionate force against protesters, resorting to mass arrests.

## PM: nations don't...

FROM PAGE 01 The prime minister emphasised that the youth of Pakistan was a challenge as well as a great opportunity. "If we provide training of information technology and artificial intelligence (AI)-led modern technology, they can contribute a lot for the development and prosperity of Pakistan," he said. Chairman Prime Minister Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan on the occasion said that the government was opening up new opportunities to empower youth of the country. He said through PM Digital Hub, the youth would take benefit in various sectors including sports, tourism, sports, IT, green economy and others.

## Aqeel, Ushna Annex Serena Masters Tennis Cup

Serena Hotels Tennis Masters Cup Concludes with Thrilling Finals



## DNA / AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Serena Hotels Tennis Masters Cup concluded with exhilarating final matches and a closing ceremony, celebrating outstanding talent and sportsmanship. The tournament brought together Pakistan's top tennis players, reaffirming Serena Hotels' commitment to promoting sports through its Sports Diplomacy Initiative.

Since 2015, Serena Hotels has been organizing the Serena National Ranking Championship in Islamabad in collaboration with the Pakistan Tennis

Federation. Last year, the tournament was restructured into the Serena Tennis Masters Cup to ensure broader participation from across Pakistan. This new format has made the competition more inclusive and competitive. The tournament's first leg was held in Peshawar, the second in Faisalabad, and the final leg culminated in Islamabad. In the Women's Singles category, Ushna Sohai secured the title with an impressive performance, while Shiza Sajid finished as runner-up after a hard-fought match. The Men's Singles final was an intense battle, with Aqeel Khan emerging victorious and Barkatullah finishing as runner-up.

The Men's Doubles saw top players, including Aqeel Khan, Aisam-ul-Haq, Shahzad Khan, and Muhammad Abid, competing in a closely contested match that ended in a tie due to unfavorable weather conditions, highlighting the exceptional skill and competitive spirit of all participants. Speaking at the closing ceremony, Pakistan Tennis Federation President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi praised Serena Hotels for its dedication to supporting tennis in Pakistan. He stated, "Tournaments like the Serena Hotels Tennis Masters Cup play a crucial role in providing a platform for both emerging and professional players. We

appreciate Serena Hotels' unwavering support in elevating the sport in the country." Through its Sports Diplomacy Initiative, Serena Hotels continues to foster a culture of inclusivity and excellence in sports, offering athletes a platform to showcase their talent while promoting healthy competition and national pride. The Serena Hotels Tennis Masters Cup once again highlighted the unifying power of sports and its role in developing Pakistan's athletic talent. Serena Hotels remains committed to strengthening its support for sports and creating more opportunities for emerging players to shine.

## Philippine's Eala stuns Swiatek as Emma out

Eala showed no signs of intimidation playing against one of her idols

## SPORTS DESK

MIAMI: Philippine wild card Alexandra Eala pulled off the biggest win of her young career with a stunning 6-2 7-5 upset of Polish world number two Iga Swiatek on Wednesday to extend her dream run at the Miami Open into the semi-finals. The big-hitting 19-year-old showed no signs of intimidation playing against one of her idols and was instead a picture of poise as she dismantled Swiatek's serve early on to grab control of the match and never looked back. "I don't know what to say,

I mean, complete just disbelief right now and I am on cloud nine," Eala said in her on-court interview. "It's forever in my heart." Swiatek, who was playing the match with added security after being verbally abused by a spectator at the weekend, failed to hold serve throughout the first set while Eala was swinging freely as she unleashed winners from all over the court. Five-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek hit a staggering 19 unforced errors in the opening set and then received some advice from her coach before briefly leaving the court. In the second set Eala managed to overturn a 4-2 deficit and then held her nerve while Swiatek tried to serve out the set at 5-4 before ultimately closing it out with her eighth break of the match. For Eala, the victory over Swiatek marked the third Grand Slam winner she had knocked out of the women's draw after earlier wins over Australian Open champion Madison Keys and 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko. Up next for Eala will be the winner of the day's other quarter-final between American fourth seed Jessica Pegula and 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu of Britain. On the men's side Serbian fourth seed Novak Djokovic, who is seeking a record seventh Miami title, caps the evening session against American 24th seed Sebastian Korda for a spot in the semi-finals. Bulgarian 14th seed Grigor Dimitrov will face Argentine Francisco Cerundolo in the day's

other quarter-final while German top seed Alexander Zverev faces Frenchman Arthur Fils in a last-16 clash that was postponed due to rain on Tuesday. Emma Raducanu's encouraging Miami Open run came to an end in a narrow quarter-final defeat by world number four Jessica Pegula. Despite needing medical treatment, the 22-year-old Briton levelled the match before American Pegula clinically regained control to win 6-4 6-7 (3-7) 6-2. In the second set Raducanu played some of her best tennis since becoming a teenage Grand Slam champion at the 2021 US Open.



## Bayern eye win over St Pauli to stay on title course

Bayern are top with 62 while reigning champions Leverkusen are on 56

## WEB DESK

LONDON: Bayern Munich's defence will have to be overhauled for the visit of lowly St Pauli on Saturday following injuries to Alphonso Davies and Dayot Upamecano, with the Bundesliga leaders in need of a win to remain on course for the title. The Bavarians, who face Inter Milan in the Champions League quarter-finals next month, have gone two games without a Bundesliga victory and their lead over second-placed Bayer Leverkusen has been cut to six points. Bayern are top with 62 while reigning champions Leverkusen are on 56. Mainz 05 are in third place with 45. The Bundesliga leaders must reshuffle their rearguard after left back Davies suffered an ACL tear to his right knee in the 12th minute of Canada's 2-1 win over the United States in the CONCACAF Nations League third-place playoff on Sunday. The 24-year-old will miss the rest of the season in a major blow to Bayern coach Vincent Kompany's plans. Bayern will also be without Upamecano for weeks after the Frenchman finished his country's Nations League quarter-final shootout win over Croatia but picked up a knee injury. The pair are Bayern's quickest defenders and most suited to Kompany's high-pressing, quick transition game, with likely replacements Eric Dier, Josip Stanisic or Hiroki Ito lacking some of their pace. Whatever the final lineup, Bayern will look to avoid another home debacle after their 3-2 loss to visitors VfL Bochum in their most recent home game, after leading 2-0. They followed that up with a 1-1 draw at Union Berlin before going into the international break last week. Despite their injury setbacks, Bayern will not budge from their season targets, said sports director Max Eberl. "The absences of Alphonso Davies and Dayot Upamecano are a big blow for Bayern," Eberl said. "But our squad is strong enough and will make up for these absences. This will bring us even closer together. We have the quality to remain focused on all our major goals this season."

## Pakistan foreign exchange..

FROM PAGE 01 multilateral and bilateral financing, could help stabilise the reserves in the coming weeks. International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff reached a deal with Pakistan for a new \$1.3 billion arrangement and also agreed on the first review of the ongoing 37-month bailout programme, the Fund said on Tuesday. Pending board approval, Pakistan can unlock the \$1.3 billion under a new climate resilience loan programme spanning 28 months. It will also free \$1 billion for the South Asian nation under its \$7 billion bailout programme, which would bring those disbursements to \$2 billion.

## Three killed, 21 injured...

FROM PAGE 01 staff on an urgent basis. The area has been cordoned off, and security forces have launched an investigation into the attack. Balochistan has witnessed a surge in terrorist attacks in recent months, with security forces frequently being targeted. President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the blast and expressed deep sorrow and regret over the loss of precious lives in the terrorist attack.



## Briefs

## Global renewable energy capacity up 585 GW

RIYADH: Global renewable energy capacity saw a record annual growth rate of 15.1 percent in 2024, increasing by 585 gigawatts, according to a new analysis. In its latest report, the International Renewable Energy Agency said that this addition brought the total installed power capacity in the sector to 4,448 GW. Despite this record increase, IRENA highlighted that growth is still falling short of the 11.2 terawatts needed to align with the global goal to triple the installed renewable energy capacity by 2030. The study further said global renewable capacity should expand by 16.6 percent annually to meet the stipulated 2030 target. —APP

## Gold price ups by Rs.3,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold witnessed increased by Rs.3,200 and was traded at Rs.321,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs.317,800 the previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported. The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs.2,743 to Rs.275,205 from Rs.272,462 whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs.2,515 to Rs.252,280 from Rs.249,765. The prices of per tola silver increased by Rs.105 to Rs.3,580 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs.90 and was traded at Rs.3,069. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$ 31 to \$3,052 from 3,021 whereas that of silver went up by \$1.00 to \$34.10, the Association reported. —APP

## Russian drone attack on Kharkiv, nine injured

MOSCOW: Russian forces launched a mass drone attack on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, late on the other day, injuring nine people and causing considerable damage, emergency services and officials said. Emergency services, posting on the Telegram messaging app, said the attacks started four fires in the city center and posted pictures of firefighters battling flames alongside piles of rubble. The strikes, it said, caused serious damage to buildings. Mayor Ihor Terekhov said there had been at least 12 drone strikes on the city, a frequent target of Russia's military, located some 30 km (18 miles) from the border. Kharkiv resisted capture in the early weeks of Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but has been repeatedly hit by drones and missiles and Russian forces changed the focus of their campaign to Ukraine's east. —APP

## Carney calls Trump's auto tariffs direct attack on Canada

Carney said he needs to see the details of Trump's executive order before taking retaliatory measures. He called it unjustified and said he will leave the election campaign to go to Ottawa on Thursday to chair his special Cabinet committee on US relations

TORONTO: Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Wednesday that US President Donald Trump's auto tariffs are a "direct attack" on his country and that the trade war is hurting Americans, noting that American consumer confidence is at a multi-year low. Trump said earlier Wednesday that he was placing 25 percent tariffs on auto imports and, to underscore his intention, he stated "This is permanent."

"This is a very direct attack," Carney responded. "We will defend our workers. We will defend our companies. We will defend our country." Carney said he needs to see the details of Trump's executive order before taking retaliatory measures. He called it unjustified and said he will leave the election campaign to go to Ottawa on Thursday to chair his special Cabinet committee on US relations. Carney earlier announced a CA\$2 billion (\$1.4 billion) "strategic

response fund" that will protect Canadian auto jobs affected by Trump's tariffs. Autos are Canada's second largest export, and Carney noted it employs 125,000 Canadians directly and almost another 500,000 in related industries. "Canada will be there for auto workers," he said. Trump previously granted a one-month exemption on his stiff new tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada for US automakers. The president has plunged the US into a global trade war — all while on again, off-again new levies continue to escalate uncertainty. The Conference Board reported Tuesday that its US consumer confidence index fell 7.2 points in March to 92.9, the fourth straight monthly decline and its lowest reading since January of 2021. "His trade war is hurting American consumers and workers and it will hurt more. I see that American consumer confidence is at a multi-year low," Carney

said earlier while campaigning in Windsor, Ontario ahead of Canada's April 28 election. The tax hike on auto imports starting in April means automakers could face higher costs and lower sales. Trump previously 25 percent tariffs on Canada's steel and aluminum and is threatening sweeping tariffs on all Canadian products — as well as all of America's trading partners — on April 2. "He wants to break us so America can own us," Carney said. "And it will never ever happen because we just don't look out for ourselves we look out for each other." Carney, former two-time central banker, made the earlier comments while campaigning against the backdrop of the Ambassador Bridge, which is considered the busiest US-Canadian border crossing, carrying 25 percent of all trade between the two countries. It plays an especially important role in auto manufacturing. Carney said the bridge carries \$140 billion

Canadian dollars (\$98 billion) in goods every year and CA\$400 million (\$281 million) per day. "Now those numbers and the jobs and the paychecks that depend on that are in question," Carney said. "The relationship between Canada and the United States has changed. We did not change it." In the auto sector, parts can go back and forth across the Canada-US border several times before being fully assembled in Ontario or Michigan. Ontario Premier Doug Ford said, whose province has the bulk of Canada's auto industry, Ford said auto plants on both sides the border will shut simultaneously if the tariffs go ahead. "President is calling it Liberation Day. I call it Termination Day for American workers. I know President Trump likes tell people 'Your fired!' I didn't think he meant US auto workers when he said it," Ford said. Trump has declared a trade war on his northern neighbor and continues to call for

Canada to become the 51st state, a position that has infuriated Canadians. Canadians booed Trump repeatedly at a Carney election rally in Kitchener, Ontario. The new prime minister, sworn in March 14, still hasn't had a phone call with Trump. It is unusual for a US president and Canadian prime minister to go so long without talking after a new leader takes office. "It would be appropriate that the president and I speak given the action that he has taken, I'm sure that will happen soon," Carney said. Opposition Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre said the tariffs will damage American auto workers just as they will damage Canadian auto workers. "The message to President Trump should be to knock it off," Poilievre said. "He's changed his mind before. He's done this twice, puts them on, takes them off. We can suspect that may well happen again." —Agencies

## Economic growth hinges on political harmony: Nasir

ISLAMABAD: The President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, has emphasized that political stability is the backbone of economic progress and urged all political stakeholders to prioritize the country's economic interests by resolving differences through dialogue. Highlighting the significance of stability, he noted that uncertainty hampers investment, trade, and industrial development, making consensus-building essential for national progress. He welcomed the government's willingness to engage Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) through constructive dialogue, calling it a commendable step towards ensuring political and economic stability. He expressed confidence that this initiative would help restore investor confidence and strengthen Pakistan's business climate. Fostering dialogue between key political forces is crucial for addressing national challenges and creating a conducive environment for economic growth," he stated. The ICCI President reiterated the business community's strong support for peace, stability, and economic revival initiatives. He urged all political leaders to embrace dialogue as a means of securing Pakistan's economic prosperity. —APP

## Italy pledges 68m euros in aid for Syria

ROME: Italy has earmarked some 68 million euros (\$73.20 million) to finance humanitarian projects and rebuild infrastructure in Syria, Rome's foreign minister told lawmakers on Thursday, saying it was crucial to support the transition in Damascus. "An initial package has been earmarked for humanitarian initiatives in the hospital and health sector, in infrastructure, and in strengthening food supply chains," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told a parliamentary hearing. "New cooperation projects will start in the coming weeks. And we also intend to organize a business forum aimed at reconstruction," he added. Earlier this month, donors at a European Union-led conference pledged 5.8 billion euros to help Syria's new authorities with the challenges of the transition. EU countries have also suspended a range of sanctions against Syria, including restrictions related to energy, banking, transport and reconstruction. The new authorities this month issued a constitutional declaration that retains a central role for Islamic law in the country. Tajani said the constitutional declaration represented a "positive step" and a "progressive and cautious" easing of sanctions should continue to foster institutional consolidation and economic recovery. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Girl selecting bangles from stall at local mall during the preparation of Eid-ul-Fitr.

## Six dead in tourist submarine sinking off Egypt resort

CAIRO: Six tourists died on Thursday when a tourist submarine sank off the resort of Hurghada on Egypt's Red Sea coast, state media reported. The website of the state-owned Akhbar Al-Youm newspaper said the deceased were all foreigners, adding that 19 others were injured. Investigations were underway to determine what caused the accident, according to the newspaper, which said the injured were transported to nearby hospitals along with the bodies of the deceased. Hurghada, a bustling tourist city some 460 kilometers (285 miles) southeast of the Egyptian capital Cairo, is a major destination for visitors to Egypt. The Red Sea coral reefs and islands off Egypt's eastern coast are major draws, contributing to the country's vital tourism sector which employs two million people and generates more than 10 percent of GDP. While dozens of tourist boats sail through the coastal area daily for snorkeling and diving activities, the website of Sindbad Submarines, the vessel owner according to Akhbar Al-Youm, says the company deploys the region's "only real" recreational submarine. —DNA

## Easypaisa introduces Digital Insurance marketplace

ISLAMABAD: Easypaisa digital bank has launched its very own digital insurance marketplace, making insurance more accessible, affordable, and convenient for millions of Pakistanis. The platform offers a comprehensive range of coverage for the Pakistani population, including health, life, mobile, income protection, vehicle insurance, domestic & international travel, and doctor consultations being offered through industry leaders in the insurance space such as EFU Life, EFU General, IGI Life, IGI General, WEBDOC, and oladoc. Envisioning to make insurance products accessible for everyone, the newly launched insurance marketplace offers a one-month free subscription on all monthly plans, making coverage more affordable and transparent, with the convenience of immediate consultations with over 25,000 specialist doctors via video, audio, and discounted clinic and lab visits. The AI-powered Insurance Marketplace is transforming the way people access insurance by offering a smarter, faster, and more convenient experience. Users can engage in real-time conversations, instantly explore tailored insurance options, get their questions answered, and complete transactions with ease. Jahanzeb Khan, President & CEO, easypaisa digital bank, commented, "The launch of easypaisa digital bank's insurance marketplace is a significant milestone. easypaisa has enabled digitized insurance-based products to increase the accessibility of insurance services to a wider segment of our society. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to enhancing every aspect of the customer journey and provide millions with insurance services at their fingertips. This initiative symbolizes our relentless pursuit of enabling our customers with valuable services and protecting them in times of need. —DNA

## PSX, CSE, DSE sign MoU to establish Exchange Forum

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Akif Saeed remarked: "This strategic partnership marks a significant step forward in regional market integration. By combining our strengths, these three exchanges can drive innovation, enhance market resilience, and create new opportunities for investors across South Asia

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark move to strengthen regional capital market cooperation, the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) has entered into a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) and the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) to establish an exchange forum. The agreement, signed in Colombo, according to press release received here Thursday from PSX, adding that the exchange forum would facilitate technology development and sharing, human resource sharing, product development, regulatory collaboration, investor protection, and knowledge exchange, fostering a continuing relationship across the three markets. The signing ceremony was attended by senior leadership from all three exchanges, including Farrukh H. Sabzwari, Managing Director & CEO of the Pakistan Stock Exchange; Rajeeva Bandaranaike, CEO of Colombo Stock Exchange; and Momin Ul Islam, Chairman Board of Directors Dhaka Stock Exchange PLC (DSE). Also present at the ceremony was Akif Saeed, Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) along with other senior officials, the statement added. The MoU aims to execute joint initiatives in system development and digital transformation; cross-exchange training programs and knowledge-sharing initiatives; build collaborative development of new financial instruments; and harmonize market oversight and investor protection frameworks. The MoU would also aim at exploration of cross-border listing opportunities to expand investor access; facilitation of broker partnerships and institutional connectivity. Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Akif Saeed remarked: "This strategic partnership marks a significant step forward in regional market integration. By combining our strengths, these three exchanges can drive innovation, enhance market resilience, and create new opportunities for investors across South Asia." Speaking on the occasion, Farrukh H. Sabzwari said the agreement represents a transformative chapter in regional capital market cooperation. "Through this partnership with our counterparts in Colombo and Dhaka, we aim to elevate market standards, foster sustainable growth, and deliver greater value to all market participants," he said. The MoU establishes a formal platform for ongoing dialogue and joint initiatives, with working groups to be formed to implement the cooperation framework. This alliance is expected to enhance market liquidity and product diversity; strengthen regulatory frameworks across the region; facilitate cross-border investment flows and promote technological innovation in market infrastructure. This initiative will foster deeper regional cooperation among the three South Asian nations while creating new opportunities for investors and market participants across the region, the statement added. —DNA

## The World Bank's SFERP initiative improving lives of flood victims

The exemplary performance of PD Ghulam Asghar Kanasro in leading SFERP has set a precedent in disaster management and rehabilitation

MUMTAZ AHMED BHATTI



THE catastrophic floods of 2022 in Sindh left behind an unprecedented trail of destruction. Thousands of people were displaced, their homes and livelihoods obliterated by the raging waters. The devastation extended to critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, schools, and healthcare facilities, plunging the region into a crisis that demanded urgent and effective rehabilitation efforts. Recognizing the scale of the disaster, the Sindh Flood Emergency Rehabilitation Project (SFERP) was initiated with the support

of the World Bank. The project aimed to rebuild infrastructure, rehabilitate communities, and enhance resilience against future disasters. At the helm of this significant undertaking was Project Director (PD) Ghulam Asghar Kanasro, whose leadership, dedication, and commitment to excellence played a crucial role in ensuring the success of SFERP. Under his direction, the project not only met its objectives but also set a benchmark for efficient and transparent disaster rehabilitation. The floods of 2022 were among the most devastating in Sindh's history, affecting millions of people and causing massive financial losses. The torrential rains led to widespread flooding, submerging entire villages and towns. Thousands of families lost their homes, while agricultural lands were washed away, leading to food insecurity and economic turmoil. The floods also severely damaged public infrastructure, including roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, exacerbating the suffering of affected communities. The human cost of the disaster was equally alarming. Many lost

their lives, while others suffered from waterborne diseases due to contaminated water supplies. The breakdown of essential services, including healthcare and education, further deepened the crisis. In the face of such overwhelming devastation, an urgent and coordinated response was necessary to rebuild and restore normalcy in the region. One of the defining aspects of Kanasro's leadership was his unwavering commitment to quality. He ensured that all infrastructure projects under

SFERP adhered to the highest construction standards. Regular inspections, adherence to safety norms, and stringent quality control measures were implemented to prevent substandard work. This approach not only ensured the durability of the rebuilt infrastructure but also restored public confidence in the project. Managing a project of such magnitude required meticulous planning and judicious allocation of resources. Kanasro ensured that funds were utilized efficiently, minimizing wastage

and preventing financial discrepancies. His transparent approach earned him appreciation from both national and international stakeholders. By implementing robust financial management strategies, he ensured that every penny contributed to the project was used effectively to benefit flood-affected communities. A project of this scale necessitated seamless collaboration among various entities, including government departments, private contractors, and local communities.

Kanasro's ability to foster teamwork and maintain coordination among these stakeholders played a crucial role in the smooth execution of SFERP. His open communication channels and proactive problem-solving approach helped address challenges swiftly and ensured steady progress. The exemplary performance of PD Ghulam Asghar Kanasro in leading SFERP has set a precedent in disaster management and rehabilitation. His visionary leadership, commitment to quality, efficient resource management, and ability to foster teamwork have contributed immensely to the success of the project. His efforts have not only rebuilt infrastructure but also restored hope and resilience among the people of Sindh. The impact of SFERP extends beyond the immediate recovery phase. By implementing sustainable and resilient rebuilding practices, the project has paved the way for long-term disaster preparedness. The appreciation Kanasro has received at all levels—government, international organizations, and local communities—is well deserved. His work continues to positively influence lives and

serve as a model for future disaster rehabilitation projects. As SFERP moves rapidly towards completion, the lives of flood victims are steadily improving. The devastation of the 2022 floods posed an immense challenge, but through strategic planning, efficient execution, and dedicated leadership, the region has embarked on a path to recovery. The success of SFERP stands as a testament to what can be achieved through resilience, collaboration, and effective governance. Ghulam Asghar Kanasro's leadership has been instrumental in transforming this vision into reality. His dedication to rebuilding Sindh not only provided immediate relief but also laid the foundation for a stronger and more disaster-resilient future. The lessons learned from this project will serve as a guide for future disaster management initiatives, ensuring that communities are better prepared to withstand and recover from such calamities. In the face of adversity, SFERP has proven that with the right leadership and commitment, rebuilding lives and communities is possible.





## Briefs

### Earthquake jolts Islamabad, parts of KP

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: An earthquake measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale jolted Islamabad, Peshawar and multiple districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday afternoon. According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC), the tremors were felt in other areas including Shangla, Kohat, Swabi, Lower Dir, Chitral, Attock, Malakand, Swat, Shangla, Buner and Abbottabad, PTV news channel reported.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department's Seismological Centre, the earthquake struck with depth of 198 kilometers. The epicenter was located in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan, a region known for frequent seismic activity.

### PTI moves court seeking permission of rally

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Thursday moved Lahore High Court (LHC) to hold public rally at Minar-e-Pakistan on April 22. The petitioner seeking to hold public rally was moved by PTI leader Akmal Khan Bari. Lahore Deputy Commissioner has been made respondent in the petition. The petitioner prayed before the court that he had moved a similar petition to hold rally on March 22.

He said that the verdict was announced without giving PTI a chance to narrate its version. We couldn't hold rally on March 22 due to the delaying tactics of deputy commissioner, said the petitioner. The petitioner prayed before the court to direct the officials concerned to allow PTI to hold rally on April 22.

Earlier, the Punjab government had rejected PTI's request for a rally at Minar-e-Pakistan on March 22. Justice Farooq Haider of the Lahore High Court disposed of the PTI request for permission to hold a rally. The deputy commissioner of Lahore issued a notification rejecting the request of PTI's Vice President Akmal Bari and presented a report in the court. The report stated that the PTI cannot be granted permission for the rally in view of security situation. The DC report mentioned the recent terrorist incidents in the country - an attack on Bannu Cantt and the Jaffar Express - as reasons for turning down the request.

### 10 Pakistanis arrested for begging in UAE

DNA

ABU DHABI: United Arab Emirates (UAE) officials arrested ten Pakistani nationals, including five women, for begging, according to official sources. The detainees have been sent to prison, and UAE authorities have formally informed their Pakistani counterparts.

According to sources within the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the arrested women include Amina Bibi, Kausar Bibi, and Farzana Bibi from Vehari, as well as Jameela Bibi and Zubaida Bibi from Lahore. They were apprehended during multiple operations conducted across the UAE.

FIA officials confirmed that these women have been incarcerated and preparations are underway for their deportation to Pakistan. Similarly, in related operations, Muhammad Zakariya from Dera Ghazi Khan, Waqar Haider from Bahawalnagar, Muhammad Usman from Lahore, Ejaz Khan from Charsadda, and Abdullah from Peshawar were also arrested on charges of begging. The FIA further stated that emergency passports have been issued for these five men, and they will be deported to Pakistan in the coming days.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani in a group photo with Chairman Monal Group Luqman Ali Afzal, DHM of Palestine embassy Nadir Alturk and others on the occasion of iftar diner hosted by Monal Group for diplomats and members of business fraternity, civil society and government officials. - DNA

### IGP seeks time to recover missing brothers of Noorani

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Inspector General of Police (IGP) on Thursday told the Islamabad High Court (IHC) that he would need fourteen days to recover the two missing brothers of journalist Ahmad Noorani. The US-based Noorani, who works for a news outlet called FactFocus, recently published an investigative report regarding a serving high-ranking military official and his relatives.

Noorani's two brothers, Muhammad Saifur Rehman Haider and Muhammad Ali, went missing from their residence on March 19. Noorani's mother Amina Bashir had filed a plea with the IHC for the recovery of his two brothers. On Tuesday, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) demanded the immediate release of Noorani's brothers, calling it a "clear reprisal to intimidate and silence [Noorani]." Today's hearing was heard by Justice Imam Ameen Minhas, while Advocate Imaan Mazari-Hazir, representing the petitioner, appeared before the court along with Noorani's mother and sister.

### 11 Khwarij killed in KP province

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On 26-27 March 2025, 11 Khwarij were killed by the security forces in four separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

An intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly, five khwarij were sent to hell. In a second operation conducted in same general area, three more khwarij were successfully neutralized by own troops.

In another encounter that took place in general area Miran Shah, North Waziristan District, own troops effectively neutralized two khwarij. In fourth operation conducted by the Security Forces in general area Daraban, Dera Ismail Khan District, one khwarij was sent to hell.

# Pak not to extend deadline for expulsion of Afghans

Amnesty International urges govt to withdraw "Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan"

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led government has decided against extending the March 31 deadline for illegal Afghan nationals to leave the country. During a meeting held at the interior ministry, the sources said, the government has decided to strictly enforce the March 31 deadline for the expulsion of illegal immigrants. Islamabad previously had turned down the Afghan government's request to extend the stay of Afghan nationals residing illegally in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Meanwhile, the government has also sought the record of Afghan students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from the provincial government by March 27 for updating the Foreign National Security Cell's dashboard related to foreign nationals and needed the data of Afghan students. The policy to expel illegal immigrants comes as part of efforts being made to improve the security situation amid increasing terrorist attacks in the country - which Islamabad has time again blamed on terrorist groups operating from the Afghan territory. So far, as many as 878,972

## US spy agencies declare TTP as 'future threat'

30-page report focuses on TTP's capabilities, historical ties to al-Qaeda

WASHINGTON: As many as 18 US intelligence agencies have declared the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as a "potential future threat" to Washington. A 30-page report prepared by the agencies and published on Tuesday said in South Asia, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operations in recent years have focused exclusively on targeting the government of Pakistan, probably to avoid drawing more counterterrorism pressure. "However, TTP's capabilities, historical ties to al-Qaeda, and previous support to operations targeting the United States keep us concerned about the potential future threat," the report notes. Pakistan has long warned the international community, including the United States, about the global threat posed by the TTP. However, regional and international players have largely viewed the group as a threat confined to Pakistan. The latest US intelligence community's assessment seems to have changed the approach. Official sources told The Express Tribune that it was a welcome development that finally the United States has realised the danger posed by the TTP. The recognition of the TTP as a threat to the US could strengthen Pakistan's fight against terrorist outfits. It may revive cooperation between Pakistan and the US while also increasing pressure on Afghanistan. Pakistan has consistently maintained that the TTP operates from Afghan soil.

Afghans living in Pakistan illegally have returned to their country, reported Radio Pakistan today. Meanwhile, human rights watchdog Amnesty International has urged Pakistan to withdraw its "opaque" Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan regarding the expulsion of illegal immigrants and Afghan citizens residing in the country.

In a statement, the Amnesty said that Islamabad's March 31 deadline for Afghans would exacerbate their woes. It is to be noted that Pakistan hosts 2.1 million documented Afghans. There are hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghan nationals also living in Pakistan for decades. "Out of the total 2.1 million, 1.3 million Afghan refugees are those who have obtained Proof of Registration Cards. Over 52% of them are in KP," said United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Qasim Afridi. He added that there were around 800,000 Afghans, who had obtained ACC cards and majority of them were living in KP. The country has been hosting millions of Afghans for around five decades. Hundreds of thousands of them returned to their country in the last few years but still over 2.1 million are living in KP and other provinces.

## Russia envoy hands over aid to Pak authorities

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev on Thursday while handing over the Russian Humanitarian Aid consignment to Pakistan's authorities at Islamabad Airport, described such initiatives as important for promoting future bilateral relations between the two countries. Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev said this while addressing the 'Humanitarian Aid Delivery' to Pakistan's authorities in Islamabad International Airport, said a release issued here. It is a great honor for me to be part of the ceremony celebrating the delivery of Russian humanitarian aid to the brotherly people of Pakistan, he said. "We believe that humanitarian cooperation, including the provision of humanitarian aid, is an important component of Russia-Pakistan relations, which are currently at their highest point in history" he said. He said that today, as "We approach the end of the holy month of Ramadan, we are handing over 31 tons of hu-

manitarian aid, including such essentials as clothing, medicines, food and baby formula for those in need." The Ambassador said that this gesture of goodwill has been made possible through the efforts of the Government of Russia and its Ministry of Emergency Situations, the coordinating role of the Government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. The Russia has a proud history of helping the people of friendly countries around the world and more than once, "We have come to the aid of the friendly nation of Pakistan in times of need" he said. Russian ambassador said that this was the case in 2005, when valiant Russian emergency workers came to the rescue after devastating earthquakes shook northern Punjab and northeastern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and in 2022, after catastrophic floods hit southern and south-eastern Pakistan. Meanwhile he said the recent armed attacks by terrorists and extremists in various parts of Pakistan have once again reminded us of the importance of unity and solidarity in the face of this threat. He said the actions of militants and inter-communal conflicts cause untold suffering to the civilian population, leaving thousands of people on the brink of survival and dependent on the assistance of the state, humanitarian organizations and agencies. "I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the team of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations, who without hesitation once again came to the aid of the friendly people of Pakistan" he said.

## Pakistan, US agree to hold counter-terrorism dialogue

US Acting Ambassador Natalie Baker and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi hold meeting to discuss cooperation against terrorism: Baker condemns Jaffar Express attack

ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met with the Acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker. During the meeting, Pakistan-US relations, matters of mutual interest, and bilateral cooperation were discussed in detail. US Acting

Ambassador Natalie Baker strongly condemned the recent terrorist attack on Jaffar Express and other incidents. She expressed condolences to the families of the martyrs who lost their lives in these attacks. Both sides also discussed



to enhance mutual cooperation in the field of counterterrorism efforts, it was agreed to hold a Counter-Terrorism Dialogue in June this year. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, US Political Counselor Zach Harkenrider, and Federal Interior Secretary Khurram Agha were also present during the meeting. Acting US Ambassador Natalie Baker congratulated Talal Chaudhry on assuming the office of Minister of State for Interior. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi stated that terrorism is an international issue, and the global community must work together to combat it. He further said that the Government of Pakistan is taking strong action against terrorists and a comprehensive policy is being formulated to counter terrorism. - DNA

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