



# Islamabad POST

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**Ramzan relief package formally Launched, says PM**

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**Interfaith gathering at British HC**

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**Pakistan yet to decide AI agents: Malik**

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## Operation Ghazul Haq

# Pakistan forces inflict heavy blows on Taliban

Official sources confirmed that scores of Afghan Taliban soldiers were killed in the operation; "Pakistan is taking decisive measures to respond to these unprovoked actions by the Afghan Taliban along our border. No one will be allowed to take away Pakistan's peace"

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's security forces have mounted an immediate, effective, and punishing response to unprovoked firing initiated by the Afghan Taliban regime along multiple points of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, in an official statement posted on X, described the Taliban's actions as a grave miscalculation, confirming that Pakistani troops are actively delivering severe punishment to regime forces across the Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur sectors. Early reports from the ministry indicate heavy casualties on the Afghan side, with multiple Taliban posts and military equipment destroyed in the exchanges. Pakistan has emphasized its unwavering commitment to safeguarding territorial integrity and the safety of its citizens, vowing to take all necessary measures to counter such provocations. The latest escalation follows recent intelligence-based airstrikes conducted by Pakistan days earlier, which targeted seven camps and hideouts linked to Fitna al-Khawarij (the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP) in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost provinces. Those operations reportedly eliminated over 100 militants responsible for recent suicide attacks and terrorist activities inside Pakistan. In a strong rebuttal to Taliban propaganda, Pakistani officials dismissed as completely false the regime's claims of capturing

numerous Pakistani border posts and inflicting major losses. Taliban spokespersons, including Zabihullah Mujahid, had asserted on X that their forces launched large-scale offensives, seized several outposts in areas like Nangarhar and Kunar, and captured or killed Pakistani soldiers. Independent accounts and Pakistani military sources categorically rejected these assertions, labeling them as baseless disinformation aimed at misleading the public and inflating Taliban capabilities. Pakistan's defenses proved highly effective, with security forces successfully downing all projectiles and munitions fired by Taliban positions during the clashes. In a coordinated retaliatory effort dubbed Operation Ghazul Haq, Pakistani troops launched precise counterstrikes, destroying enemy positions and inflicting significant damage. Official sources confirmed that more than 30 Afghan Taliban soldiers were killed in the operation, underscoring the one-sided nature of the outcome despite the regime's exaggerated narratives. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, reiterated Pakistan's resolute stance: "Pakistan is taking decisive measures to respond to these unprovoked actions by the Afghan Taliban along our border. No one will be allowed to take away Pakistan's peace." He drew parallels to past conflicts, referencing the May confrontation with India: "What happened to India, which had armies, planes, and weapons?" Chaudhry condemned civilian-targeted terrorism, stating that bomb blasts in markets and mosques are intolerable.

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ROME: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held significant meetings in Rome with his counterparts from Italy, Spain, and Greece. - DNA

## Pakistan, Greece, launch dialogue

DNA

ROME: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held significant meetings in Rome with his counterparts from Italy, Spain, and Greece focusing on curbing illegal immigration, human smuggling, and related transnational crimes. The discussions took place during the inaugural session of the Quadrilateral for Migration (Q4M) dialogue, involving Pakistan, Italy, Spain, and Greece. The four ministers—Mohsin Naqvi (Pakistan), Matteo Piantedosi (Italy's Interior Minister), Fernando Grande-Marlaska (Spain's Interior Minister), and Athanasios Plevris (Greece's Minister for Migration and Asylum)—participated in the multilateral talks and bilateral meetings on the sidelines. Italy, Spain, and Greece commended Pakistan's efforts in reducing illegal migration outflows, with reports highlighting a 47% decrease in

Continued on Page 06

## Ramazan relief package 2026 launched: PM

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif says Ramazan Relief Package 2026 has been formally launched with an allocation of 38 billion rupees. He was chairing a review meeting on implementation of the Prime Minister Ramazan Package, 2026 in Islamabad today. The Prime Minister said the financial assistance has been increased from 5,000 rupees last year to 13,000 rupees per beneficiary to provide greater support to deserving families during Ramazan. He described it as the largest and most comprehensive Ramazan relief package in the country's history. Shehbaz Sharif further said building on last year's successful experience,

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## Fitna al Hindustan Security forces kill 10 Khwarij in Zhob district of Balochistan

During the conduct of operation, own forces tracked down Khwarij on multiple routes and effectively engaged their locations. After an ensuing fire exchange, ten Indian sponsored Khwarij were sent to hell

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Ten Indian sponsored Khwarij were killed by the security forces in an intelligence based operation in Zhob District of Balochistan. According to ISPR, further to an intelligence based operation in Zhob District of Balochistan on Tuesday last, in which eight Indian sponsored Khwarij were successfully neutralized, the security forces conducted a comprehensive area sanitization operation in the district yesterday to hunt down hiding Khwarij belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna al Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own forces tracked down Khwarij on multiple routes and effectively engaged their locations. After an ensuing fire exchange, ten Indian sponsored Khwarij were sent to hell. Weapons, ammunition and explosives were

Continued on Page 06

## India, Israel to push free trade

NEWS DESK

TEL AVIV: India will soon give final shape to a mutually beneficial free trade agreement with Israel, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday. The two countries will also pursue joint development, production, and transfer of technology in defence, Modi said at the end of his two-day trip aimed at strengthening ties with Israel. Modi said Tel Aviv and New Delhi agreed there was "no place for terrorism in the world". "India and Israel are clear that there is no place for terrorism in the world, in any form..."

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## Iran, US hold talks in Geneva for 3rd round

The discussions come amid the largest US military build-up in the Middle East since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and with Iran vowing to respond to an attack with force

DNA

GENEVA: US and Iranian officials have met in Geneva for a third round of indirect talks seen as crucial to averting conflict, with President Donald Trump threatening to strike Iran if a nuclear deal is not reached. The discussions come amid the largest US military build-up in the Middle East since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and with Iran vowing to respond to an attack with force. Thursday's talks were adjourned after three hours. Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, who is acting as the mediator, said negotiators had

exchanged "creative and positive ideas" and would return after taking a break. "We hope to make more progress," he added. But the chances of an agreement remain unclear. While Trump has said he prefers to solve the crisis through diplomacy, he has also said he is considering a limited strike on Iran to pressure its leaders to accept a deal. The president, however, has done little to explain what he is demanding in the negotiations and why there could be the need to take military action now, eight months after the US bombed Iranian nuclear facilities during a war between Israel and Iran.

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

**IHC to hear Imran, Bushra pleas on March 11**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday fixed for hearing the petitions seeking suspension of former prime minister Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi's sentences in the £190 million corruption case. During the hearing, a division bench comprising Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Azam Khan expressed displeasure as dozens of lawyers affiliated with PTI stood up and approached the rostrum simultaneously. "What is this? Are you trying to influence the court?" the IHC chief justice asked. Imran's counsel, Barrister Salman Sardar, replied: "Not at all." He argued that the matter had assumed greater urgency in view of the former premier's sudden ailment and eye infection.

**Joint sitting of parliament on Monday**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has summoned the Joint Sitting of the Parliament on Monday at 10:30 in the morning. The Joint Session of the Parliament is convened at the start of each parliamentary year. President Asif Ali Zardari will address the Joint Session of the Parliament. It will be his 9th address to the Joint Session as President of Pakistan. Meanwhile, the President has also summoned the National Assembly to meet on Tuesday at 3:00 pm, while the Senate will resume its session at the Parliament House tomorrow at 10:30 in the morning. Both the Houses will discuss issues of national and international importance besides transacting legislative business.

## India continues to aid, abet terrorism in Pakistan: FO

The Foreign Office Spokesperson also expressed alarm that the Hindutva extremism and saffron terror that had intensified manifold under the current regime in India

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has expressed severe disappointment at Indian government's callousness towards the plight of the families of the Pakistani and Indian nationals, who await justice even after the passage of nineteen years since Samjhauta Express terrorist attack. It was stated by Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tahir Andrabi, while responding to a question at his weekly media briefing in Islamabad today. The Spokesperson said this callous response confirms India's role as an official and political accomplice in the heinous terrorist attack carried out on its soil against innocent Pakistani and other civilians. He said the government of Pakistan also condemns the shameful acquittal and exoneration of all four perpetrators including Swami Aseemanand,

Continued on Page 06

## 'Pakistan to maintain current policy'

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will maintain its current policy towards Afghanistan unless the Taliban abandon their "guerrilla mindset", State Minister Talal Chaudhry said on Wednesday. "Their [Taliban leadership's] attitude towards us is quite different from what it is with the rest of the world," the state minister said in programme "Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath". Following a series of deadly suicide blasts in Islamabad, Bajaur and

Continued on Page 06

## Jailed PTI leaders urge CJP to ensure 'justice is done'

PTI leaders allege obstruction to doctors, lawyers and family access during Imran's treatment



BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Jailed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders have written to the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, raising serious concerns over alleged obstruction to medical and legal access for the party's founder, Imran Khan, and urging him to intervene to ensure justice in his treatment. In a letter issued through their lawyer, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Dr Yasmin Rashid, Ijaz Chaudhry, Omar Sarfraz Cheema and Mahmood-ur-Rashid maintained that the former prime minister has been repeatedly denied

Continued on Page 06

## 'Imran to be shifted to hospital if court orders'

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah on Wednesday maintained that jailed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan can be shifted to a hospital if the court orders. Speaking on Geo News programme Capital Talk, Sanaullah said a five-member medical panel examined Imran twice at the Central Jail in Rawalpindi, adding that if the PTI is not satisfied with the treatment, it should approach the Supreme Court. His remarks came a day after the PTI founder received a second eye injection at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) in Islamabad

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**FEBRUARY 2026**

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DHQ Hospital  
healthcare  
facilities  
inspected

RAWALPINDI: Amir Khattak, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, paid a detailed visit to DHQ Hospital Rawalpindi to review discipline, cleanliness, service delivery, and administrative affairs, directing the hospital management to ensure uninterrupted and quality healthcare services for patients. During the visit, the commissioner conducted a thorough inspection of the Emergency Department and met patients under treatment as well as their attendants. He inquired about the availability of medicines, the standard of medical facilities being provided and any difficulties being faced by patients. Expressing concern over public facilitation, Khattak directed that clean drinking water must be ensured in waiting areas and that medical services should be provided without disruption. He emphasized that staff attendance in the emergency and other critical departments must be ensured at all times. "Negligence, particularly during peak hours, will not be tolerated," the commissioner said, instructing the administration to maintain strict monitoring of performance and patient care standards. He later visited various wards of the hospital and reviewed overall arrangements, sanitation conditions and facilities being extended to patients. He directed that all essential medicines must remain available at all times and that clinical protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) be strictly implemented. —APP

Murree admin  
foils two  
attempts to  
smuggle flour

RAWALPINDI: The Punjab Enforcement and Regulatory Authority (PERA) has thwarted two attempts to smuggle flour into Murree District, a Murree administration spokesman said on Thursday. He said the PERA Special Operations team, in a successful operation under the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi, intercepted commercial vehicles at designated check posts. During searches, large quantities of flour were recovered and taken into custody in accordance with legal requirements. The seized stock, the spokesman added, was later sold at government rates in areas experiencing high demand, providing immediate relief to the public. Vehicle owners were also present during the process to ensure transparency and compliance with the law. —APP

Educational  
Complex partially  
handed over

RAWALPINDI: The long-pending District Educational Complex project in Rawalpindi has moved forward after two completed floors were ordered to be handed over to the education authorities, paving the way for the relocation of scattered offices under one roof. The construction of the District Educational Complex had remained partially stalled despite completion of two floors, as the formal handover process faced delays. As a result, the shifting of relevant offices could not take place. Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema, directed the Building Department to immediately hand over the two completed floors to the District Education Authority Rawalpindi so that the relocation process could begin without further delay. —APP

Unified Azan calendar to be launched  
for religious harmony: Yousaf

President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood expressed gratitude to the Minister for his tireless efforts in promoting interfaith harmony and ensuring cost-effective facilitation for Hajj pilgrims

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, has said that the Ministry, in consultation with eminent scholars representing all schools of thought, clerics, and members of the business community is formulating a unified calendar to standardize Azan and prayer timings across for the promotion of religious harmony. The Minister stated that the proposed calendar is currently under review by the concerned Nizam-e-Salat Committee and is expected to be finalized and published soon. The Minister sought complete support of the ICCI leadership in successfully implementing the initiative by appreciating the consistent cooperation extended by the business community, particularly the ICCI with the Ministry. He expressed these views while addressing an interactive session at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Thursday. Emphasizing Islamic principles in economic activities, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf asserted that trade and business should be conducted in accordance with Islamic teachings, ensuring success both in this world and the hereafter. Highlighting the importance of interfaith harmony as the need of the hour, he elaborated on his Ministry's countrywide initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance and unity. He reaffirmed that the protection of the lives and property of minorities is the constitutional responsibility of the government, adding that regular interfaith conferences are being organized to strengthen mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. Earlier, in his welcome address, President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood expressed gratitude to the Minister for his tireless efforts in promoting interfaith harmony and ensuring cost-effective facilitation for Hajj pilgrims. He also apprised the Minister of ICCI's regular initiative of hosting weekly Dars-e-Quran sessions for the guidance and benefit of the business commu-



ty. Sardar Tahir Mehmood assured that the entire business community stands shoulder to shoulder with the government in promoting unity and stability. He strongly condemned acts of terrorism carried out by enemies of Pakistan and offered the Chamber's platform for organizing awareness sessions for youth to counter extremist narratives. Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub informed the Chief Guest that ICCI has over 15,000 registered members and is actively performing its corporate social responsibility alongside its business activities. Maulana Ahmed Ali highlighted the Cham-

ber's Seerat classes and future initiatives, while Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, in his vote of thanks, reiterated ICCI's commitment to raising awareness within the community regarding religious teachings and social harmony. The event was also attended by former President Zafar Bakhtawari, executive members Malik Abdul Aziz, Zulfurnain Abbasi, Imran Minhas, Aftab Gujjar, Mirza Mohammad Ali, former Senior Vice President Malik Naveed, Khalid Chaudhry, Mehmood Warrich, Chairman Religious Affairs Committee Tariq Wani, and other prominent members of the business community.

Primary completion  
female students rate  
soars to 89%, 96%: Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister of Federal Education and Professional Training (FE&PT), Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui launched report under the title of "Girls' Education Statistics and Trends Report 2023-24," highlighting that the primary school completion rate for girls has surged from 75% to 89%, reflecting a significant return on infrastructure investment. The launching ceremony was held at PIE on Thursday, which was graced by Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, (FE&PT) Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui as chief guest, other participants included Minister of State, FE&PT, Wajih Qamar, Federal Parliamentary Secretary Farah Naz Akbar, Senator Fawzia, DG PIE Dr. Muhammad Shahid Soroya, representatives of partners and educationists. This report was prepared in collaboration with Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), Malala Fund, Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE) and the Ministry of Education. The key findings of the report highlighted 96% of schools have concrete buildings, 92% have toilets and 82% have clean drinking water. The percentage of girls completing primary education has increased from 75% to 89%, and facilities and infrastructure for girls' education are gradually improving every year and others. Speaking on the occasion, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said that the data presented in the report would serve as the foundation for policymaking on girls' education. He emphasized that accurate data is essential for solving educational challenges, noting that no country progresses alone but advances collectively with regional cooperation. He

stressed the need to move toward practical actions based on data, as successful global policies are built on evidence. He added that girls' dropout rates can only be reduced by changing societal attitudes and broadening mindsets. The minister highlighted that Pakistan has 140 million youth, and the country must decide whether to treat them as a burden or empower them as an asset by providing opportunities. He stressed that the fight against ignorance must begin at home. When the state equips a girl with education or skills, it is her right to progress. He urged parents to allow their daughters to pursue professional careers alongside domestic responsibilities, warning that restricting skilled women to homes is a loss of valuable human capital. Concluding his remarks, the minister said that serious measures to promote girls' education are urgently needed and assured that the government would utilize all available resources to address the issue. Minister of State Wajih Qamar highlighted key findings of the report and said an action plan would be developed, using both achievements and challenges as guidance for future progress. DG PIE Dr. Muhammad Shahid Soroya said Pakistani girls are proving their exceptional abilities in education. The National Achievement Test (NAT) results show that when girls are provided a supportive environment, they outperform boys in various subjects. He added that the report aims to identify gaps through data to improve policymaking and remove barriers to girls' education. According to the report, Pakistani girls have demonstrated academic excellence. —APP

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has approved revisions to the Shariah screening criteria and methodology for the PSX-KMI All Share Index. The revisions align with international benchmarks and aim to strengthen investor confidence in Shariah-compliant capital market instruments, said a release issued on Thursday. The decision follows

SECP revises,  
Shariah screening  
criteria for  
PSX-KMI all  
share index

a high-level review meeting of the Committee on the Post-2027 Financial Sector Strategy, chaired by the Finance Secretary. The meeting emphasized accelerating the implementation of initiatives in line with the Federal Shariat Court's ruling. Progress on the ongoing transformation and next steps toward transitioning Pakistan's financial system to a Ri-ba-free framework were reviewed. —APP

آئل اینڈ گیس  
ریگولیشن اتھارٹی  
حکومت پاکستان

**Oil & Gas  
Regulatory Authority**  
Government of Pakistan

**PETITION FILED BY FRONTIER OIL COMPANY-II FOR DETERMINATION OF EPC BASED TARIFF OF FAISALABAD - THALLIAN- TARUJABBA WHITE OIL PIPELINE SECTION I, II, III. POSTPONEMENT OF PUBLIC HEARING**

This is in continuation of OGRA's earlier Public Hearing Notice published in the national press on 21-02-2026. Due to unavoidable circumstances the above referred Public Hearing has been postponed. Next date of Public Hearing shall be published later.

(Ms Raheela Mustafa)  
Senior Registrar  
Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority  
OGRA Office 37- Mauve Area, Service Road South, Sector G-10/4, Islamabad.  
Phone: 051-9108889, 051-9108890-98 (Ext-123), Fax: 051-9108810  
Email: registrar@ogra.org.pk

PID(I)7030/25

Public Service Message:  
گیس لکچ جان لیوا حادثات کا سبب بن سکتی ہے، احتیاطی تدابیر یقینی بنائیں اور حادثات سے بچیں۔

Climate stress threatens  
mango industry

MULTAN: The mango fruit industry, one of the country's most prized agricultural export sectors, is facing mounting climate stress as rising temperatures and shifting seasonal patterns threaten orchard productivity across key growing regions. From February to June, mango belts in Mirpurkhas and Tando Allahyar in Sindh, as well as Multan and Rahim Yar Khan in southern Punjab, experience temperatures soaring between 35°C and 45°C — far above the optimal 24-29°C range required for healthy mango growth. Agricultural scientists warn that heat alone is not the sole culprit. The real concern lies in the combined effect of high temperatures and low humidity, which increases Vapor Pressure Deficit (VPD) — a measure of the atmosphere's drying power. Elevated VPD forces trees to lose water rapidly through transpiration, prompting leaf pores (stomata) to close. This reduces photosynthesis, disrupts calcium transport to developing fruit, and weakens overall plant physiology. From March to May, VPD levels frequently cross critical thresholds in Pakistan's mango-growing zones. The consequences are increasingly visible: fruit drop, sunburn, poor firmness, smaller and misshapen mangoes, and declining overall yields. Zafar Hussain Mahay, a progressive farmer and Mango grower said climate stress is intensifying each year. "Temperatures here are expected to reach 35-36°C within days, even though February was traditionally part of winter," he noted. "Now we begin feeling summer heat much earlier." He added that excessive heat during May and June often burns mango inflorescence, damages pollination, and results in undersized or crooked fruit. "Moderate temperatures are crucial for germination and cross-pollination," he emphasized. Experts argue that climate resilience in mango orchards depends on a structured, Integrated Management System (IMS) built around prevention, response, and recovery. Maintaining soil moisture at 60-70 percent of field capacity is essential, with drip irrigation recommended during extreme heat. Light but frequent watering, combined with organic or plastic mulching, helps conserve moisture. —APP

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SC, bar agree on nationwide  
reforms to expand legal aid

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday announced a series of inclusive justice reforms in collaboration with bar representatives across the country, aimed at strengthening access to justice, legal empowerment and institutional coordination. The Chief Justice of Pakistan convened a consultative meeting with the leadership of the Pakistan Bar Council, provincial bar councils and the Supreme Court Bar Association to advance collaborative measures focused on district-level legal support and women-friendly judicial facilities. The meeting, attended virtually and in person by senior representatives of bar bodies from Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Islamabad, focused on strengthening District Legal Empowerment Committees (DLECs), expanding structured free legal aid services and institutionalising Women Facilitation Centres within court complexes. During the meeting, the Chief Justice briefed participants on the 2025-26 reform portfolio under which nationwide funding has been allocated for four priority areas: solarisation of court complexes, establishment of e-libraries, development of women-centric spaces and provision of clean drinking water. These facilities are being extended to both the bench and the bar, with implementation targeted

by the end of August 2026. For the 2026-27 term, the reform agenda will prioritise the upgradation and consolidation of Women Facilitation Centres across judicial complexes nationwide. The proposal received unanimous endorsement from bar representatives. It was also agreed that free legal aid services offered by bar councils would be systematically integrated

with DLECs to improve coordination, efficiency and outreach. In this regard, a dedicated helpline will be established at the Supreme Court to enable pro bono lawyers nominated by bar councils to provide legal advice through a structured call-based platform. The proposed framework will be shared with bar councils for further consultative input. —DNA



## National Days and Armed Forces Days

Feb 04/Sri Lanka National Day
Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day
Feb 06/Uganda Army Day
Feb 11/Iran Revolution day
Feb 16/DPR Korea National Day
Feb 16/Lithuania National Day
Feb 18/Gambia National Day
Feb 19/Nepal Democracy Day
Feb 23/Uzbekistan National Day
Feb 23/Brunei National Day
Feb 23/Guyana National Day
Feb 23/Russia National Army Day
Feb 23/Tajikistan Armed Forces Day
Feb 25/Kuwait National Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9225596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



### Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Enquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



### Departments

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



### Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potohar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480
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# Pak yet to deploy AI agents, tech policy needed: Musadik

Vice President of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Senator Sherry Rehman, while addressing the Pakistan Governance Forum, stated that effective and strong governance has become more important than ever amid the current global turmoil

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Musadik Malik on Thursday said Pakistan has yet to deploy operational artificial intelligence (AI) agents but is expected to see their emergence within the next few years, stressing that technological advancement must remain inclusive — particularly in the face of growing climate risks. Speaking at the Pakistan Governance Forum 2026 held at a local hotel in Islamabad, the minister said the prime minister had provided clear policy direction on technological development and that related proposals had been consolidated accordingly. He noted that countries such as Japan, Singapore and China were already actively developing AI agents, while Pakistan was working toward building capacity in the field. Musadik Malik said the primary technical challenge surrounding AI deployment was currently one of efficiency, which he expected would improve over time. However, he emphasised that the more critical concern for policymakers was ensuring inclusivity so that technological change does not widen existing socio-economic disparities. "Policies must keep the poorest segments of society at their core so they are not left behind during technological transitions," he said, adding



that the government was working on integration strategies aimed at addressing the "last-mile problem" to ensure services and reforms effectively reach citizens. Linking technology policy with climate vulnerability, the minister noted that recent floods had demonstrated the severe impact of climate change across villages, cities and mountainous regions, disproportionately affecting poor communities, farmers and children. He reiterated that Pakistan contributes relatively little to global carbon emissions but faces significant climate-related risks, including glacier melt, erratic rainfall patterns and extreme weather events. Musadik Malik said natural disasters could not be entirely prevented but their effects could be mitigated through better planning, early warning systems and the effective use of modern technology. He stressed that future policymaking must prioritise vulnerable populations, particularly children and marginalised communities, to ensure sustainable and equitable development outcomes. Vice President of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Senator

Sherry Rehman, while addressing the Pakistan Governance Forum, stated that effective and strong governance has become more important than ever amid the current global turmoil. She said the multilateral global system has weakened, and the world is facing the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War. According to her, uncertainty and power politics have pushed global diplomacy into the background. Senator Rehman noted that Pakistan has been fighting a prolonged war against terrorism since 2008 and has paid a

heavy price for it. Despite ongoing security challenges, she said, Pakistan has made significant progress in the field of foreign policy. Highlighting domestic challenges, she stated that uncontrolled population growth and the provision of employment opportunities to youth remain the country's biggest internal challenges. With an unemployment rate of 7 percent, she emphasized that creating at least three million jobs annually is imperative. She stressed that sustainable stability is not possible without economic growth.—DNA

heavy price for it. Despite ongoing security challenges, she said, Pakistan has made significant progress in the field of foreign policy. Highlighting domestic challenges, she stated that uncontrolled population growth and the provision of employment opportunities to youth remain the country's biggest internal challenges. With an unemployment rate of 7 percent, she emphasized that creating at least three million jobs annually is imperative. She stressed that sustainable stability is not possible without economic growth.—DNA

# Commissioner reviews discipline

RAWALPINDI: Amir Khattak, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, paid a detailed visit to DHQ Hospital Rawalpindi to review discipline, cleanliness, service delivery, and administrative affairs, directing the hospital management to ensure uninterrupted and quality healthcare services for patients. During the visit, the commissioner conducted a thorough inspection of the Emergency Department and met patients under treatment as well as their attendants. He inquired about the availability of medicines, the standard of medical facilities being provided and any difficulties being faced by patients. Expressing concern over public facilitation, Khattak directed that clean drinking water must be ensured in waiting areas and that med-

ical services should be provided without disruption. He emphasized that staff attendance in the emergency and other critical departments must be ensured at all times. "Negligence, particularly during peak hours, will not be tolerated," the commissioner said, instructing the administration to maintain strict monitoring of performance and patient care standards. He later visited various wards of the hospital and reviewed overall arrangements, sanitation conditions and facilities being extended to patients. He directed that all essential medicines must remain available at all times and that clinical protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) be strictly implemented. The commissioner stressed that patients must be treated

with dignity and without discrimination. "Every patient deserves respect, timely attention and complete medical care," he said. Khattak also took notice of parking issues at the hospital and instructed the management to improve parking arrangements. He directed that additional space be allocated to facilitate patients and their attendants. He further ordered practical steps to strengthen the hospital's waste management system and improve infrastructure where required to enhance overall service standards. Director Health Services, the Medical Superintendent, Assistant Commissioner City and other relevant officers accompanied the commissioner during the visit.—DNA

# NHA expands network to 14,480 Km across 118 districts

ISLAMABAD: The National Highway Authority (NHA) is currently administering 48 national highways, motorways and strategic roads spanning 14,480 kilometers across 118 districts of the country, reflecting the government's strong commitment to enhancing connectivity and infrastructure development. According to official sources, the NHA network extends through 118 out of 160 districts nationwide, playing a pivotal role in economic growth and regional integration. The official shared province-wise details of the network, stating that in Punjab, out of 36 districts, 30 are traversed by NHA roads covering 4,080 kilometers. In Sindh, 26 districts out of 35 are connected with a total length of 2,566 kilometers. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 25 districts are covered with 2,392 kilometers of roads. In Balochistan, the network spans 4, 443 kilometers across 27 districts, while in Gilgit-Baltistan it covers 854 kilometers. In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, three districts are connected under the NHA framework, and in Islamabad Capital Territory, 54 kilometers of roads fall under NHA's jurisdiction. The official further informed that currently 71 projects are included in the NHA's Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) portfolio, funded through the Government of Pakistan, foreign loans and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements, with a cumulative value of Rs3.4 trillion. So far, an expenditure of Rs681.37 billion has been incurred on these projects. Highlighting quality assurance mechanisms, he said the NHA ensures strict compliance with prescribed standards and specifications by appointing independent supervisory consultants. Dedicated Monitoring and Inspection (M&I) teams conduct oversight at various stages of construction before issuance of the Defect Liability Certificate, the M&I teams thoroughly evaluate the quality of work, and only upon satisfactory performance is the contractor relieved of contractual obligations, he added. He emphasized that under FIDIC provisions, "The Engineer" plays a vital role in impartial contract administration, quality control and timely completion of projects, while also facilitating dispute resolution. He underscored that timely alignment of financial flows with project schedules remains critical, noting that delays in fund releases often impede completion of projects within stipulated timelines.—DNA

# NEOC warns of looming GLOF threat

ISLAMABAD: The National Emergencies Operation Centre (NEOC) has warned of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) risks in northern Pakistan from March to September 2026, cautioning that rising temperatures and early heatwaves could intensify glacier melt and trigger flash floods in vulnerable valleys of Gilgit Baltistan and Upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In its advisory, NEOC cited anticipated temperature rise, shifting weather patterns, and possible early heatwave conditions as key factors behind the heightened risk. Seasonal projections indicate that increasing temperatures during March to June 2026 may accelerate snow and glacier melt in Gilgit Baltistan and Upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, heightening the risk of GLOF incidents. Such events can trigger flash floods, causing damage to homes, infrastructure, agriculture, communication networks, and may result in human casualties in vulnerable downstream communities.—APP

# DHA raids medical labs over fake certificates

RAWALPINDI: The District Health Authority (DHA), Rawalpindi has launched raids against medical labs allegedly involved in issuing fake health certificates and registered an FIR against one outlet following evidence of large-scale forgery. According to the details, the enforcement teams carried out inspections after reports surfaced that counterfeit certificates were being prepared and distributed to the public. During the inquiry, officials found that serial numbers on the bogus certificates had reached nearly 2,600, indicating systematic malpractice. Dr Ehsan Ghani, the district health chief, said the authority had adopted a zero-tolerance policy against anyone attempting to jeopardize public health through fraudulent doc-

umentation. "Only the competent authority of the District Health Authority is authorized to issue such certificates; no private lab, clinic or medical store has the legal mandate to prepare or distribute them," he told APP. He added that strict legal action had been initiated to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. "Public health is non-negotiable. We will continue targeted inspections and raids to dismantle any network involved in forgery or illegal certification," he stated. The report revealed that some labs were engaged in issuing fake vaccination certificates to those intending to travel abroad. A formal FIR was lodged against the concerned medical store, and further legal proceedings are underway.

District Health Officer Dr. Jawad told that the crackdown would be expanded to other areas to verify the authenticity of certificates being issued by private facilities. "We are reviewing records and strengthening monitoring mechanisms to prevent recurrence of such violations," he said. Dr. Jawad warned that obtaining or using fake certificates is also a punishable offence. "Citizens must ensure that any health-related documentation is obtained only through authorized channels. Those found facilitating or benefiting from fake certificates will face legal consequences," he added. The authority has urged members of the public to report any suspicious activity to health officials so that timely action can be taken.—APP

# UPR core network security solution launched

Through continuous collaboration and co-innovation, the company aims to elevate industry standards and contribute to Pakistan's vision of a secure and reliable digital future

ISLAMABAD: Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator from JazzWorld, has launched Huawei's Unified Protection & Response (UPR) intrinsic security solution, following successful verification of its commercial deployment. This milestone marks a significant step in Jazz's network security evolution, reinforcing its commitment to building a resilient and future-ready telecom ecosystem, said a news release. Huawei UPR works on building precise defense based on native devices and detecting blocks through whitelisting. The solution embeds advanced security capabilities directly into the core network, enabling real-time threat detection, analysis, and response without disrupting live services. By integrating protection

mechanisms within the network itself, the solution delivers proactive defense against emerging risks while maintaining high reliability and operational continuity. Khalid Shehzad, Chief Technology Officer at JazzWorld, said, "We view security not as a cost, but as a competitive advantage — one that enables us to deliver reliable, trusted digital services while strengthening Pakistan's telecom ecosystem. Together with our strategic partner Huawei, we have successfully embedded advanced defense capabilities within our core network. This milestone completes a key pillar of Jazz's security strategy, ensuring robust protection without compromising service continuity." Designed for precision threat prevention, the in-

trinsic security framework operates with minimal resource overhead and ensures zero service interruption. It also simplifies operations by enabling rapid security integration following network expansion, reducing maintenance effort while providing round-the-clock protection against a broad spectrum of threats. This architecture strengthens Jazz's ability to safeguard critical infrastructure and mitigate potential financial and operational risks. Jazz continues to invest in next-generation security technologies as part of its broader digital transformation agenda. Through continuous collaboration and co-innovation, the company aims to elevate industry standards and contribute to Pakistan's vision of a secure and reliable digital future.—DNA

# ITP holds road safety workshop for QAU students

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) organised a road safety workshop for students and faculty members of Quaid-i-Azam University's Sociology Department to promote awareness about traffic rules and safe road behaviour. An ITP official told APP on Thursday that Chief Traffic Officer Captain (R) Hamza Humayun addressed the participants and highlighted the importance of following traffic laws to prevent accidents and ensure safer roads. CTO Hamzah briefed students on key aspects of road safety, responsible driving practices, and common traffic violations that contribute to road mishaps. The official said participants were also informed about Islamabad Police's public facilitation initiatives, including modern licensing services and awareness programmes aimed at improving citizen convenience.—APP

# SC sets aside land transfer order

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has set aside an order for the transfer of land based on an alleged oral agreement dating back to 1992, ruling that mere possession or long-term occupation does not establish ownership. The court allowed the appeal filed by Ghulam Ali. Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan issued the written judgment, stating that a strict standard of proof applies in cases involving oral agreements. The ruling held that the alleged 1992 oral agreement was not proven in accordance with the requirements of law. The Supreme Court declared void the judgments of the Lahore High Court, the Additional District Judge, and the trial court. The court clarified that to establish an oral agreement, complete details regarding the date, time, place, terms, and witnesses must be provided. It further held that evidence deviating from the written pleadings cannot be considered admissible. According to the written judgment, the plaintiffs claimed that a settlement had been reached in 1992 after the acquittal of an accused in a murder case involving their father. It was asserted that a jirga decided Ghulam Ali would transfer 32 kanals of land to the plaintiffs and that possession of the land was handed over to them following the settlement. The plaintiffs further contended that in 2016, Ghulam Ali refused to have the mutation formally registered. The background of the case reveals that the trial court had initially dismissed the plaintiffs' claim. However, on appeal, the suit for specific performance was decreed. The Additional District Judge and subsequently the Lahore High Court upheld the lower court's decision. In its ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that a claim based on an oral agreement must be established through solid and unimpeachable evidence; otherwise, such claims cannot be sustained in law.—APP

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## Briefs

Dr. Tariq Fazal  
questions  
Modi's  
remarks

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhary Thursday, said that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that the killing of civilians can never be justified before the Knesset ring hollow when viewed against the backdrop of unwavering political alignment with actions that have led to immense civilian suffering in Gaza.

In a post on his X account, he referred to Prime Minister Modi's remarks before the Knesset, where he emphasized that the killing of civilians can never be justified. "These remarks ring hollow when viewed against the backdrop of unwavering political alignment with actions that have led to immense civilian suffering in Gaza," he wrote. He said, that across Gaza, entire neighborhoods lie in ruins, food insecurity has reached catastrophic levels, medical facilities are barely functioning, and repeated escalations have shattered hopes for lasting peace. The minister added that the principles of human rights and civilian protection cannot be reduced to selective slogans and must apply equally, regardless of politics or partnerships. —APP

Issuance of  
learner driving  
permits

RAWALPINDI: The City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi will officially begin issuing learner driving permits for youths aged 16 to 18 from April 1. Chief Traffic Officer Farhan Aslam told APP on Thursday that all arrangements had been completed and that "applications will be accepted from the scheduled date." The fee for the permit or learner licence would be Rs 500, while applicants would be required to pass a road test and a sign (traffic signal) test. The CTO added that a parent's or legal guardian's consent on a stamp paper, along with a B-form, would be necessary for applicants. Permit holders aged 16 to 18 would not be allowed to operate motorcycles exceeding 125cc, and electric bikes would also need to comply with prescribed power and speed limits, he said. The Chief Traffic Officer noted that the special permit would be considered invalid upon the holder turning 18, after which a new application for a full driving licence would be required. He said the initiative aimed to promote responsible driving among young people and reduce traffic accidents. —APP

Jazz, Huawei  
launch core  
network

ISLAMABAD: Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator from JazzWorld, has launched Huawei's Unified Protection & Response (UPR) intrinsic security solution, following successful verification of its commercial deployment. This milestone marks a significant step in Jazz's network security evolution, reinforcing its commitment to building a resilient and future-ready telecom ecosystem, said a news release. Huawei UPR works on building precise defense based on native devices and detecting blocks through whitelisting. The solution embeds advanced security capabilities directly into the core network, enabling real-time threat detection, analysis, and response without disrupting live services. By integrating protection mechanisms within the network itself, the solution delivers proactive defense against emerging risks while maintaining high reliability and operational continuity.

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British High Commissioner  
hosts interfaith leaders

The Iftar forms part of the High Commission's ongoing work to support dialogue between different communities and encourage equal rights and opportunities for all citizens



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Representatives from 11 religious communities across Pakistan came together to celebrate Pakistan's rich religious diversity at a special Iftar

at the British High Commission. Leaders from Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and other faiths attended, promoting inclusion and highlighting Pakistan's vast religious communities. Guests shared a meal and discussed the importance of respect, understanding

and equal participation for all. British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, said, "The white in Pakistan's flag is not decorative: it represents a commitment to dignity and equal belonging. Events like this bring us together around empathy, connec-

tion, and a reminder that difference is not a barrier but a strength" The Iftar forms part of the High Commission's ongoing work to support dialogue between different communities and encourage equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.

PIDE warns of heightened  
trade risks for Pakistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has cautioned that the recently concluded European Union-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) could significantly heighten Pakistan's trade vulnerability, particularly in the textile and apparel sector, which forms the backbone of the country's exports to the European Union. In a new Policy View Point titled "Economic Fallout: The EU-India Free Trade Agreement and Pakistan's Trade Vulnerability", PIDE highlights that the agreement marks a structural shift in the regional trade landscape, with serious implications for Pakistan's market access in its single most important export destination. The study notes that the EU currently absorbs roughly one-third of Pakistan's total merchandise exports, most of which enter under the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+). While GSP+ has supported export growth over the past decade, it remains unilateral, conditional, and subject to periodic review.

In contrast, the EU-India FTA grants India permanent, treaty-based access with extensive tariff reductions and deeper regulatory cooperation, a development that is expected to raise India's exports to the EU by more than 20 percent and intensify competitive pressure on Pakistani exporters. PIDE's analysis finds that the risks are most acute in textiles and apparel, which account for nearly 80 percent of Pakistan's exports to the EU. With export profiles between India and Pakistan overlapping in several key product categories, the erosion of Pakistan's preferential margin could lead to trade diversion, reduced market share, and heightened pressure on employment in major industrial clusters such as Faisalabad, Karachi, and Sialkot. The impact is expected to be disproportionately severe for small and medium enterprises, which face limited capacity to absorb cost shocks or undertake rapid upgrading. The View Point further emphasizes that Pakistan enters this new trade environment with significant structural disadvantages, including the highest energy tariffs among regional competitors, elevated interest rates, and an

unpredictable tax and refund regime. These factors undermine firm-level competitiveness and weaken Pakistan's ability to respond effectively to intensified competition from India, whose export base is far more diversified and resilient. PIDE underscores the need for coordinated policy action to mitigate potential losses. The View Point calls for short term measures to ease liquidity constraints for exporters, rationalize energy costs, ensure predictable access to GSP+ preferences, and support productivity-enhancing investments. Over the medium to long term, it stresses the importance of securing more durable market access arrangements with the EU, diversifying export markets, and strengthening Pakistan's integration into regional and global value chains. The Policy View Point has been authored by Dr. Usman Qadir, Senior Research Economist and Director at PIDE's Centre for International Trade and Development Economics (CITDE), and Dr. Aamjad Masood, Chief of Research at PIDE. It forms part of PIDE's ongoing efforts to provide evidence-based policy guidance on emerging global economic developments and their implications for Pakistan.

Raja bazaar  
beautification to  
preserve heritage

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Aamir Khattak on Thursday conducted a detailed visit of the ongoing beautification project at Raja Bazaar and adjoining Commercial Market, directing authorities to ensure quality, safety and timely completion of the scheme. During the inspection, the commissioner reviewed the pace of work, construction standards and safety arrangements. He said Raja Bazaar represents the historical and commercial identity of the city and stressed that beautification work must be completed in line with modern urban requirements while preserving the area's cultural character and architectural heritage. The commissioner said that regular site visits were being conducted to monitor progress and maintain construction quality. He instructed officials to ensure the use of high-grade materials in all development activities and emphasized that public convenience must remain the top priority throughout the execution phase. He directed the administration to make alternative arrangements for pedestrians and shopkeepers during construction so that business activities in the market remain minimally affected. "Efforts should be made to avoid disruption to traders and customers," he added. The commissioner further ordered that all workers must use protective gear, including helmets and jackets. He also instructed that clear signboards, protective barriers and adequate lighting arrangements be ensured at construction sites, particularly during night hours, to prevent accidents. Officials briefed the commissioner that under the beautification project, utility lines of IESCO, WASA, Sui Gas and PTCL are being shifted underground to improve the visual landscape and ensure long-term infrastructure sustainability. According to the briefing, overall physical progress on the civil beautification work stands at 29%. The shifting of IESCO lines has reached 92 per cent completion, while Sui Gas lines are 97 per cent complete. PTCL lines have achieved 95 per cent progress and WASA lines also stand at 95 per cent completion. The project also includes construction of an arch wall, improvement of building façades, installation of tuff tiles, benches, street lights, Victorian-style lights, dustbins, planters and the beautification of the main entrance. The commissioner said the Raja Bazaar beautification initiative would transform the area into a well-organized, safe and aesthetically appealing commercial hub, benefiting both the public and the trader community. The project has been assigned a completion deadline of May 30, 2026. Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, Assistant Commissioner City, Chief Officer Municipal Corporation and other relevant officials were also present during the site visit.—DNA

HEC opens  
doors to  
foreign  
varsities

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan launched on Wednesday its revamped Faculty Exchange Programme, an initiative enabling faculty of Pakistani universities to gain exposure of teaching, research, advanced curriculum and academic governance in foreign universities, and the foreign faculty from technologically advanced countries to come to Pakistan and share their expertise as faculty/ researcher for a time span of two to sixteen weeks. The local faculty and students will also benefit from the expertise of foreign faculty as they would be engaged in teaching, curriculum enhancement and research at Pakistani universities. Additionally, the foreign faculty would also become part of conferences, trainings, and future research collaborations. Under the initiative, foreign faculty will teach courses at undergraduate, Master's, and PhD levels. Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training Ms. Wajihah Qamar was the chief guest of the launch ceremony, while Executive Director HEC, Dr. Zia ul Haq, Member HEC, Engr. Muhammad

Raza Chohan, and Ambassador of Germany Ms. Ina Lepel graced the occasion with their presence. The Vice Chancellors and large number of university heads, Deans, and faculty members attended the event. Addressing the ceremony, Ms. Wajihah Qamar appreciated HEC's commitment to academic excellence through initiatives like Faculty Exchange Programme. She affirmed that HEC rightly understood the need for a programme that will not only give global exposure to Pakistani faculty but will also enable redressal of misconceptions about Pakistan by welcoming foreign faculty. She asserted that the flagship initiative will serve in building highly collaborative networks by facilitating Pakistani faculty in learning the international best practices in teaching and research. It will pave the way for enhancing academic integrity, student exchange, and development of advanced curriculum, she added. Ms. Qamar shed light on the HEC's meritorious selection process for the programme that extends equal opportunities to local and foreign faculty to integrate the 21st century competencies. She acknowledged that HEC has embedded the component of impact analysis in the programme. She assured all-out government's support in advancing the higher education sector of the country. "I assure you the Ministry of Federal Education is committed to supporting HEC in uplifting the higher education sector," she emphasized, the stressing need for measures to strengthen financial independence and sustainability of universities. She encouraged the academic community to proactively engage with this programme as a step forward to nurturing innovation and competitiveness in the higher education landscape. Executive Director HEC Dr. Zia ul Haq highlighted the importance of Faculty Exchange Programme in terms of exchange of ideas, experiences, skills and techniques, and outcomes between the local and foreign faculties. Stressing the significance of exchange of faculty with European countries, he expressed his conviction that the robust strengthening of the programme will prove to be very helpful in shaping the future landscape of higher education in Pakistan.

TOR amendment bill to scrap  
dozens of women's chambers

Eliminating district-level chambers could push many businesses back into the informal economy, reducing their visibility and access to policy forums

ISLAMABAD: Samina Fazil, President of the Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IWC-CI), has warned that a bill introduced in the National Assembly to amend the Trade Organizations Rules 2013 could dismantle district-level chambers across Pakistan and effectively dissolve dozens of women's chambers formed after years of struggle. She said the proposed amendments would restructure chamber jurisdictions by limiting them to divisional or municipal boundaries, eliminating the current district-based framework under which many women's chambers operate. Such restructuring would force smaller, women-led chambers into mergers with larger bodies, ending their independent representation. In a formal objection letter addressed to the Director General Trade Organizations (DGTO), Bilal Pasha, Fazil conveyed concerns raised by the presidents of all women's chambers of Pakistan. They warned that the pro-

posed changes would centralise representation and reduce grassroots participation in trade bodies. Samina Fazil noted that women-



posed changes would centralise representation and reduce grassroots participation in trade bodies. Samina Fazil noted that women-

posed changes would centralise representation and reduce grassroots participation in trade bodies. Samina Fazil noted that women- their registration, following sustained advocacy. She said reversing that framework would undermine two decades of struggle. She also cautioned that the changes could marginalise SMEs, particularly in tehsils and rural areas where export-oriented clusters rely on local chambers for networking, certification support, and regulatory liaison. Pakistan has around 5.2 million SMEs, contributing roughly 40 percent to GDP and about 80 percent of non-agricultural employment. A significant but undercounted share of these enterprises is women-led. Fazil argued that women entrepreneurs already face structural constraints, including limited access to finance, mobility restrictions, and weaker market linkages. Eliminating district-level chambers could push many businesses back into the informal economy, reducing their visibility and access to policy forums.—DNA

Awareness  
advised  
for healthy  
lifestyle

ISLAMABAD: During Ramadan, physician Thursday warned that "Hypertension", called the "silent killer" can stealthily affect the whole body from brain to toe and advised people to reduce fast food, deep fried items and excessive use of bakery products and maintain a healthy lifestyle to avoid serious complications such as heart attacks, kidney failure and vision impairment.

While speaking to a local media channel, Consultant Physician Prof. Dr. Omer Sultan warned that hypertension is increasingly affecting young adults, with many individuals in their 30s already showing cardiac strain and early heart complications. He pointed out that unhealthy eating habits, including excessive consumption of fast food, fried items, and sugary snacks, are fueling this rising trend among the younger population. Prof. Dr. Sultan explained that high blood pressure can silently impair vital organs, such as the heart, kidneys, and brain, often long before any noticeable symptoms appear.

He urged young adults, particularly those observing Ramadan, to limit fried and fast foods, follow a balanced diet, and engage in regular physical activity to prevent serious consequences like heart attacks, kidney damage, and vision loss. The physician also emphasized the need for public awareness campaigns, encouraging youth to understand the hidden dangers of hypertension and the importance of timely check-ups and preventive health measures.—APP

Police nab  
'Kata Gang'  
member

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police arrested an injured member of the 'Kata Gang' following an exchange of fire with armed suspects in the jurisdiction of Khanna police station. An official told APP on Thursday that a Khanna police team was moving to arrest suspected criminals after receiving credible intelligence about their presence in the area. He said that three armed suspects riding a motorcycle opened direct fire upon seeing the police team. Police officers remained unharmed due to bulletproof jackets and timely defensive measures, the official added. He said that during the exchange of fire, one suspect was injured by firing from his own accomplices and was arrested on the spot.—APP

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## Saudi Arabia and balance of power

DR. TURKI FAISAL AL-RASHEED

**I**n an era of unprecedented global turbulence, Arab and Islamic nations face a critical imperative: deeper integration to forge comprehensive security. This concept must extend beyond military might to include economic, food, water, energy, cyber and information security, alongside unwavering political independence. Saudi Arabia has emerged as a pivotal leader and security guarantor in the Gulf and Horn of Africa. Regional stability is indispensable for realizing Vision 2030 amid volatile international dynamics.

The world is witnessing profound political, economic and military shifts and conflict, which signal the decline of the old unipolar system and the ascent of multipolarity. The US is recalibrating its global role, prioritizing national interests while seeking to reform institutions to better align with itself and its allies. Russia pushes boundaries through territorial assertions, China expands economic dominance and influence and Europe confronts perceived US disengagement, compelled to pursue greater strategic autonomy, bolster defense spending and accept sacrifices after decades of reliance on the American security umbrella. This month's Munich Security Conference, themed "Under Destruction," starkly reflected fractures in the international order. The accompanying Munich Security Report described a shift to "wrecking-ball politics," where destructive forces prevail over reform, multilateralism erodes and divisions among major powers deepen. The report concluded that the US-led post-1945 order is now actively being destroyed. European leaders voiced alarm over escalating conflicts, US-China rivalry, Middle East instability, energy crises and threats to the rules-based order. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz bluntly declared that the post-Second World War rules-based global order "no longer exists," supplanted by an era of raw great power politics. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen reinforced the call for decisive European action. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered a forthright critique, deeming postwar institutions like the UN unfit for today's realities. He stressed that US national interests must come first, portraying today's American policy as renewal rather than destruction. Rubio lambasted the UN's ineffectiveness, citing its failure to halt Iran's nuclear program — which "required 14 bombs dropped with precision from American B-2 bombers" in a recent escalation — as emblematic of its obsolescence. Amid this flux, the central question is: Where does the Arab and Islamic region fit? Despite persistent turmoil, fears of Iranian escalation, US military postures and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's confrontational rhetoric, the region has a unique opportunity to assert itself as an active geopolitical pole, wielding the economic heft and moral authority to shape global equilibriums. Prominent analyses underscore how prolonged conflict serves narrow interests. An op-ed by Thomas L. Friedman in *The New York Times* this month, titled "Ne-



tanyahu Plays Trump and American Jews for Fools — Again," argued that Netanyahu's far-right coalition perpetuates instability for political gain. Chaos sustains high military budgets, unchecked US aid, settlement growth and survival through perpetual threats, often amplified by Iran-focused rhetoric. This yields a ravaged Gaza, heightened regional tensions, alienated partners, surging global antisemitism threatening Jews worldwide and US complicity risking its own standing. True peace is blocked because the status quo profits the coalition more than resolution does. The region boasts unparalleled assets: vast oil and gas reserves fueling the global economy; strategic control of chokepoints like the Suez Canal, Bab Al-Mandab Strait, Strait of Hormuz and the Bosphorus; geographic centrality bridging continents; immense solar resources for green hydrogen and renewables; critical minerals essential for technology; and a dynamic, youthful workforce. These endowments elevate the Arab and Islamic world from a mere regional actor to an influential force in multipolarity. Realizing this demands intensified security, economic, food, water, energy, cyber, information and political integration, while countering extremism, safeguarding cultural identity and advancing social justice. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has evolved decisively toward initiative-taking engagement across the Gulf, Levant and Horn of Africa. Riyadh actively counters fragmentation by militias, nonstate actors and separatists in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti. Notable alliances include the September 2025 Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement with Pakistan, the sole nuclear power in the Islamic world, bolstering deterrence and joint security cooperation. Riyadh also spearheads coordination with Cairo and Ankara to restore balance, uphold Arab state sovereignty and tackle conflicts collaboratively in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan and elsewhere. In the Horn of Africa, Saudi initiatives encompass military partnerships, Red Sea safeguarding, the protection of Bab Al-Mandab and efforts to neutralize divisive external interventions. As a regional leader and security guarantor, Saudi Arabia understands that domestic stability and Vision 2030 flourish only in a secure, mutually beneficial environment. As a proud Saudi citizen, this week's Founding Day celebrations — marking 299 years since Imam Mohammed bin Saud founded the First Saudi State in Diriyah in 1727 — profoundly reaffirmed our resilient identity. This year's events went beyond remembrance, embodying continuity, unity and unstoppable progress. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has evolved toward initiative-taking engagement across the Gulf, Levant and Horn of Africa. The standout feature was the genuine pride among the Kingdom's youth. Both in Riyadh and nationwide, schoolchildren, university students and young professionals connected vividly to their heritage through cultural workshops, historical reenactments, community events and interactive programs. They linked Diriyah's principles of justice, stability and unity to Vision 2030's achievements, illustrating how historical resilience powers today's economic diversification, global outreach and bold ambitions. In interactions with international visitors, tourists and expatriates, young Saudis conveyed this 299-year saga with confidence and insight — showing national pride as inclusive and outward-looking, aligned with Vision 2030's pillars of vibrant society, cultural preservation, youth empowerment and belonging. This generational fusion of heritage and aspiration proves Saudi identity is dynamic: a seamless blend of rooted tradition and forward momentum. Founding Day 2026 was vivid evidence of the unbreakable link between past foundations and future promise, galvanizing collective resolve for a prosperous, unified Kingdom amid global and regional challenges.

## From Swift Retort to Bunyanum Marsoos

Izmi Herlani

**F**ast forward to 2025, and the lessons of Swift Retort resonate in Operation Bunyanum Marsoos. This operation demonstrated continuity in doctrine, evolution in tactics and adaptation to emerging threats. The seamless integration of intelligence, precision weapons and mission planning in Bunyanum Marsoos underscores how the PAF has transformed its operational philosophy—ensuring readiness not just for today's threats, but for tomorrow's uncertainties. Together, these operations reveal a culture of proactive deterrence, where our Air Force remains vigilant, agile and mission-ready at all times. Such operational prowess is inseparable from the recent modernization drive spearheaded by Pakistan Air Force leadership that has redefined PAF's combat capabilities

**T**HE skies of Pakistan have always been watched over with unwavering vigilance. Yet, seven years ago, they witnessed a moment that would forever define the nation's resolve. Operation Swift Retort, executed with unflinching precision and daring, was not merely a military response; it was a proclamation that Pakistan's airspace is sacred, and its defenders are relentless. Today, as we commemorate its 7th anniversary, the operation stands as a testament to the Pakistan Air Force's operational excellence, strategic foresight and indomitable spirit. On that fateful day in February 2019, when unprovoked aggression threatened the nation, PAF personnel rose to the challenge with unparalleled professionalism. Swift, calculated and resolute, the response reflected speed, precision and a mastery of modern aerial warfare. Each sortie underscored not only tactical brilliance but also strict adherence to rules of engagement; a signature of a force that balances courage with discipline. Operation Swift Retort became emblematic of PAF's strategic deterrence, a clarion signal to the region that any threat to Pakistan's skies would be met with decisive action. Fast forward to 2025, and the lessons of Swift Retort resonate in Operation Bunyanum Marsoos. This operation demonstrated continuity in doctrine, evolution in tactics and adaptation to emerging threats. The seamless integration of intelligence, precision weapons and mission planning in Bunyanum Marsoos underscores how the PAF has transformed its operational philosophy—ensuring readiness not just for today's threats, but for tomorrow's uncertainties. Together, these operations reveal a culture of proactive deterrence, where our Air Force remains vigilant, agile and mission-ready at all times. Such operational prowess is inseparable from the recent modernization drive spearheaded by Pakistan Air Force leadership that has redefined PAF's combat capabilities. Recognizing that modern warfare demands more than wings and engines, Pakistan Air Force has inducted advanced fighter jets, unmanned aerial vehicles, multi-layered air defence systems and long range precision-guided munitions. Surveillance networks have expanded, cyber and space domains

have been fortified and early warning and command & control systems have been integrated to ensure multi-dimensional superiority. Legacy platforms have not been left behind; they have been upgraded with state-of-the-art avionics and weapons systems, making every aircraft, missile and radar a potent contributor to national defence.

A defining feature of this transformation has been the focus on indigenization and local aerospace development. Spearheaded by the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park, PAF has invested smartly in domestic aircraft programs, drone development, precision weaponry and avionics systems. These initiatives not only strengthen operational self-reliance but also cultivate a sustainable, home-grown aerospace ecosystem that has turned Pakistan's skies into a proving ground for innovation, ingenuity and national pride. The engine driving this modernization is the visionary leadership of PAF. Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu has steered the force with foresight, blending imported capabilities with indigenous solutions to create a modern, adaptable and cost-effective Air Power that has recalibrated deterrence in South Asia. PAF leadership's emphasis on quality HR, operational doctrine and readiness has ensured that every technological advancement translates into battlefield effectiveness. Through disciplined stewardship, strategic foresight and a commitment to excellence, PAF has built a force that is both formidable and forward-looking. Anniversaries like Swift Retort are more than historical markers; they are reminders of a force that stands vigilant and unwavering, capable of defending the nation's skies with speed and precision. They affirm resilience, operational mastery and the enduring spirit of Pakistan Air Force. Swift Retort, and its operational successors like Bunyanum Marsoos, are chapters in a larger narrative: that of a force committed to deterrence, technological advancement and strategic autonomy. As we reflect on seven years since Operation Swift Retort, one truth emerges clearly: PAF's resolve is timeless. Its story is not merely about missions flown or weapons deployed, but about vision, preparation and courage. It is about a force that turns strategy into



action, doctrine into deterrence, and innovation into sovereignty. From the adrenaline-charged sorties of 2019 to the meticulously executed operations of 2025, Pakistan's airspace remains secure under the watchful eyes of our modern, capable and indomitable Air Force. The journey from Swift Retort to Bunyanum Marsoos, from legacy fleets to indigenous innovation, is a testament to strategic foresight and operational excellence. It signals to allies and adversaries alike that Pakistan's skies are not merely defended; they are fortified by vision, innovation and relentless resolve. Pakistan Air Force stands ready, always evolving, always vigilant, ensuring that the nation's aerial frontiers remain inviolable. In the theatre of the skies, where threats evolve as rapidly as technology itself, Pakistan has carved a legacy of precision, resilience and self-reliance. Swift Retort may have been the spark, but the sustained modernization, operational evolution and visionary leadership have ensured that the flame of deterrence burns brighter with each passing year. PAF today is not just a force of wings and engines; it is a symbol of national resolve, a beacon of technological prowess and a sentinel of Pakistan's sovereignty.

## Echoes of War in the Desert

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



**I**ndeed, questions are being raised about international reactions to perceived unilateral actions in other contexts. If the world accepted or tacitly tolerated episodes such as the dramatic arrest of Venezuela's President and his wife, and if ambitions toward territories like Greenland, reportedly entertained by American leadership, failed to draw substantive global censure...

**T**HE world watches with apprehension as the turbulent politics of the Middle East threaten to erupt into a conflict of devastating proportions. Recent developments in that fragile region have cast a long shadow over global peace and security, drawing stark warnings from capitals across continents. At the heart of these tensions lie the persistent standoff between the United States and Iran, the ever-volatile Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the complex web of alliances and rivalries that define contemporary geopolitics in West Asia. What unfolds there in the coming weeks and months will reverberate far beyond the desert sands. In recent weeks, the United States has intensified its diplomatic and military posturing toward Iran, issuing unmistakable threats of punitive action and setting tight deadlines for Tehran to accede to American conditions in their nuclear negotiations, warning of "really bad things" if those conditions are not met. American warplanes and aircraft carriers have been repositioned in the region, signaling Washington's readiness for a confrontation that could rapidly spiral out of control. Tehran, for its part, has responded with equally stark language. Iranian leaders have declared that any military assault on their territory will be met with force and insisted that American bases and assets in the Gulf would be legitimate targets for retaliation, brick by brick, in defence of national sovereignty. Complicating this dangerous standoff are the shifting stances of global powers and alliances. It is noteworthy that the United States' long-time ally, Britain, has indicated that it will not participate in military action against Iran. British officials have publicly stated their absence from any such operation, reinforcing the principle of adherence to international law. Into this volatile mix comes a controversy that has ignited further alarm across the Arab and Muslim world. The United States Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, in an interview referenced a biblical justification for extensive Israeli territorial claims, suggesting it "would be fine if they took it all," a remark interpreted by many as endorsing expansive Israeli control over Arab lands. The statement provoked swift and forceful condemnation from more than a dozen Islamic and Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia,

Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, and Pakistan itself, as well as regional organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. These governments jointly affirmed that such rhetoric not only contravenes the principles of international law and the UN Charter but also risks inflaming tensions further in an already fragile region. Indeed, questions are being raised about international reactions to perceived unilateral actions in other contexts. If the world accepted or tacitly tolerated episodes such as the dramatic arrest of Venezuela's President and his wife, and if ambitions toward territories like Greenland, reportedly entertained by American leadership, failed to draw substantive global censure, observers fear that similar actions by other states in the Middle East could set worrying precedents. Critics warn that if Israel attempts to enforce territorial changes by force in the region, situations may get out of control. The reality on the ground illustrates the complexity of this crisis. Despite the formation of peace boards and diplomatic initiatives intended to ease the suffering in Gaza, hostilities continue unabated. Israel's military operations in Palestinian territories show no sign of abating, highlighting the disconnect between international peace frameworks and the grim reality of ongoing conflict. At the same time, events back in the United States have added another layer to this already intricate tableau. The US Supreme Court recently declared certain measures by the President to increase tariffs unconstitutional, prompting a reassessment of domestic and foreign policy priorities. Undeterred, President Trump has moved to impose new global tariffs under alternative legal authority, a show of economic assertiveness that raises questions about broader strategic intent. Amid these tensions, the revelation of names involved in major cover-ups, including personalities associated with the Epstein case, has created a media storm that some commentators believe may encourage diversionary tactics. There is speculation in certain quarters that actors connected to these scandals might hope for global attention to shift further, even towards chaos in the Gulf, as a means of overshadowing unresolved controversies closer to home.

In the broader geopolitical landscape, political strategists are also watching closely the impending visit of India's Prime Minister to Israel. Though ostensibly a diplomatic engagement, some analysts fear it could be interpreted as a symbolic endorsement of Israeli policy at a time when regional sensitivities are acute. Pakistan is keeping a close eye on these matters. Islamabad has aligned itself with other Muslim and Arab nations in condemning inflammatory rhetoric and affirming support for international law and territorial integrity. But a wider conflagration in the Gulf would carry grave implications for Pakistan's security and economy. Any disruption in oil supplies would strain an already fragile balance of payments, exacerbate inflation, and escalate the cost of imports. An intensification of conflict could also trigger larger refugee movements and heighten sectarian tensions within and beyond the region. Moreover, the spectre of great power politics looms large. As the United States presses its diplomatic and strategic agenda, and as Iran makes clear its willingness to defend its interests, the risk of miscalculation increases. Europe's apparent reluctance, and that of some American allies, to be drawn deeper into confrontation underscores the possibility that this crisis could spiral beyond diplomatic control. Yet, there remains a slender thread of hope in diplomacy. Negotiations on nuclear issues continue, accompanied by appeals from global leaders for restraint and dialogue. The only sustainable resolution to these tensions will come through patient diplomacy, mutual respect for sovereignty, and the recommitment of all parties to international norms. War would achieve no lasting peace; it would only deepen wounds and displace countless lives across the region. As these complex and interlinked dynamics unfold, Pakistan's policymakers and citizens alike must maintain vigilance and clarity of purpose. The Gulf's stability is not merely a distant concern; its turbulence could send ripples through our own national life. Only time will reveal the course that events will take. But for now, the world watches uneasily, aware that the fate of millions may hinge on the choices made in capitals from Washington to Tehran, Riyadh to Jerusalem, and beyond.

## Briefs

## Pakistan forces inflict...

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He affirmed, "Pakistan will go to any extent for the safety and peace of its people," while stressing the urgent need for Afghanistan to become a responsible and peaceful neighbor under all circumstances. The border tensions highlight ongoing challenges stemming from the Taliban regime's alleged failure to curb cross-border militant activities, particularly by TTP elements using Afghan soil. Pakistan has repeatedly urged verifiable actions to prevent such threats, but provocations persist. As clashes subsided, Pakistan maintained heightened vigilance along the Durand Line, with forces on high alert to deter further aggression. The government reiterated that while it seeks peaceful relations, it will not hesitate to defend its sovereignty decisively.

## Jailed PTI leaders...

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access to his personal doctor, family members and legal counsel during treatment. The development came a day after Imran Khan received a second eye injection at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad. The former prime minister, who has been incarcerated since August 2023, has been diagnosed with a serious eye condition known as central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO). A report submitted to the Supreme Court earlier this month stated that he has lost approximately 85 per cent of the vision in his right eye.

## 'Imran to be shifted...

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during a follow-up visit. The former ailing prime minister was administered first injection in his right eye in late January as the doctors had prescribed three injections for his eye care. The jailed PTI founder is expected to receive the third injection on March 23. The PTI founder was diagnosed with a serious eye condition known as central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO), according to a report submitted in the SC earlier this month by his lawyer Salman Safdar. The report stated that the former premier — who has been in jail since August 2023 — has complained of losing 85% of the vision in his right eye.

## Security forces kill...

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also recovered from the Khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorist found in the area. Relentless Counter Terrorism campaign under vision "Azam e Istehkam" as approved by Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan by Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

## India, Israel to push free trade

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We will oppose it shoulder to shoulder. We will always oppose it in the future," Modi said at a press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. "Humanity must never become a victim of conflict," he added. Following their meeting, Netanyahu's office said the "two leaders will sign a series of agreements between Israel and India in economic, security, and diplomatic fields". Separately, Modi said he and Israeli President Isaac Herzog held "extremely fruitful and wide-ranging" talks.

## Unbeaten Usman Wazeer ready for India clash



*Despite his young age, Wazeer has won multiple titles, including the WBC Middle East, WBA Asia, WBC OPBF Silver, and WBO World Youth titles. In recognition of his achievements, he was awarded the prestigious Tamgha-e-Imtiaz*

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's unbeaten professional boxing star Usman Wazeer will return to the international ring on February 28 to facing India's Baljeet Singh at Global Fight Night at World Siam Stadium, Bangkok. Wazeer carries a perfect record of 17 wins in 17 fights, including 12 knockouts, and will step into his 18th professional bout aiming to extend his unbeaten streak and move closer to an Open World Title shot. "I have knocked out two Indian opponents before and am fully prepared for another strong performance," he said. Despite his young age, Wazeer has won multiple

titles, including the WBC Middle East, WBA Asia, WBC OPBF Silver, and WBO World Youth titles. In recognition of his achievements, he was awarded the prestigious Tamgha-e-Imtiaz. Currently training in Karachi under former boxer Ali Bakhsh, Wazeer says the camp has sharpened his endurance, ring IQ, and knockout precision. He also thanked his long-time sponsor ACTIV-IT and CEO R. Rizwan Aftab Ahmed for their continued financial, medical, and nutritional support, calling sponsorship vital for success in professional boxing. Beyond his own career, Wazeer is grooming young talent through his UW Box Academy and believes structured training and government backing can turn Pakistan into a strong force in professional boxing.

## Vinicius hits winner as Real Madrid eliminate Benfica after racism row

MADRID: Vinicius Junior scored the winner on the night as Real Madrid beat Benfica 2-1 in the Champions League on Wednesday, progressing 3-1 on aggregate to the last 16. It was the Brazilian forward's superb goal which separated the teams in a first leg marred by an incident of alleged racial abuse aimed at him by Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni, who denies it. Jose Mourinho's side were still alive in the play-off round tie and took the lead early on at the Santiago Bernabeu through Rafa Silva, although Madrid's Aurelien Tchouameni swiftly levelled. Benfica gave the record 15-time champions a rough ride but fittingly Vinicius, who never hides from the spotlight, scored on 80 minutes to effectively end the contest. It was Portuguese coach Mourinho's first time back at the Santiago Bernabeu since he

coached Real Madrid from 2010-2013, but he could not lead his team from the dug-out because of suspension. After a week dominated by the fall-out from the first leg, Vinicius lined up for Real Madrid alongside Gonzalo Garcia, who stepped in for injured French superstar Kylian Mbappe. Benfica were without banned midfielder Prestianni, after an appeal against his provisional one-game sanction was turned down earlier on Wednesday, with UEFA still investigating the incident. Madrid hung a large banner reading "no to racism" at one end, with the game played under the shadow of what happened last week in Lisbon. There were boos for Vinicius from the visiting Benfica fans and he prodded wide in the early stages, appealing in vain for a penalty as Nicolas Otamendi collided with

him after he got his shot away. Benfica took a deflected lead in the 14th minute as Madrid defender Raul Asencio clumsily turned the ball toward his own goal. Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois kept the ball out but Silva was on hand to bundle home from close range. Stung into action, Madrid pulled level two minutes later through Tchouameni. The French midfielder finished with aplomb from the edge of the box from rampaging team-mate Federico Valverde's cross. Madrid thought they had gone ahead on the night when Arda Guler stabbed home a loose ball after Garcia's shot was blocked, but the Spanish striker had edged offside and it was disallowed after a VAR review. Vinicius settles it. Courtois made a fine save from Richard Rios before the break, as Benfica

turned up the pressure. Silva hit the bar with a deflected effort before the hour mark as Mourinho's side at times pinned back the hosts. Madrid were dealt a set-back as Asencio was forced off on a stretcher after colliding with Eduardo Camavinga. It had to be Vinicius who settled the tie, though, and Valverde played him scuttling through on goal, with the Brazilian calmly rolling a low shot past goalkeeper Anatoly Trubin. Vinicius produced another celebratory dance by the corner flag, as he had done in the first leg in the run-up to the flashpoint with Prestianni, and to the chagrin of Mourinho. This time, the 25-year-old just had thousands of jubilant fans jumping up and down before him, and his goal confirmed Madrid's passage to the last 16. — Agencies

## South Africa women clinch ODI series after 2nd win over Pakistan

DUBAI: South Africa have secured a 16-run victory over Pakistan in a thrilling One Day International encounter of the ICC Women's Championship series at SuperSport Park, clinching the series 2-1 with a match to spare. The hosts were made to struggle hard for their unassailable 2-0 lead, enduring a few nervous moments as the visitors launched a spirited pursuit of a daunting target. Electing to bat first, the Proteas showed confidence from the very beginning of the match with openers Laura Wolvaardt (20) and Tasmin Brits (77) laying a solid foundation. However, it was Brits who truly shifted the momentum. Her innings of 77 from just 62 balls set the tone for what was to follow. Following the departure of Wolvaardt and a brief stint at the crease for Faye Tunncliffe (7), the stage was set for a remarkable middle-order display. Sune Luus played tactfully, compiling a measured 57, but the day belonged to Annerie Dercksen. In a breathtaking exhibition of power-hitting, Dercksen fell just ten runs short of a century, blasting 90 off 68 deliveries, with the help of six boundaries and four sixes. Her partnership with Luus gave the home side a commanding position. Nadine de Klerk's late flurry, featuring a colossal 90-metre six, compounded Pakistan's misery, with the tourists' bowling discipline deserting them at crucial junctures. Chasing a record target of 361, Pakistan found themselves in early trouble at 24 for two, as Dercksen sent Muneeba back. However, the tourists refused to capitulate. — APP

## Cristiano Ronaldo scores again as Al Nassr FC thrash Al Najma

UNAIZAH: Cristiano Ronaldo scored in his third straight match after coming from a brief boycott as Al Nassr FC topped Saudi Pro League leaders with a decisive 5-0 victory over the low-strung Al Najma SC here at the Al-Najma Club Stadium on Wednesday. In the seventh minute, Ronaldo scored the opening goal from the penalty spot. Kingsley Coman and Inigo Martinez scored in the first half and made the hosts comfortable, leading 3-0 at the break. Sadio Mané scored in the second half, and afterward, the coach Jorge Jesus started to change his team and replaced some of his main players, including Ronaldo. Portuguese extends his lead over Ivan Toney of Al Ahli Saudi FC in the race to the Saudi Golden Boot to 20 league goals this season. The victory was the 19th of the campaign that saw Al Nassr in league leadership with 58 points in 23 matches. They have already lost only once and are two points ahead of second-placed Al Ahli. Ronaldo had missed recent matches against Al Itihad Club and Al Riyadh SC amid reported frustration over the club's failure to provide the expected financial backing during the most recent transfer window. It is pertinent to mention that he reportedly was not happy with the Public Investment Fund (PIF), which failed to substantially enrich the squad, whereas competitors Al Hilal SFC, also owned by PIF, took high-profile signings, such as his ex-Real Madrid CF teammate Karim Benzema at Al Itihad. — APP

LOS ANGELES: Hilary Knight, captain of the victorious US women's Olympic ice hockey team, said Wednesday it was unfortunate that a "distasteful joke" by President Donald Trump had overshadowed the achievements of US athletes at the Milan-Cortina Games. The US men's ice hockey team took a congratulatory call from Trump as they celebrated their gold medal victory over Canada. The president invited them to his State of the Union address and added he would have to ask the triumphant women's team as well or risk being "impeached". The women's side later declined an invitation from Trump to be on hand for the speech Tuesday night. "I thought it was sort of a distasteful joke, and unfortunately that is overshadowing a lot of the success, the success of just women at the Olympics carrying for Team USA and having amazing gold medal feats," Knight, a five-time Olympic medalist, said on ESPN's "Sportscenter." Several players on the men's team appeared to laugh at Trump's comment, sparking criticism. But Knight said the men's and women's national teams were very supportive of each other. "I think there's a genuine level of support there and respect," she said. "I think that's being overshadowed by a quick lapse. "I think the guys were in a tough spot, so I think it's a shame this storyline and narrative has kind of blown up and (is) overshadowing that connection and genuine interest in one another and cheering each other on." The women's team declined an invitation to Trump's big speech in Washington, with USA Hockey saying they had had prior commitments. Players from the men's team were feted in the Oval Office at the White House and again at Trump's speech before a joint session of Congress. Trump gave goaltender Connor

## US women's ice hockey captain responds to 'distasteful' Trump remark

Hellebuyck the Presidential Medal of Freedom. A handful of men's players did not attend, according to US media, and said they were heading back to their NHL teams to train and spend time with family. Knight scored the game-tying goal against Canada in the final two minutes of regulation in the women's gold medal game and Megan Keller scored the game-winner in overtime. The 36-year-old Knight, who announced last year that Milan would be her last Games, claimed her second Olympic gold. Her 15 Olympic goals are the most for any US hockey player, male or female. She told ESPN that the controversy that erupted could serve as a "really good learning point, to really focus on how we talk about women, not only in sport but in industry. "Women aren't less than, and their achievements shouldn't be overshadowed by anything else other than how great they are," she said. — DNA

## India continues to aid...

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who publicly confessed being the mastermind of Samjhauta Express terrorist attack, Lieutenant Colonel Purohit, a serving Indian Army officer and Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur, a former BJP member of the assembly. The Foreign Office Spokesperson also expressed alarm that the Hindutva extremism and saffron terror that had motivated this inhumane attack nineteen years ago has intensified manifold under the current regime in India. Tahir Andrabi said the government of Pakistan demands a fair trial in which the perpetrators and abettors of Samjhauta Express terrorist attack be brought to justice. The Spokesperson said the families of innocent Pakistani nationals, mercilessly killed at the hands of the Hindutva-motivated extremists, deserve justice.

## 'Pakistan to maintain current...

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Bannu — all of which were linked to terrorists operating from the Afghan soil — Pakistan struck Afghanistan's Nangarhar and Paktika provinces overnight into Sunday. Islamabad, which has repeatedly urged Kabul to prevent its soil from being used by terrorist organisations to carry out attacks, conducted intelligence-based strikes targeting seven terrorist camps and hideouts belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), its affiliates, and the Daesh-Khorasan, along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The state minister noted that the reason for the deteriorating situation is an irresponsible neighbour and an irresponsible state.

## Iran, US hold talks in Geneva...

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Iran has rejected the US demand to stop the enrichment of uranium in its territory, but there have been indications that it is prepared to offer some concessions about its nuclear programme. As in the previous two rounds of discussions earlier this month, the Iranian delegation is being led by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, while the US is represented by special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. In recent weeks, the US has sent thousands of troops and what Trump has described as an "armada" to the region, including two aircraft carriers along with other warships, as well as fighter jets and refuelling aircraft.

## Pakistan, Greece...

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such attempts linked to Pakistan, as previously noted in European assessments. The European ministers praised Pakistan's intensified actions, including enhanced monitoring at airports and maritime borders, strict enforcement against smuggling networks, and cooperation with international bodies like Frontex and Interpol. Key outcomes from the meetings include: Agreement on promoting legal migration pathways as an effective deterrent to irregular flows. Minister Naqvi's proposal for structured legal channels received strong support from the three European nations.

## Ramazan relief...

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the distribution of funds under the 2026 package is also being carried out through a transparent digital system. He added that financial assistance is being transferred directly to beneficiaries through digital wallets. The Prime Minister commended the performance of all relevant institutions involved in implementing the package. He said the provision of funds through digital wallets ensures a highly transparent and convenient system, saving people from long queues and upholding their dignity. The meeting was briefed on the progress of the PM Ramazan Relief Package 2026. It was informed that by the 8th of Ramazan, 64 per cent of the beneficiaries had received their payments, while the verification and disbursement process for the remaining beneficiaries is progressing swiftly.

## Pakistan warns progress remains fragile in Central Africa

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: While welcoming the holding of combined presidential, legislative, regional and municipal elections in Central African Republic (CAR) last December, Pakistan told the UN Security Council on Thursday that gains made in this small landlocked country in recent years were fragile and required continued support to consolidate. "Conducted with the logistical, technical and security support of the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, under its electoral support mandate, they reaffirm the Mission's continued relevance as a guarantor of stability and an enabler of political processes," Ambassador Usman Jadoon, deputy permanent of Pakistan to the UN, said. Speaking in a debate on the situation in CAR, he welcomed the progress in implementing the 2019 Political Agreement, including the dissolution of armed groups and advances in D.D.R. (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration). "However," the Pakistani envoy added, "persistent volatility in the east and south-

east, and the presence of residual armed elements and spillover from Sudan underline the fragility of these gains. Strengthening national defence and internal security forces, extending State authority, and advancing justice and reconciliation remain essential for lasting stabilization." While MINUSCA is a "success story of this Council", Ambassador Jadoon said Pakistan — which contributes more than 1,200 uniformed personnel to the Mission — was concerned that "indiscriminate financial cuts ultimately undermine both peacekeeping and the Council's core mandate". He also pointed out that troop-contributing countries have not been reimbursed for personnel costs since 30 September 2025 or for equipment since 31 December 2024. Against that backdrop, the Pakistani envoy observed: "This essentially means that the troop-contributing countries — in addition to providing human resources and sacrifices — also continue to shoulder the financial burden of peacekeeping missions while having little to no say in mandate formulations, changes or drawdowns." Pakistan supports a conditions-based transition aligned with CAR's national priori-

ties, Ambassador Jadoon said, while stressing that the objective is consolidation of the hard-won gains achieved over the past decade, not to risk their reversal. "We reaffirm our unwavering support for CAR's sovereignty and for MINUSCA, and will continue working with partners to advance lasting peace and stability in the country." Earlier, briefing the Security Council, UN's Special Representative Valentine Rugwabiza said the 28 December 2025 polls marked "an important milestone in the consolidation of the peace process and State authority." The combined presidential, legislative, regional and municipal elections — including the first municipal polls since 1988 — represented "the most extensive electoral operations ever undertaken in the Central African Republic," she said. Voting was conducted "in a peaceful and secure manner across most of the country, despite isolated security incidents," Ms. Rugwabiza said. Incumbent President Faustin-Archange Touadera secured an outright majority and won a third term in office. MINUSCA provided technical, logistical, operational and security support, including transporting

more than 232 tonnes of voter information and facilitating the deployment of nearly 500 election-related workers nationwide. The mission also supported the rotation and reinforcement of 1,237 national defence and security forces and provided assistance packages to more than 800 soldiers in hotspot areas. The elections also reflected progress on inclusion, with women representing more than 47 per cent of voters and 45 per cent of municipal candidates. CAR has faced recurrent cycles of conflict since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power, prompting the rise of largely Christian anti-Balaka militias. The 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation between the Government and 14 armed groups — brokered with international support — remains the central framework for stabilization efforts. Ms. Rugwabiza reported continued progress under that agreement, including the dissolution of two additional armed groups and the signing of a third agreement for the return of the Movement of Central African Patriots to the process, facilitated by Chad. Since July 2025, more than 1,200 combatants have been disarmed and demobilized.

## Briefs

## Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.50 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.51. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.40 and Rs 282.30, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee increased by 21 paisa to close at Rs 330.02 from the previous day's close of Rs 329.81, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.79, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of 32 paisa and closed at Rs 378.40 compared to the previous day's Rs 378.08. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham stood stagnant to close at Rs 76.09, while the Saudi Riyal went up by 02 and closed at Rs 74.52.—APP

## Gold rates fall by Rs 700 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs 700 on Thursday and was sold at Rs 540,562 against its sale at Rs 541,262 the previous trading day, All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also went down by Rs 600 to Rs 463,444 from Rs 464,044 whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold decreased by Rs 550 to Rs 424,839 from Rs 425,389. The rates of per tola silver declined by Rs 350 to Rs 9,204 from Rs 9,554 whereas that of ten gram silver decreased by Rs 301 to Rs 7,890 from Rs 8,191. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$7 to \$5,178 from \$5,185 whereas that of silver went down by \$3.5 to \$87.20, the Association reported.—APP

## China's draft law on social assistance submitted for second reading

BEIJING, Feb 25 (XINHUA/APP): China is improving its social assistance system to better ensure basic living support and provide a stronger safety net for people in need, according to a bill under review by Chinese lawmakers on Wednesday. The draft law on social assistance was submitted for a second reading to the ongoing session of the 14th Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the top legislature. Following an initial review last June, lawmakers solicited wide opinions from relevant government organs, local legislatures, and the public to revise the draft. The revised bill adds legal liability for unauthorized disclosure of data collected during assistance reviews, prohibiting illegal access, sale, or release of information unrelated to applications. China's social assistance system is part of a broader social security system covering social insurance, welfare programs, and support for veterans and other entitled groups.—APP

## New fossils reveal high fish diversity

BEIJING: Chinese scientists have discovered new cyprinid fish fossils from the early and middle Miocene of the Lunpola Basin in northwest China's Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. These findings indicate that fish diversity on the plateau was notably high between 18 and 15 million years ago. The research team from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology and the Institute of Hydrobiology, both under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, conducted detailed comparative studies on fossil specimens collected from the Lunpola Basin, which sits at an average elevation of 4,600 meters. The fossils, recovered from the Chebuli and Lunbori sections within the basin, date back to around 15 million years and 16-18 million years, respectively.—APP

## Pakistan awards 11 Oil, Gas blocks awarded, secures Rs 8b investment

Speaking at the ceremony, the Federal Minister for Petroleum termed the signing a significant milestone in the Government's efforts to boost domestic exploration, attract investment, and reduce reliance on imported energy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Petroleum Division, Government of Pakistan signed Petroleum Concession Agreements (PCAs) and Exploration Licences (ELs) awarding 11 onshore blocks marking a significant step forward in advancing oil and gas exploration activities across the country. The signing ceremony was held in Islamabad, and was graced by the Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik. The awarded blocks include eight in Balochistan, two in Sindh, and one in Punjab. The successful joint venture partners include Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), Mari Energies Limited (MariEnergies), Pakistan Oilfields Limited (POL) and Prime Global Energies (Prime). Speaking at the ceremony, the Federal Minister for Petroleum termed the signing a significant milestone in the Government's efforts to boost domestic exploration, attract investment, and reduce reliance on imported energy. Signing of agreements demonstrate strong investor confidence in



stone in the Government's efforts to boost domestic exploration, attract investment, and reduce reliance on imported energy. Signing of agreements demonstrate strong investor confidence in

Pakistan's upstream potential. The Minister expressed confidence that recent discoveries would lead to further investments in development and production, create employment opportunities, stim-

ulate economic activity in the regions and will contribute meaningfully to reducing reliance on imported energy. He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to facilitate exploration activities ensuring

a stable investor-friendly environment for promoting the sustainable development of Pakistan's indigenous energy resources. MariEnergies will serve as operator for six blocks. The company has secured 100% working interest in five blocks: Padag, Chagai, Dalbandin, Merui, and Merui West and will lead the Ahmad Wal block as operator with a 60% working interest, alongside OGDCL holding 40%.

## Chinese-Pakistani 'Caring Kitchen' brings Ramadan relief

ISLAMABAD: In a heartwarming display of cross-border compassion, a Chinese-Pakistani charity initiative has launched a month-long "Caring Kitchen" program across Pakistan, providing daily iftar meals to hundreds of families during the holy month of Ramadan 2026, says a report published by Gwadar Pro on Thursday. The initiative, organized by the China-Pakistan Youth Exchange Community (CPYEC) in collaboration with the Beijing One Heart Sphere Charity Foundation and the Chinese volunteer group Boundless Love, is currently serving 200-300 cooked meals each evening to communities in Islamabad, Gujranwala, Gilgit and Azad Kashmir. Speaking on behalf of the program, Ma Bin, head of CPYEC, explained that this year's Ramadan drive represents a continuation of the charitable efforts that first took root 8 years ago. "What began as small-scale food distributions has grown into a sustained movement of friendship and mutual care between our two peoples," Ma said. In the federal capital, the volunteers extended their support beyond cooked meals to include essential food packages donated to the Star School in Islamabad. The parcels, containing rice, flour, cooking oil and pulses, aim to support the nutritional needs of students throughout the holy month. Over the past 13 years, CPYEC has steadily expanded its charitable footprint across Pakistan, organizing relief activities and development projects in Islamabad, Lahore, Dadu, Gujranwala, Gilgit and Quetta. Previous initiatives have included sheltering orphans, conducting cataract surgeries for elderly patients, distributing footwear to underprivileged children and delivering relief supplies to flood-affected communities. As Ramadan continues, organizers say they remain committed to ensuring that no deserving family in their operating areas goes hungry, embodying the spirit of sharing and compassion that defines the holy month. They have already announced plans to expand the initiative further, with a ten-day temporary kitchen scheduled to be set up in Quetta in the coming days.—DNA

## Guardian's 40 years of protecting migratory birds at China's lake

NANCHANG: China's annual Spring Festival travel rush involving billions of passenger trips continues, while another seasonal migration is yet to begin at the country's largest freshwater lake, with more than 700,000 migratory birds gathered there set to start their northward trips from March. At the frontline of this avian journey stands Wang Xiaolong, a 61-year-old veteran who has dedicated four decades to bird conservation at Poyang Lake in east China's Jiangxi Province. At 6:30 a.m. in the morning, Wang boarded a ferry to the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve to start his patrol. Dressed in camouflage gear and wearing boots, he moved swiftly along the water's edge despite his age, while his sharp eyes scanned the area. Only his graying temples confirmed the 40 winters he has spent guarding this location Wang's connection to the lake runs deep. "When I was five, I went picking wild vegetables by the lake with my mother and saw a snow crane for the first time," he recalled. "It looked so elegant. It delighted my heart instantly. Even as a child, I thought: these graceful creatures must be protected." After retiring from military service at 21, Wang returned to his hometown and joined the Jiangxi Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Administration. He worked there until retirement and then continued as a volunteer. By his estimate, he has walked over 400,000 kilometers while on patrol — enough to circle the Earth 10 times. "Sometimes, even in my dreams, I see birds," he said. Poyang Lake is a vital wintering and stopover site along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, one of the globe's nine major flyways. With a surface area of up to 4,000 square km, it hosts more than 700,000 wintering birds every year, including the world's largest wintering population of Siberian cranes, also known as snow cranes. Its vast wetlands, a mosaic of lakes, mudflats and grassy islets, provide rich feeding grounds featuring aquatic plants, mollusks and fish. Within this expansive ecosystem lies a much smaller wetland, built to imitate the natural habitat: a rescue station for injured birds. Days ago, Wang received an urgent call about an injured oriental white stork found by villagers. He rushed to the scene along with rescue staff. The stork was found thin and weak, with a broken left wing. "We examined it carefully and wrapped the wound," Wang revealed. "Now it's resting peacefully at the rescue center." In the course of over 14,000 days of vigilance, Wang has rescued and released more than 300 birds. "Caring for them takes the same patience as raising children," he said with his eyes softening. Plans are underway to expand the facility into a 1,600-square-meter standardized rescue center, complete with an operating room, professional rehabilitation enclosures, and outdoor activity areas.—DNA

## Khojaly Genocide: A bloody chapter in 20th-century history

34 years ago, on the night of 25-26 February, Khojaly genocide, one of the most horrific crimes against humanity of the past century, was committed by Armenia against Azerbaijani civilians with particular brutality and cruelty. On the 34th anniversary of the Khojaly genocide, with profound sadness, we commemorate the victims of this horrible crime, which took the lives of 613 people, including 106 women, 70 elderly people, and 63 children in a single night. The chronology of massacres committed in the course of Armenia's aggression, particularly in the villages of Baghanis Ayrim, Imarat-Garvand, Tugh, Salakatin, Akhullu, Khojavand, Jamilly, Nabilar, Meshali, Hasanabad, Karkijahan, Gaybaly, Malibayli, Yuhari and Ashaghi Gushchular, Garadaghi, where the majority of the population were Azerbaijanis, reveals how the Khojaly genocide was an integral part of Armenia's policy of ethnic hatred and intolerance against Azerbaijanis. The Siege of Khojaly since 1991, transport communication and electricity cut-off, massive shelling, and unprecedented atrocities on the night of 25-26 February 1992, committed by the armed forces of Armenia against the civilian population with the assistance of the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the former USSR attest to the fact that this massacre was, at its core, a planned and intentional genocide. During the Khojaly genocide, 8 families were completely wiped out, 130 children lost one of their parents, and 25 children lost both of their parents, 1275 people, including 68 women and 26 children, were taken hostage. Characteristics of the Khojaly genocide, including the slaughter of civilians with particular cruelty, inhuman treatment, torture, and humiliation of the corpses were all contrary to international humanitarian law, human rights law, and international

conventions in this field, including the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and implies international legal responsibility. Confessions from perpetrators of the Khojaly genocide, especially the statement of Monte Melkonian, whose identity was also revealed by witnesses, that "Khojaly was a strategic goal, as well as an act of revenge," as well as acknowledgment of Serzh Sargsyan, former President of Armenia, who was one of the masterminds of the genocide that "Armenians was able to break the stereotype that they could not raise their hand against the Azerbaijani civilians" and "absolutely no regrets regarding this" prove that the Khojaly genocide was purposefully committed and that Armenia bears international legal responsibility. As a result of the international community's disregard for the facts and evidence of the Khojaly genocide, Armenia continued its war crimes against Azerbaijanis throughout the former occupation period and during the 44-day Patriotic War, particularly attacking civilian targets. The restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as a result of the Patriotic War and Azerbaijan's sovereignty as a result of the counter-terrorism measures of 19-20 September 2023, the liberation of Khojaly, and the legal prosecution of war criminals are the embodiments of historical justice. It should be emphasized that Pakistan has consistently demonstrated its support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and inviolability of Azerbaijan's borders, in accordance with the demands of the aforementioned UN Security Council resolutions.

The principled position displayed by Pakistan during the Patriotic War of Azerbaijan and the continuous political and moral support provided to Azerbaijan's just position were a true manifestation of the brotherly relations between the fraternal countries. Furthermore, Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize the Khojaly Genocide. In this context, it should be noted that over the past periods, the National Assembly and the Senate of Pakistan have adopted various resolutions condemning the Khojaly genocide. Immediately after the historic Victory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, large-scale restoration and reconstruction work, including key infrastructure projects, were launched in the Karabakh and East Zangezur regions, and thousands of people have returned to their native lands. Like in other liberated territories, today life returns to Khojaly, which remains one of the incurable wounds of the Azerbaijani people, and the state and people of Azerbaijan do not forget the victims of the genocide and keep their memories alive. Azerbaijan has always advocated a peace agenda and actively pursued measures to achieve lasting peace and stability in the region. Currently, significant progress has been made in this regard. On August 8, 2025, a Joint Declaration was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the witness of the US in Washington. Thus, an important historic step was made towards ending the long-lasting conflict between the countries. Initiating of a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia creates favorable opportunities not only for the region but also for the wider geography. The full instauration of prosperity in the South Caucasus will open up opportunities not only for the region but also for the regions beyond.—Agencies

## Number of UK young people not in work or education nears 1m

LONDON: Nearly 1 million Britons aged 16-24 were not in employment, education or training at the end of last year, the second-highest level in more than a decade, according to official data released on Thursday. The rate of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is sometimes seen as a better guide to labor market difficulties than the headline youth unemployment rate, which was the highest in 10 years in the last quarter of 2025. Thursday's data showed that the number of NEETs aged 16-24 rose to 957,000 in the last quarter of 2025 from 946,000 the quarter before — just short of 971,000 in the final quarter of 2024 which was the highest since 2014. The latest NEET rate is equivalent 12.8 percent of the workforce, up from 12.7 percent in the last quarter but below a 10-year high of 13.2 percent a year earlier and compares to an unemployment rate of 16.1 percent for 16-64 year olds. Earlier this week, Bank of England Chief Economist Huw Pill told a parliamentary committee that a rise in the minimum wage and employer social security charges had contributed to the difficulty young people face in getting a foothold in the job market. This view is shared by many academic economists: 15 out of 19 in a poll by Britain's National Institute of Economic and Social Research and the London School of Economics' Center for Macroeconomics judged that government policy had a "very" or "moderately important" driver of youth unemployment. LSE economics professor Ricardo Reis said "government policy changes are the most likely proximate cause for such large movements in young joblessness," though he added that there was not conclusive evidence, and others pointed to broader economic weakness and artificial intelligence as factors. Louise Murphy, a senior economist at the Resolution Foundation think tank, said finance minister Rachel Reeves should use a fiscal statement next week to widen eligibility for work placements and to pause plans to narrow the gap between the minimum wage rates for 18-20 year olds and older workers.—APP

## Kids from Gaza return after medical treatment

LONDON: A group of Palestinian children are returning home to Gaza after medical treatment in Jordanian hospitals. The patients, who included 10 children and 18 members of their families, crossed King Hussein Bridge on the border between Jordan and the West Bank on Wednesday, the Jordan News Agency reported. Jordanian authorities said the group was returning to Gaza after treatment in line with Jordan's commitment to support for Palestinians and the prevention of displacement from their land. Jordan has been organizing medical evacuations from Gaza since March last year, during which time 635 children and 1,598 caregivers have been taken to hospitals in Jordan.—APP

## Reopening Syria embassy in Washington discussed

LONDON: Syria's foreign minister, Asaad Al-Shaibani, and the US special envoy for Syria, Tom Barrack, on Wednesday discussed the steps required to reopen the Syrian embassy in Washington, D.C. They also talked about the establishment of an international committee to ensure transparency in the process to eliminate the chemical weapons under Syrian supervision, the Syrian Arab News Agency reported. During their meeting in Damascus they addressed a number of strategic issues with the aim of promoting a new phase of bilateral cooperation, and reaffirmed a strong shared commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria.—APP

## Briefs

**Pak seeks \$4-5bn joint investment to redevelop Roosevelt Hotel**

Govt expected to appoint financial adviser by first week of March

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is moving forward to secure between \$4 billion and \$5 billion in joint investment for the redevelopment of the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, with the government expected to appoint a financial adviser by the first week of next month. When asked about the possibility of signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Donald Trump administration, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation Muhammad Ali said the government's financial adviser would develop a transaction structure for redevelopment of the Roosevelt Hotel in New York. Speaking to reporters at the Pakistan Governance Forum (PGF), organised by the Ministry of Planning on Wednesday, he explained that under the proposed model, the government would retain ownership of the property, while an interested party would arrange financing for construction. The objective, he added, is to generate long-term benefits for the country rather than sell the high-value asset outright. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said that Pakistan responded to the newly evolving architecture on relationship among the countries based on tailored cooperation with our partner countries.

**Imran's health echoes across UK Parliament**

NEWS DESK

LONDON: The imprisonment and reported deteriorating health of former prime minister Imran Khan came under sustained scrutiny in the UK Parliament on Tuesday. Peers across party lines pressed the Labour government to intensify diplomatic engagement with Islamabad and consider linking aid and trade to human rights benchmarks. The issue was raised during oral questions led by Labour peer Baroness Alexander of Clevedon, who asked about discussions with the government of Pakistan regarding Imran's incarceration. Responding on behalf of the Foreign Office, Minister of State Baroness Chapman of Darlington reiterated that while Pakistan's judicial processes are a matter for its own authorities, UK had consistently raised concerns over fundamental rights.

**Japan births fall for 10th straight year**

NEWS DESK

TOKYO: The number of births in Japan fell for the 10th straight year in 2025, official data showed on Thursday, highlighting the challenges for Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. A total of 705,809 babies were born in Japan, the preliminary health ministry data showed, down 2.1 per cent from 2024. The data includes births to Japanese nationals in Japan, foreign births in Japan and babies born to Japanese nationals overseas. Meanwhile, 505,656 couples got married in 2025, up 1.1pc, while the number of divorces fell 3.7pc to 182,969 cases. There were 1,605,654 deaths, down 13,030 or 0.8pc from 2024. The internal affairs ministry estimated Japan's overall population as of February at 122.86 million people, down 0.47pc, or 580,000, from a year ago.

## Trump hits out at reports

# Top US general warned against attacking Iran

General Caine has reportedly cautioned that a military action could have repercussions across the region, potentially including retaliatory strikes by Iranian proxies or a larger conflict that would require more US forces

DNA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has lashed out at reports that his top military adviser had urged caution on air strikes against Iran, saying the general believes it would be "easily won". Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Dan Caine, has warned that strikes against Iran could be risky, potentially drawing the US into a prolonged conflict, US media report. General Caine has reportedly cautioned that a military action could have repercussions across the region, potentially including retaliatory strikes by Iranian proxies or a larger conflict that would require more US forces. In a lengthy post on Truth Social, Trump described the reports as "fake news". "General Caine, like all of us, would like not to see war, but, if a decision is made on

going against Iran at a military level, it is his opinion that it will be something easily won," the president wrote. "He has not spoken of not doing Iran, or even the fake limited strikes that I have been reading about," Trump added. "He knows only one thing, how to win, and, if he is told to do so, will be leading the pack." The US has been reinforcing its forces in the region in recent weeks, one of the largest build-ups in decades, to pressure Iran to curb its nuclear programme. Multiple outlets, including Axios and The Washington Post, had reported that General Caine and other Pentagon officials raised serious concerns in internal meetings about the risks of a US military operation against Iran. Citing several sources familiar with the discussions, Axios - which first reported the news - said that Caine was one of several people within Trump's inner circle

who were urging the president to proceed cautiously. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who is also Trump's son-in-law, are scheduled to meet Iranian negotiators in Geneva, the latest in a series of talks between the two sides. Trump has warned that he is considering a limited military strike on Iran. On 19 February, Trump said that the world would find out "over the next, probably, 10 days" whether the US will reach a deal with Iran or take military action. "We have to make a meaningful deal otherwise bad things happen," he added. Even as negotiations continue to take place, US forces have been conducting a massive military build-up in the region, including large numbers of refuelling and heavy lift aircraft and considerable naval firepower. Earlier this week, Witkoff told Fox News that Trump was questioning why Iran had not yet "capitulated" in the face of Washing-

ton's military build-up. BBC Verify has confirmed that the USS Gerald R Ford - the world's largest warship - passed through the Strait of Gibraltar towards the Mediterranean on Friday. Ship-tracking data also confirmed the USS Mahan, one of the destroyers in the warship's strike group, passed through the Strait. The Gerald R Ford had briefly broadcast its location off Morocco's Atlantic coast on Wednesday and is believed to be travelling to the Middle East where another US aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, was tracked earlier this week. Military experts have said that the build-up gives the US considerably more depth and sustainability than was the case before the military operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January or the previous airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities last June

## Pakistan urges steps to ensure safety of UN peace keepers

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: As one of the world's largest contributors to UN peacekeeping, Pakistan has issued a stark warning regarding the evolving dangers facing blue helmets, saying the growing use of unmanned aerial systems and other devices by hostile actors has transformed the threat environment. "Peacekeeping environments are becoming more complex, more fluid and more lethal," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told an event held at UN Headquarters in New York to discuss the 'Safety and Security of UN Peacekeepers in the Context of Emerging Technologies'. "Our response must therefore be equally adaptive, coherent and collective," he said, adding that for troop- and police-contributing countries, safety and security of peacekeepers has a human dimension.

## Opp accepts govt talks offer

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: As the government and the PTI remain at loggerheads over the matter of former prime minister Imran Khan's eye treatment, the opposition alliance, Tehreek Tahafuz-e-Aiyen Pakistan (TTAP), has accepted the government's offer to hold negotiations to end the political deadlock in the country, it emerged on Thursday. The decision was taken during the opposition alliance's consultative meeting in Islamabad late on Wednesday night, sources privy to the development told Geo News. The meeting was attended by National Assembly Opposition Leader and PkMAP leader Mahmood Khan Achakzai, Senate Opposition Leader and Majlis-e-Wahdat Muslimeen leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser, TTAP leader Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar and others.



MANSEHRA: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sahrif visits the residence of Lt. Col. Shehzada Gull Faraz Shaheed and offers condolences to his family. Manshehra, 26 February, 2026. - DNA

## Illegal Israeli settlers ignite Palestinian homes

DNA

ILLEGAL Israeli settlers set fire to Palestinian houses and cars in the village of Susya, located south of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, during the holy month of Ramadan, Anadolu Agency reported, citing Al-Baidar Human Rights Organisation. Five residential properties and multiple vehicles were burned, the group reported, and added that settlers stormed the village, inflicting extensive material damage and instilling fear among local residents, especially women and children. Local sources said that settlers also launched tear gas canisters into several homes, causing four people to suffer breathing difficulties due to smoke inhalation. Violence by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank has intensified since the start of the Gaza conflict in October 2023.

## Israel committed record press killings

DNA

TEL AVIV: A record 129 journalists and media workers were killed worldwide in 2025, said the Committee to Protect Journalists on Wednesday, blaming Israel for two-thirds of the deaths. Over three-quarters of all the fatalities in 2025 were in conflict settings, the CPJ said in its report. More than 60% of the 86 members of the press killed by Israeli fire in 2025 were Palestinians reporting from Gaza, it added. The Israeli military maintains that it never deliberately targets journalists. "Journalists are being killed in record numbers at a time when access to information is more important than ever," CPJ CEO Jodie Ginsberg said in a statement. "We are all at risk when journalists are killed for reporting the news."

## FCC upholds tax officials' power to raid premises without prior notice

Court says it cannot impose conditions beyond powers granted to tax authorities by parliament

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: In a significant ruling, the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Thursday upheld the authority of tax officials to conduct enforcement raids without prior notice and without a pre-existing case against a taxpayer. Justice Aamir Farooq, issuing the verdict, ruled that tax authorities may carry out raids at any time and that such action does not require an existing case. The court rejected the argument that raids conducted without a pending case were unlawful. The court said in the judgment that parliament has granted tax authorities broad powers to enforce the law, and that the court cannot impose conditions that the legislature has not included. It further observed that where the wording of legislation is clear and unambiguous, courts cannot introduce limitations, reductions or interpretations that contradict the statute. However, the court emphasised that the commissioner must provide written reasons specifying which law has been violated when ordering a raid.

## 12-hour daily curfew imposed in S. Waziristan

Officials said in the statement that residents have been instructed to stop their vehicles at least 50 metres before approaching security forces and to ensure that all passengers exit the vehicle if required

PESHAWAR: The district administration on Thursday imposed Section 144 in the districts of Upper South Waziristan and Lower South Waziristan due to rising security concerns and to facilitate the movement of logistics for security forces. Officials said the move aims to ensure public safety, maintain law and order, and facilitate the uninterrupted operational movement of security personnel. Upper South Waziristan Deputy Commissioner Asmatullah Wazir confirmed that Section 144 has been enforced in the tehsils of Sarveki and Sararogha from 6am to 6pm. During this period, all movement will be strictly prohibited, and all markets and commercial centres will remain closed. The affected routes include Makin, Sararogha, Kot Kai and Spinkai Raghzai up to Nazar Khel. Additionally, the route from Dargai Bridge through Madi Jan, Sheen Warsak and Moley Khan Sarai to Chagmalai will also remain closed. Officials said in the statement that residents have been instructed to stop their vehicles at least 50 metres before approaching security forces and to ensure that all passengers exit the vehicle if required. - DNA

## PSX rebounds as institutions chase value shares

"Renewed institutional buying in value stocks and improving corporate earnings helped restore sentiments," says expert

DNA

KARACHI: The bourse rebounded on Thursday as renewed institutional buying in value names and improving corporate earnings helped restore confidence in index-heavy-weight shares, after rollover-week deleveraging left the market with a firmer base. The Pakistan Stock Exchange's (PSX) benchmark KSE-100 Index closed at 168,893.08 points, up 4,266.79 points, or 2.59%, from the previous close of 164,626.29. The index reached an intraday high of 169,374.27 (up 4,747.98 points, or 2.88%) and a low of 162,953.63 (down 1,672.66 points, or -1.02%). "Renewed institutional buying in value stocks and improving corporate earnings helped restore sentiments in index-heavy-weight stocks," said Huzaifa Riaz, Director, Mayari Securities (Pvt) Limited. "The reversal also followed a phase of systematic deleveraging earlier during the rollover week, offering the market a firmer base for the next move," he added. National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) posted record earnings of Rs85 billion for calendar year 2025, up 227% from a year earlier, with EPS of Rs39.9 and a highest-ever cash dividend of Rs35 per share (vs Rs8 in 2024). On a quarterly basis, profit was Rs19.3 billion, down 13% YoY and 16% from the previous quarter. Net interest income rose 45% to Rs248.6 billion, driven by a 42% decline in interest expense that more than offset a 28% drop in interest income. JS Bank Limited reported profit before tax of Rs6.19 billion

for 2025 (vs Rs6.37 billion a year earlier). Profit after tax was Rs2.79 billion, while EPS stood at Rs1.36 (vs Rs1.39 in 2024). Total income increased 4.0% YoY to Rs40.31 billion; net interest income was flat at Rs27.15 billion, while non-mark-up income rose 17% to Rs13.16 billion. Total assets grew 3% to Rs655.64 billion, and the deposit mix improved as non-remunerative deposits rose 12% YoY to Rs222.12 billion, lifting their share to 41% from 38%. United Bank Limited (UBL) reported consolidated fourth-quarter earnings of Rs29.9 billion (EPS Rs11.9), up 15% YoY but down 15% from the previous quarter. For full-year 2025, UBL posted earnings of Rs130 billion (EPS Rs51.9), up 73% from 2024, and declared a final dividend of Rs8 per share, taking the total 2025 payout to Rs29.5 per share. Topline Research said the fourth-quarter result fell short of industry expectations due to higher non-interest expenses, with operating costs rising 21% YoY and 34% QoQ to Rs43.6 billion. Pakistan's non-bank financial sector expanded in the second half of 2025, with total assets rising 21% to Rs6.84 trillion by December 31, 2025, from Rs5.63 trillion at end-June, according to the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). Mutual funds managed Rs4.5 trillion—66.3% of total assets—with allocation of 44% in money market funds, 23% in income funds and 14% in equity funds. Mutual fund investor accounts rose 8.0% to 845,000 by end-December, while voluntary pension scheme accounts reached 143,154, up 30% since June 2025.

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