



Islamabad POST

Saturday, February 28, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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Detailed News On Page-08

Embarrassing defeat for UK's PM in local poll

Detailed News On Page-08

Pak values ties with Portugal, says Speaker

Detailed News On Page-04



ISPR chief says

Over 274 Taliban killed in Pakistan's retaliatory response

Lt Gen Chaudhry says 12 Pakistani soldiers martyred, 27 wounded; Taliban's 150 tanks, armoured vehicles destroyed



ANSAR M BHATTI

RAWALPINDI: At least 274 Taliban regime personnel and terrorists have been killed so far in Pakistan's retaliatory action following unprovoked aggression along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, said the chief military spokesperson on Friday. Addressing a press conference to brief the media on border clashes with Taliban regime, ISPR DG Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that Pakistan targeted terrorist hideouts on the night of February 21 and 22 in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban regime used the situation as a pretext to initiate a "so-called action", he added. Lt Gen Chaudhry stated that firing was carried out in 15 sectors along the Pakistan-Afghan border at 53 different locations, adding that all attacks were effectively repulsed. Pakistan retaliated with full force after the Afghan Taliban fighters resorted to unprovoked firing along multiple sectors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), including Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur. Thursday night.

In their retaliatory attacks, Pakistan's armed forces destroyed several key Afghan Taliban posts, while the PAF conducted strikes in Kandahar, Kabul, and Paktia. Sharing operational details, the ISPR DG said that 274 personnel of the Taliban regime and members of affiliate terror groups were killed, while more than 400 were injured during the operation. He added that over 74 posts of the Taliban regime were destroyed, and 18 checkpoints were taken into Pakistan's custody. The ISPR DG said that Pakistani forces destroyed 115 enemy tanks and armoured vehicles, while also targeting 22 hideouts of Fitna al-Hindustan and Fitna al-Khawarij during the action. He said that militants fled the area, leaving behind the bodies of their associates following Pakistan's befitting response to the unprovoked firing. As many as 12 security personnel embraced martyrdom while 27 sustained injuries during Pakistan's retaliatory response, he added. He said that the retaliatory operation continues under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's directives. "Our operation last night was for the defence of our country and the protection of our people," he said, adding that the forces acted in a professional manner and targeted only military objectives. He added that drone attacks in KP's Abbottabad and Nowshera were foiled during the exchange of fire with the Taliban regime. Lt Gen Chaudhry assailed the Afghan Taliban regime for "patronising terrorists," warning that if any act of terrorism or suicide bombing occurs anywhere in Pakistan, the response would target not only the perpetrators but also those providing them shelter or protection. The ISPR DG said that Afghanistan would have to choose between terror outfits and Pakistan.

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RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif along with his core political team visited the GHQ and met with Field Marshal Asim Munir and his team. The PM expressed solidarity with the armed forces. - DNA

PM Shehbaz gets briefing at GHQ

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi on Friday, where he received a detailed briefing from the military leadership on border clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Addressing senior military officials, the prime minister emphasised that a zero-tolerance approach must be maintained against the nexus between Fitna al-Khawarij and the Afghan Taliban regime, as well as malicious activities being carried out against Pakistan. He termed these cross-border attacks by the Afghan Taliban regime and Fitna al-Khawarij as "unacceptable" and reaffirmed the country's right to defend its territory. PM Shehbaz said that the armed forces were always ready to

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Indian court acquits Kejriwal

DNA

NEW DELHI: An Indian court acquitted the former chief minister of the capital Delhi on Friday in a long-running corruption probe the man had called a "political conspiracy" by the ruling party. Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal was Delhi's chief minister before losing elections in 2025 in the midst of the judicial proceedings. Kejriwal, 57, who spent several months in jail after he was arrested in March 2024 on accusations that his administration received kickbacks from the allocation of liquor licenses, wept as he left court. "Truth has won," Kejriwal told reporters after the verdict.

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Cross border tensions

World reacts to eruption of Pak, Afghan fighting

Countries around the world are urging the warring parties to show restraint

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has said it is now in "open war" with Afghanistan's Taliban government as explosions were reported in Kabul and fighting continues in other locations along the border. Pakistan says it has also attacked Kandahar and Paktika inside Afghanistan. The declaration on Friday comes hours after Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said Afghanistan was carrying out "large-scale offensive operations" against the Pakistani military along the Durand Line" which separates the two countries. The Taliban said its attack was in response to a separate round of Pakistani air strikes earlier this week. Here is how countries and institutions are reacting: United Nations: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is closely monitoring the situation, expressing

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China mediates Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict

DNA

BEIJING: China has been mediating the Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict through its own channels and is willing to continue to play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation and improving relations between the two countries. This was stated by the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning on Friday in response to a question concerning the fierce clashes and rapid escalation of

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United States-Iran talks end with no deal

US military buildup near Iran has raised fears of regional conflict as Trump threatens to carry out attack

DNA

WASHINGTON: The United States and Iran made progress in talks over Tehran's nuclear program on Thursday, mediator Oman said, but hours of negotiation ended with no sign of a breakthrough that could avert potential US strikes amid a massive military buildup. The two sides plan to resume negotiations soon after consultations in their countries' capitals, with technical-level discussions scheduled to take place next week in Vienna, Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi said in a post on X after the day's meetings in Switzerland.

Badr Albusaidi will hold talks with US Vice President JD Vance and other US officials in Washington on Friday, MS NOW reported late on Thursday. Neither the White House nor Oman's embassy in Washington immediately responded to requests for comment. Any substantial move toward an elusive agreement between longtime foes Washington and Tehran could reduce the imminent prospects for US President Donald Trump to carry out a threatened attack on Iran that many fear could escalate into a wider war. But Tuesday's indirect talks wrapped up without a deal, still leaving the region on edge.

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Briefs

FO warns against any further adventure

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Friday warned that any further provocation by the Afghan Taliban regime and terrorist groups "will be met with a measured, decisive and befitting response". The statement came in the aftermath of Pakistan launching Operation Ghazab lil-Haq against the Afghan Taliban after "unprovoked firing" from across the border overnight. In its statement, the FO said that Pakistan's actions came in response to "repeated terrorist attacks by Fitna-al-Khawarij and Fitna-al-Hindustan against Pakistan emanating from Afghan soil, as well as the latest unwarranted and provocative actions by the Taliban regime". Fitna al-Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), while Fitna al-Hindustan is a term designated by the state for terrorist organisations in Balochistan. It said that the armed forces carried out "precise operations, inflicting heavy losses on terrorist outfits and targeting their logistical support bases in Afghanistan" on the night of February 26. The statement maintained that the actions taken by Pakistan were "in exercise of its right to self-defence and to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, as well as that of the wider region and beyond".

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. - Editor

To resolve issue

Afghan govt says wants 'dialogue'

"We have repeatedly emphasised a peaceful solution, and still want the problem to be resolved through dialogue," Taliban regime spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in a news conference

NEWS DESK

KABUL: The Taliban regime in Afghanistan on Friday said it wanted "dialogue" to resolve its conflict with neighbouring Pakistan following deadly fighting. "We have repeatedly emphasised a peaceful solution, and still want the problem to be resolved through dialogue," Taliban regime spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said in a news conference. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held a phone conversation with his Egyptian counterpart Dr Badr Abdelaty in which they exchanged views on recent regional developments, including the situation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Dar said the armed forces were carrying out a successful actions under Operation Ghazab lil-Haq to safeguard the country's sovereignty

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Pakistan security non-negotiable

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari have issued strong statements reaffirming Pakistan's resolve to defend its sovereignty, territory, and people in the wake of intensified cross-border confrontations with Afghan Taliban forces. The remarks from the country's top leadership come after the armed forces launched Operation Ghazab-lil-Haq after the Taliban regime's unprovoked action along

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SC objects to PTI's plea seeking Imran's transfer to hospital

CJP Afridi told the lawyers that the "application was returned with objections a day earlier". "Your petitions will remain pending until further orders," he said to the lawyers

FAISAL SHIEKH

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday raised objections to a plea seeking the transfer of PTI founder Imran Khan to a hospital. The application was filed by PTI lawyer Sardar Latif Khosa on February 25, pursuant to Order XXXV Rule 6 of the Supreme Court Rules 2025, after Imran underwent government-facilitated follow-up treatment for his eye ailment. PTI lawyers Khosa, along with Naem Panjtoha, appeared before SC Chief Justice Yahya Afridi on Friday, seeking the scheduling of PTI's application. However, CJP Afridi told the lawyers that the "application was returned with objections a day earlier". "Your petitions will remain pending until further orders," he said to the lawyers. "There is no such application at the moment, on which proceedings can be held," he added. Khosa informed CJP Afridi that the PTI counsels had requested an early hearing, adding that the court had ordered

the former premier's treatment. At this, CJP Afridi said that the court had not issued an order; rather, it was the government that had given assurances for the treatment. "You should read the court's decision again as the health issue is not pending," CJP Afridi remarked. Khosa informed the court that the transfer application was made "not on legal or political but humanitarian grounds". In response to this, CJP Afridi held that the former premier's recent medical check-up was carried out on "humanitarian grounds". "Please try to understand what I am saying," Khosa insisted, at which Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan remarked, "I have known you since 1992, I understand everything you are saying". "Khosa sahib, you are a senior lawyer, you understand the procedure," the CJP said, directing Khosa to meet the SC registrar. "If the SC registrar does not give a copy of the objections, then you may come to court," CJP Afridi said. "If the order was issued yesterday, then how did no

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Pak forces gave strong response to Afghan Taliban: Tessori

KARACHI: The Governor of Sindh Muhammad Kamran Khan Tessori on Friday paid tributes to the security forces for their immediate and effective response to unprovoked firing by the Afghan Taliban in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). He said that Pakistan is delivering a robust and effective response under the leadership of Field Marshal Asim Munir. The Air Force and the Army destroyed the enemy's hideouts, the Governor of Sindh said adding that brave soldiers of the Pakistan Army crushed the arrogance of the Afghan Taliban regime. Tessori said that the Afghan Taliban regime has been dealt with such a severe blow that they will remember it for a long time. He said that the Taliban regime should come to its senses even now; otherwise, they will be wiped out, warned the Governor. "Cross-border terrorism allegedly backed by India will be responded to strongly and effectively", he remarked. The Governor said that Pakistan's armed forces are fully alert and ever ready to safeguard national security. He said that no compromise will be made on national security and country's defense will be ensured at all costs. He further said that the entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its brave armed forces and the enemy will face a humiliating defeat as always.—APP

Widow Sahara Card Scheme formally announced

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has formally announced the Widow Sahara Card Scheme 2026 for financial assistance to widows. Under the scheme, eligible and registered widows across the province will be provided financial assistance ranging from Rs 100,000 to Rs 150,000. According to the Punjab government, the aim of this scheme is to provide financial support to widows, help them meet their basic needs and provide them with opportunities to become self-sufficient. According to the announcement, the amount of financial assistance will vary according to the type of family and the number of children. A widow supporting one child will be given Rs 125,000 (with an additional Rs 25,000), while women supporting two or more children will be given up to Rs 150,000 (with an additional Rs 50,000). The basic assistance amount has been set at Rs 100,000. According to officials, the scheme will be launched from February 2026, while the registration process will continue until March 14. The applicant must be a permanent resident of Punjab and be a widow. In addition, a certified identity card from NADRA, the husband's death certificate, and the children's B form will have to be submitted. Two methods have been introduced to submit applications. Widows can submit their applications through the online portal or by contacting the nearest registration centers.—APP

CM KP assures border area protection

Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sohail Afridi strongly condemned any provocation or external aggression along the Pak-Afghan border and emphasized that national security would not be compromised under any circumstances

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sohail Afridi on Friday chaired a high-level meeting to review the overall law and order situation in the province amid tension on Pak-Afghan border. He assured that the provincial government is closely monitoring the situation while remaining in constant contact with relevant authorities and that the protection of citizens' lives and property remains the top priority. Addressing the meeting, the chief minister said safeguarding every inch of Pakistan is a collective national responsibility and vowed that no compromise would be allowed on the security of border areas. He strongly condemned any provocation or external aggression along the Pak-Afghan border and emphasized that national security would not be compromised under any circumstances. Afridi praised the sacrifices of police and Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) personnel, noting that recent terrorist incidents demand more effective and coordinated security measures.

He directed relevant departments to adopt a comprehensive strategy, assured the provision of all necessary resources, and emphasized that frontline forces would not be left at the mercy of anyone. "We must handle situations ourselves and use available resources effectively," he said. The CM ordered special security arrangements for religious gatherings during Ramadan, including Khatm-ul-Quran events. He instructed the police to fill vacant positions promptly and ensure strict adherence to SOPs. He also directed the formulation of a formal policy to provide artificial limbs to personnel injured in terrorist attacks, pledging full support to young men risking their lives for the nation. Briefings highlighted that the police department had received Rs15.1 billion for procurement in the current fiscal year, with tests completed for over 9,000 vacant posts. Recruitment is expected to be finalized before Eid. The meeting reviewed the progress of Safe City projects wherein

it was informed that the Peshawar Safe City Project is ready for formal inauguration, while projects in Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat are scheduled for completion by March 31. Safe City PC-1s for Karak, Tank, and North Waziristan have been submitted to the Interior Department, and plans for the merged districts will be included in the new fiscal year. An in-principle decision was made to integrate CCTV cameras from the Excise, Dastak Data, BRT, Local Government, and Education departments with Safe City projects. The CM instructed immediate follow-up meetings to ensure timely implementation and public awareness. Finally, Sohail Afridi directed district administrations to remain on high alert to respond swiftly to any emergency. He announced that weekly security review meetings will be held to monitor the situation regularly and ensure sustainable peace across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—APP

Ahsan Bakhtawari hosts iftar for diplomats, friends



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Bakhtawari chairman clean and Green movement Islamabad hosted an iftar dinner for his diplomatic friends at his residence which

was attended by H.E. Atajan Movlamov, Ambassador of Turkmenistan and dean of diplomatic core; H.E. Ms Ina Lepel, Ambassador of Germany; H.E. Ms Mary O'Neil, Ambassador of Ireland; H.E. Wolfgang Olliver Kutschera, Ambassador of

Austria; H.E. Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of Azerbaijan; H.E. Alisher Tukhtayev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan; H.E. Sharifzoda Yusuf, Ambassador of Tajikistan; H.E. Pham Anh Tuan, Ambassador of Vietnam; H.E. Azhar bin Mazlan, High Commissioner of

Malaysia; H.E. Ms Rita Dhital, Ambassador of Nepal; H.E. Fred Seneviratne, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka; H.E. Mansoor Karim Bakhsh, High Commissioner of Mauritius; H.E. Wuma Han, Ambassador of Myanmar; H.E. Ms Fatou Harerimana, Ambassador of Rwan-

da; and H.E. Sheikh Nur Mohamad Hassan, Ambassador of Somalia. The event was also graced by many other distinguished guests including Hassan Ali Zaigham DG MOFA, Choudhry Abdul Majeed, Senator Abdul Qadir, Ms Farah Naz Akbar Parliamentary Secretary, Sal-

im Safi and Malik Yaseen, whose presence added warmth and grace to the blessed Ramadan gathering. The evening reflected the true spirit of Ramadan, fostering friendship, goodwill and meaningful exchange among the esteemed guests in a serene and cordial atmosphere.

CM Sindh boosts Kidney Centre funding

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah announced a major increase in provincial support for The Kidney Centre, pledged funding for a new cardiac catheterisation (cath) lab, and strongly cautioned against the spread of fake news, while also addressing national security, policing issues and political controversies.

The chief minister was speaking to the media and addressing a ceremony at The Kidney Centre after inaugurating a newly established Intensive Care Unit (ICU), developed with the support of the Sindh government.

The event was attended by Provincial Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, senior health officials, and the hospital's management, including Chairperson Friends of the Kidney Centre Marriana Karim, Board Chairman Adnan Afridi, CEO Dr Rashid Joona, Administrator Dr Saeed Chishty, Dean Dr Asim Ahmed, and Head of Surgery Dr Salman El Khalid.

Addressing the ceremony, the chief minister said the Sindh government takes pride in working with credible non-profit organisations through public-private partnerships. "These are fundamentally government responsibilities, but when sincere and capable partners are available, the outcomes are far

better," he said.

Announcing a significant financial boost, CM Murad Ali Shah said the provincial government would increase its annual grant to The Kidney Centre to Rs500 million from next year, up from the current Rs300 million. He also pledged funding for the establishment of a cath lab at the hospital, saying he would personally return to inaugurate it. Shah recalled that the Kidney Centre had also received support in the past from Shaheed Mohtarama Benazir Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari, underscoring its national importance and credibility. "The Sindh government is providing over Rs100 billion in grants to the health sector. Our objective is to ensure that every citizen has access to the best possible healthcare facilities," he added. The chief minister praised the Kidney Centre's 41 years of uninterrupted service and lauded the culture of philanthropy associated with it, noting that even schoolchildren had raised donations for the institution. He paid special tribute to Marriana Karim for her four decades of tireless fundraising efforts that helped build and sustain the hospital. Speaking to the media, CM Murad Ali Shah commented on the regional security situation, stating that there had been an attempt from Af-

ghanistan to launch an attack under the cover of darkness, which was effectively thwarted. "This response is a clear message to anyone casting an evil eye on Pakistan, whether on the eastern or western borders," he said, adding that the nation had previously demonstrated unity in the face of aggression. "The entire nation stands united against the enemy," he stressed. Murad Shah said tensions had persisted for about a week, with intelligence reports pointing to possible terrorist threats, prompting precautionary measures. He added that action regarding Afghan nationals would continue in accordance with national security requirements. Addressing the recent police action in Umerkot, the chief minister clarified that the operation was carried out under court orders but strongly criticised the conduct of the police. "The manner in which the police acted is unacceptable in any form," he said, adding that he had personally sought details from the provincial ministers for home and education.

The CM assured that strict action would be taken against the officials involved. "I give my word that the Sindh government will take action against any form of abuse or excess, especially when it involves women," he said.—DNA

Police solve lady doctor murder case, arrest 2 suspects

PESHAWAR: The Kohat district police on Friday claimed to have solved the murder case of lady doctor Mahwish and arrested two suspects after an intensive, technology-driven investigation conducted under challenging security conditions. According to a police spokesman, Dr. Mahwish was killed near Usman Mosque, close to KDA Hospital, at around 8:05 p. m. on February 22. Her husband, Muhammad Hasnain, a resident of KDA, told police in his initial statement that they had no personal enmity with anyone. Police then pursued the case on modern investigative lines, examining multiple angles to trace the perpetrators. The provincial government, provincial health department and senior civil and police leadership, including Inspector General KP Police Zulfiqar Hameed, Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, Commissioner Kohat Syed Motasim Billah Shah and DIG Kohat Irfan Tariq, took strict notice of the incident and directed police to ensure swift arrests. District Police Officer Kohat Shehbaz Elahi constituted special investigation teams comprising the SP City, SP Investigation, DSP Headquarters, investigation staff and the SHO of KDA Police Station.

The teams carried out intelligence-based raids at various locations and used modern technology along with human intelligence to track the suspects. Police recovered the murder weapon, along with a motorcycle and a rickshaw allegedly used in the crime. Investigations revealed that the accused Hayat Gul, and Saif Ali residents of Ghamkol Camp were involved in the killing. After coordinated raids across multiple districts, police arrested both suspects from Ghamkol No. 3. Initial interrogation indicated that a verbal dispute between Hayat Gul and the doctor escalated into the fatal attack. Police said the case remained highly sensitive as the district was simultaneously facing serious security challenges, including a recent terrorist attack in which DSP Lachi and five other police personnel were martyred. Despite these pressures, Kohat police continued the investigation with professionalism and persistence, leading to the arrest of the accused.

Further investigation is under way, and police officials said a strong, evidence-based challan will be submitted to the court to secure exemplary punishment for the perpetrators.—APP

No compromise on motherland, Says Mashhood

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan on Thursday delivered a forceful message of resolve, declaring that Pakistan will never yield to pressure or expediency when it comes to the defense of its soil, its people, and its borders. Condemning the Afghan regime's targeting of innocent civilians, he said the protection of the motherland remains a sacred and non negotiable duty. Speaking in an exclusive interview with APP, Rana Mashhood said the state stands fully prepared to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and will respond decisively to any act of aggression. He stressed that Pakistan's resolve is rooted not only in military strength but in the collective will of its people. In a series

of emphatic remarks, he condemned in the strongest terms any actions that place civilian lives at risk, warning that such moves undermine regional peace and stability.

He made it clear that Pakistan possesses the complete capacity, determination, and resolve to safeguard its frontiers and that no compromise will be tolerated on matters of national security. Paying tribute to the armed forces, the PMYP chairman said the nation takes rightful pride in their professionalism, sacrifices, and unwavering commitment.

He added that the people of Pakistan and their military stand united like a wall of lead, vigilant and unshaken in the face of threats Rana Mashhood expressed concern that in recent years Afghan soil has unfortunately been used as a refuge

by elements hostile to Pakistan. He pointed to the continued presence of terrorist groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, which he said have remained involved in violence, instability, and acts of subversion against the country. Referring to recent unprovoked aggression, he said Pakistan has sent a clear and unmistakable message that the defense of the motherland is beyond negotiation. Any form of adventurism, he warned, would invite a timely, effective, and proportionate response. Reiterating Pakistan's desire for peace and stability in the region, Rana Mashhood emphasized that while Pakistan seeks harmony with its neighbors, it will remain unwavering and resolute in safeguarding its sovereignty, people, and territorial integrity.—DNA

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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
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Feb 23/Tajikistan Armed Forces Day
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RGH.....9290301-7
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RDA.....5555864
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Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Monal Group hosts grand Iftar at newly inaugurated rooftop venue

The event drew hundreds of distinguished guests who gathered to break their fast amid an exquisite culinary experience and a serene ambiance. Attendees were treated to mesmerizing sunset views over Islamabad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of The Monal Group, Luqman Ali Afzal, hosted a splendid Iftar dinner at the newly inaugurated Monal restaurant located on the rooftop of IMARAT Downtown Mall, marking a soft opening of this iconic dining destination during the holy month of Ramadan. The event drew hundreds of distinguished guests who gathered to break their fast amid an exquisite culinary experience and a serene ambiance. Attendees were treated to mesmerizing sunset views over Islamabad, adding a magical touch to the evening as the sun dipped below the horizon. Among the prominent figures present were Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, federal and provincial ministers, diplomats, leading members of the business community, civil society representatives, and prominent media personalities.

Their attendance underscored the significance of the occasion in fostering unity and goodwill during Ramadan. Guests savored a delectable spread of traditional Pakistani dishes alongside continental favorites, all prepared to Monal's renowned high standards. Attendees praised the impeccable arrangements, elegant decor, thoughtful hospitality, and the breathtaking panoramic environment offered by the rooftop setting one of the largest in the capital, providing stunning city vistas. This Iftar



served as a soft launch for Monal's latest branch at IMARAT Downtown, fol-



lowing the brand's grand opening earlier in 2025-2026 after its relocation and revival in partnership with IMARAT Group. The venue revives the beloved Monal legacy with modern elegance, signature cuisine, and unparalleled views, positioning it as a premier dining spot along the Islamabad Expressway. Luqman Ali Afzal welcomed guests warmly, emphasizing Monal's commitment to excellence and community during Ramadan. The evening embodied the spirit of togetherness, reflection, and celebration central to the month. The new Monal rooftop promises to become a go-to destination for fine dining, family outings, and special events, blending Islamabad's iconic flavors with contemporary luxury.

Complete record of Zaireen Organizers seek

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Religious Affairs and Inter-Faith Harmony on Thursday directed the Ministry concerned to submit a complete list of registered and unregistered Zaireen Group Organizers (ZGOs), along with their registration criteria and the names of their heads, to ensure transparency and effective oversight. The meeting, chaired by Ms. Shagufata Jumani, MNA, expressed concern over shortcomings in the selection of Moavineen and the Hajj Medical Mission, citing deficiencies in the NTS system, and recommended a merit-based review of the mechanism, stressing that age should not serve as a disqualifying factor and that merit must remain the paramount consideration. The Secretary, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter-Faith Harmony, briefed the Committee on the establishment of facilitation offices for Zaireen and the issue of subsidy packages. He informed that the Ministry's mandate is primarily regulatory,

confined to monitoring the services provided by Zaireen Group Organizers (ZGOs) in accordance with existing agreements. He added that the Ministry neither formulates nor offers Ziarat packages. It was further conveyed that the establishment of facilitation offices for Zaireen in Baghdad and Karbala-e-Mualla has formally been taken up with the concerned authorities; however, their operationalization remains subject to the consent and approval of the respective host countries. The Secretary further informed the Committee that a proposal seeking a reduction in PIA airfare for pilgrims was communicated to the Ministry of Defence; however, no response has yet been received. The Committee further resolved to recommend that a formal communication be addressed to the Office of the Prime Minister of Pakistan seeking an increase in the Minority Welfare Fund, noting that the current allocation is insufficient to meet prevailing needs. It empha-

sized that the enhancement of the Fund is essential to fostering inclusivity, promoting social equity, and safeguarding the welfare of minority communities, thereby enabling their meaningful participation in social, cultural, and religious spheres. The Committee confirmed the minutes of its previous meeting held on 26 January 2025 and conducted a detailed review of the implementation status of its earlier recommendations. The meeting was attended by Ms. Seema Mohi-ud-Din Jamili, Ms. Asiya Naz Tanoli, Ms. Shahnaz Saleem Malik, Ms. Muneeba Iqbal, Ms. Neelam, Dr. Nelson Azeem, Pir Syed Fazal Ali Shah Jillani, Ms. Musarat Rafique Mahesar, Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (via Zoom), Ahmed Saleem Siddiqui, Muhammad Ijaz-ul-Haq, and Ms. Naeema Kishwar Khan MNAs. The Secretary, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter-Faith Harmony, along with other senior officers of the Ministry, was also in attendance.—APP

NAVTTTC upgrading 12 model TVET institutes in Balochistan

Construction with Electrical/Energy has 10 institutes targeting 280 trainees, Languages include 10 institutes with 220 trainees, Mines & Mineral Industry covers 6 institutes with 224 trainees, Banking & Finance includes 4 institutes with 140 trainees, and HMO & Driving Trades comprise 4 institutes with a target of 108 trainees.

ISLAMABAD: The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), in collaboration with European Union and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), is establishing and upgrading 12 model technical and vocational education and training institutes in Balochistan. The initiative aims to modernize the province's training infrastructure by equipping institutes with advanced tools, machinery, and equipment to improve the quality of technical and vocational education. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, three centres of excellence are being established in Quetta and at Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, aimed at strengthening advanced skills development, innovation, and industry-oriented training, aligning local workforce capabilities with market demands. The document further reveals that under

China's assistance, several technical training centres in Balochistan have also been upgraded with modern facilities, including heavy-duty generators, latest computer systems, and improved furniture to create a conducive learning environment. Moreover, NAVTTTC has funded Balochistan TEVTA to train 300 candidates under a cluster-based industry-led training program, ensuring direct linkage between training institutes and industry needs. Speaking to Wealth Pakistan, Executive Director of NAVTTTC Muhammad Amir Jan said the initiative is expected to significantly enhance employability among youth, strengthen industrial productivity, and support sustainable economic growth in the province. He said the focus on modernized training infrastructure and market-relevant skills reflects a broader strategy to position Balochistan as a competitive contributor to Pakistan's skilled workforce in the coming years.

The document also shows that under the Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program (Batch-II) 2024-25, a total of 186 institutes have been allocated across Balochistan with a target of training 6,252 trainees in multiple sectors. The largest share has been allocated to Information Technology with 69 institutes and a target of 3,125 trainees, followed by Manufacturing & Textile with 38 institutes targeting 920 trainees. Aesthetics, Health Care & Services cover 31 institutes with 700 trainees, while Agriculture includes 14 institutes with a target of 535 trainees. Construction with Electrical/Energy has 10 institutes targeting 280 trainees, Languages include 10 institutes with 220 trainees, Mines & Mineral Industry covers 6 institutes with 224 trainees, Banking & Finance includes 4 institutes with 140 trainees, and HMO & Driving Trades comprise 4 institutes with a target of 108 trainees.—DNA

NAB recovers Rs 11t in 5 years, Senate told

ISLAMABAD: The Senate was informed on Friday that the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had recovered Rs11.56 trillion during the last five years through direct recoveries, plea bargains, voluntary returns, settlements and retrieval of state land. Responding to a question raised by Senator Talha Mahmood, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar said the total recoveries amounted to Rs11,565,257.62 million and were achieved through co-ordinated efforts of NAB with the support of federal and provincial governments. The minister said large tracts of state land — including forest land — that had remained under illegal occupation for decades in various provinces, particularly Punjab and Sindh, were retrieved and handed over to the relevant provincial authorities. He added that the recovered land was duly endorsed by the respective provincial departments. Providing a year-wise breakdown, Tarar told the House in 2021 NAB made direct recoveries of Rs16,953.79 million, along with Rs48.58 million through voluntary returns and Rs69,289.46 million under miscellaneous recoveries. In 2022, direct recoveries stood at Rs3,927.19 million, while Rs10 million was recovered through voluntary return and Rs554.35 million under miscellaneous heads. For the period from 2023 to 2025, NAB recovered Rs45,002.11 million directly, Rs50.22 million through voluntary return, Rs38,004.29 million through settlements, Rs10,982,000 million in state land recoveries, and Rs409,417.63 million under miscellaneous recoveries. The law minister said NAB was an independent institution functioning under its own legal framework. He noted that significant amendments to accountability laws were introduced in June 2023 to enhance transparency and prevent misuse of the accountability process. Tarar said the bureau's recent focus had been on recovery of public money and minimising losses to the national exchequer.—APP

Danyal lauds forces for operation against Afghan Taliban

RAWALPINDI: Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Barrister Danyal Chaudhary on Friday paid tribute to the security forces for carrying out what he termed a successful operation against Afghan Taliban elements in a statement, he described the alleged attack by the Afghan Taliban as a 'grave mistake' and warned that the perpetrators would face serious consequences for what he called aggression. He strongly condemned the targeting of civilian population, saying the "cowardly enemy" attempted to strike under the cover of darkness and target innocent citizens, terming it open aggression and a violation of international law. He said such actions could prove dangerous for regional peace and stability and reiterated that Pakistan would not compromise on its sovereignty. The parliamentary secretary alleged that elements operating under India's patronage were attempting to sabotage peace in the region.—APP

Weekly inflation declines by 0.54pc

ISLAMABAD: Weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), recorded a decline of 0.54 percent for the combined consumption group during the week ended February 26, 2026, reflecting the impact of the government's ongoing measures to stabilise prices of essential commodities. The SPI for the week under review fell to 333.86 points from 335.67 points recorded in the previous week, according to official data available with APP. On a year-on-year basis, however, the SPI registered an increase of 4.23 percent. The SPI, with base year 2015-16 = 100, monitors price movements of 51 essential items across 17 urban centres, covering all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group (up to Rs 17,732) decreased by 0.71 percent to 323.48 points from 325.80 points, indicating relative relief for vulnerable segments amid continued administrative and supply-side interventions. Similarly, the SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,733-22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517, Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175 declined by 0.68 percent, 0.60 percent, 0.59 percent and 0.47 percent, respectively. During the week, out of 51 monitored items, prices of 14 items (27.45 percent) decreased, 13 items (25.49 percent) increased, while 24 items (47.06 percent) remained stable, suggesting improved market balance. Major commodities registering week-on-week decreases included tomatoes (29.67%), potatoes (10.62%), chicken (9.03%), onions (7.44%), eggs (3.43%), wheat flour (1.39%), bread (1.12%) and sugar (0.79%), reflecting better supply availability and effective price monitoring. On the other hand, prices of bananas (4.49%), shirting (1.36%), LPG (0.86%), garlic (0.81%), long cloth (0.70%), mutton (0.63%), pulse masoor (0.47%), lawn printed (0.44%), pulse mash (0.40%), powdered milk (0.26%) and curd and beef (0.25% each) witnessed a slight increase.—APP

Briefs

Battery-backed power system to deliver 100% reliable electricity

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has approved a comprehensive battery-backed power solution for Gwadar aimed at ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply to the port city by February or March next year, the Senate was informed on Friday. Responding to a question raised by Senator Jan Muhammad, Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari said the newly approved arrangement would guarantee "100 per cent reliable electricity" to Gwadar's critical grids, including the deep-sea port, desalination facilities and industrial zones. The minister said the decision was taken on the directions of the prime minister after an assessment of Gwadar's projected electricity requirements over the next four to five years. Current demand in the area stands at approximately 40 to 50 megawatts (MW). He explained that the new system would utilise battery energy storage systems (BESS) combined with low-cost backup generation to maintain a stable supply, particularly during disruptions from external sources. —APP

Gilani lauds armed forces

ISLAMABAD: Senate Chairman Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Friday paid tribute to the armed forces and security agencies for timely and effective response to aggression in the border areas from Afghanistan. In a statement issued by the Senate Secretariat's Media Directorate, Gilani said no compromise could be made on the country's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. He stated that any force or elements attempting to challenge Pakistan's borders and national security would be met with a strong, befitting and decisive response. Referring to last night's aggression in the border regions, which he attributed to the Afghan Taliban regime, the chairman said the armed forces had responded with exceptional professionalism, courage and well-calculated strategy. He termed the response commendable and a matter of national pride, and appreciated bravery, vigilance and unwavering commitment of security personnel in defending the homeland. "The entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its defenders," he said. Gilani further asserted that Pakistan's armed forces possessed full capability to defend every inch of the country and would not allow anyone to cast an evil eye on its territory. He underscored that the people of Pakistan, along with the armed forces and security institutions, were fully prepared to thwart and defeat any hostile designs. —APP

Parliament bridge between the aspirations of citizens

Chairman Senate congratulated Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, and his team for successfully organizing what he termed a "premier governance event" that brought together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to deliberate on reform priorities and transformative initiatives

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani has said that "Parliament is the bridge between the aspirations of our 240 million citizens and the actions of the government" he expressed these views while, addressing the concluding session of the Pakistan Governance Forum 2026, as Chief Guest, emphasizing that a strong and effective Parliament is the cornerstone of sustainable governance and democratic resilience in Pakistan. In his keynote address, the Chairman Senate congratulated Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, and his team for successfully organizing what he termed a "premier governance event" that brought together policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to deliberate on reform priorities and transformative initiatives. Reflecting on his extensive public service as former Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly, and now Chairman

Senate, Mr. Gilani highlighted the critical importance of legislative oversight in ensuring effective governance. He stated that governance is not merely about policy formulation in the executive branch but about robust parliamentary scrutiny that guarantees transparency, accountability, and public legitimacy. "Emphasizing that a strong and effective Parliament is the cornerstone of sustainable governance and democratic resilience in Pakistan", he remarked, adding that sustainable development outcomes can only be achieved when policies are rooted in legislative ownership. The Chairman Senate underscored the importance of parliamentary instruments such as Cut Motions, Calling Attention Notices, Question Hour, debates, and resolutions, describing them as powerful tools for refining governance and enforcing accountability. He stressed that each debate and question strengthens democratic responsiveness and institutional responsibility. Highlighting the pivotal role of parliamentary committees, Mr. Gilani noted that much of the substantive oversight work

takes place within committee rooms, where policies are examined in depth, budgets are scrutinized, and ministers are held accountable. He particularly referred to the Senate's rigorous review of Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) allocations from December to March, ensuring that development spending aligns with national priorities and the needs of the people. He further pointed out that biannual budget reviews conducted by Senate committees promote fiscal discipline and transparency. As Chairman Senate, Mr. Gilani reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening Parliament as an institution of governance. He outlined three key priorities: First, investing in capacity-building initiatives for Senators and parliamentary staff to enhance their ability to analyze complex policy and budgetary documents and conduct evidence-based oversight. Second, embracing modern technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). He shared that under his stewardship, the Senate of Pakistan is taking a regional lead in developing AI-based applications aimed

at enhancing legislative drafting, enabling real-time comparative policy analysis, and improving citizen engagement with the legislative process. He described this transformation as a step toward building a smarter, more efficient, and more responsive Parliament. Third, strengthening the linkage between parliamentary oversight and executive action. He called upon the Planning Commission and all ministries to institutionalize mechanisms for systematically responding to parliamentary committee recommendations, ensuring that identified gaps in development projects are addressed promptly and public resources are utilized effectively. Concluding his address, the Chairman Senate stressed that good governance is a shared national responsibility and that a strong Parliament remains the ultimate guarantor of equitable progress and democratic stability. He once again congratulated the Ministry of Planning for organizing the forum and called for collective efforts to build a Pakistan defined by effective governance, inclusive development, and unwavering commitment to its people.

Pakistan will go to any extent

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Railways and Finance, Bilal Azhar Kayani, warned Afghanistan on Friday that Pakistan's peaceful approach should not be seen as weakness, stressing that the armed forces remain strong to safeguard the country's land and citizens while upholding national sovereignty at all costs. While exclusively speaking to a local media channel, Kayani paid tribute to the courage and professionalism of Pakistan's armed forces, highlighting their unwavering dedication to protecting the nation. He emphasized that the Pakistan Army responded swiftly to the unprovoked aggression from the Afghan Taliban regime, showcasing the strength and readiness of the country's defense forces. Kayani reiterated that Pakistan remains committed to peace in the region but warned that its resolve should not be mistaken for weakness, underscoring that the armed forces stand firmly to defend the country's land, citizens, and sovereignty. He said Pakistan repeatedly sought peace talks and even presented evidence showing the presence of TTP elements in Afghanistan, but those warnings were ignored. Kayani added that Pakistan will go to any extent to protect its citizens, noting that Afghanistan had the capacity to stop these threats but lacked the proper intent, and now it will face the consequences of its inaction. —APP

Pakistan will go to any length to defend nation: Talal

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior, Talal Chaudhry on Friday reaffirmed that the government and Pakistan armed forces are prepared to go to any extent to defend the nation, warning Afghanistan to become a peaceful neighbor and praising the armed forces for their swift and decisive response. While speaking to a private news channel, officials said Pakistan has launched the 'Ghazab il Haq' operation against the Afghan Taliban regime, underlining the country's commitment to eliminating threats and protecting its citizens. He praised the Pakistan armed forces for their swift and effective response to previous aggression along the western border, highlighting their professionalism, readiness and firm stance in safeguarding national sovereignty. —APP

Jam engages textile export leaders



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, accompanied by senior officers of Ministry of Commerce, held a consultative session in hybrid mode with Chairmen and representatives of Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PHMA), Pakistan Ready-made Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PRGMEA), Pakistan Textile Council (PTC), Pakistan Textile Exporters Association (PTEA), All Pakistan Bedsheets and Upholstery Manufacturers Association (APBUMA), and Towel Manufacturers Association (TMA) at the Ministry of Commerce to thoroughly examine the key challenges facing the value-added apparel and textile sector

and devise strategic measures aimed at strengthening its global competitiveness and substantially accelerating export growth. The industry representatives delivered a detailed presentation outlining the key challenges impeding export growth, notably the substantial burden of upfront taxes; elevated energy tariffs combined with infrastructural limitations; ongoing liquidity constraints caused by pending refunds; limitations under temporary importation scheme, including reduced utilization periods; insufficient credit limits under Export Finance Scheme that restrict access to necessary working capital; and repeated policy shifts that significantly curtail the sector's export expansion potential. Jam Kamal Khan re-

affirmed the government's support, recognizing value-added apparel and textile sector a cornerstone of Pakistan's exports and employment generation. Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world with vertically integrated supply chain which is significantly contributing in socio-economic development of the country, and government will extend maximum support for its sustainability and growth," he added. The Minister stated that a dedicated technical committee, as per the directions of the Prime Minister, has already been constituted to review the issue of limited utilization period under Export Facilitation Scheme and submit its recommendations for the immediate resolution of these constraints.

Pakistanis unity stands firm, Says Fazal

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Friday emphasized that Pakistan's unity is unshakable and its determination unyielding as the armed forces and the people stand as one force to confront terrorism He said that operation Ghazab il-Haq against the Afghan Taliban regime will continue with full intensity until its mission is accomplished in total. In an exclusive conversation with a local news channel, the minister said that decisive action had become inevitable, as Pakistan had exhausted all diplomatic avenues in pursuit of peace and stability. He noted that Pakistan formally invited the Afghan side for negotiations and peace talks, with friendly and brotherly countries such as Qatar and Turkey also playing a supportive role in facilitating dialogue. According to the minister, despite Pakistan presenting concrete evidence and expressing readiness for a peaceful resolution, the Afghan authorities declined to cooperate meaningfully. Tariq Fazal further revealed that the Afghan side demanded financial resources reportedly amounting to around \$10 billion. He said Pakistan's Defence Minister responded that any such understanding required a clear written guarantee to ensure sincerity and accountability. He maintained that had there been genuine intent and a formal written commitment, Pakistan was prepared to consider even greater financial support; however, the core issue remained the absence of a credible written assurance to address Pakistan's security concerns. He said that the action taken by the armed forces has delivered a clear and lasting lesson, ensuring that Pakistan's civilians will not be targeted again. He stressed that this message is also for the Afghan side to understand that Pakistan's patience should not be mistaken for weakness. The minister further alleged that India, frustrated by its setbacks, has been attempting to exploit Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan and sponsor hostile activities. However, he reaffirmed that despite these challenges, Pakistan remains committed to peace and regional stability, and still prefers dialogue and constructive engagement over confrontation, provided its sovereignty and security are fully respected. Responding to a query, he said the government will engage the opposition, stressing that on national security Pakistan stands united above all politics, with internal and external challenges met together. —DNA

How Orange Line, Metro Rail changed urban life

TAHA KHAN AZIZI



EVERY morning in Lahore, thousands of people step out of their homes carrying hopes, responsibilities, and dreams. For many, the day once began with uncertainty, unpredictable traffic, long delays, and the daily stress of simply getting to work or school on time. Hours lost on congested roads meant less time for families, fewer opportunities, and constant fatigue. The arrival of the Orange Line Metro Rail in October 2020 quietly transformed this daily reality. It did more than introduce a new mode of transport; it restored confidence in the idea that public infrastructure can improve ordinary lives. As Pakistan's first metro rail system, the Orange Line marked

a historic milestone in the country's urban development. Built under the framework of strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China, the project stands as a symbol of enduring friendship and shared vision. Stretching over 27 kilometers with 26 stations from Dera Gujran to Ali Town, it connects communities across Lahore, providing safe, efficient, and affordable transport. Beyond its physical presence, the system reflects the strength of Pakistan-China partnership, one that goes beyond infrastructure to include trust, knowledge sharing, and a shared commitment to progress.

Over the past five years, the Orange Line has carried more than 270 million passengers, with over 250,000 people relying on it every day. Behind these numbers are millions of individual stories. Students can now reach their universities on time without fear of delays. Workers spend less time in traffic and more time with their families. Young professionals can access opportunities across the city with greater ease. In a rapidly expanding urban center, reliable mobility is not just about convenience, it is about access to opportunity and a better quality of life. The system's consistent performance has played a key role in

earning public trust. With modern electric trains, advanced signaling systems, and dedicated tracks, the Orange Line has completed over 512,000 train trips while maintaining an on-time performance rate of around 99 percent. Clean stations, air-conditioned coaches, and accessibility features for women, elderly citizens, and persons with disabilities have helped redefine the public transport experience. For many citizens, it represents a shift from uncertainty to reliability, and from compromise to comfort.

The Orange Line Metro Rail has also contributed to Lahore's environmental and economic well-being. As an electric rail system, it provides a cleaner alternative to road-based transport, helping reduce traffic congestion, fuel consumption, and urban emissions. At the same time, the project has created more than 2,000 local jobs and contributed to the development of skilled Pakistani professionals working alongside Chinese experts. This collaboration reflects the true spirit of Pakistan-China friendship, a partnership that empowers people, builds capacity, and strengthens the foundation for long-term progress. Chief Executive Officer Mr. Tan Zidong has noted that the

Orange Line's success demonstrates the reliability of modern urban rail transit in Pakistan and the strength of cooperation between Chinese and Pakistani teams in delivering safe and sustainable transportation. Over time, the system has grown beyond a transport service to become a symbol of teamwork, professional excellence, and public trust, reflecting the shared dedication of all those working behind the scenes.

Perhaps the Orange Line Metro Rail's greatest achievement is the confidence it has inspired. It has shown that modern infrastructure can operate successfully in Pakistan and serve millions of citizens every day. It has proven that progress is not just about building systems, but about sustaining them. Most importantly, it has improved daily life in ways both visible and invisible, saving time, reducing stress, and connecting people to opportunity. As Lahore continues to grow, the Orange Line Metro Rail will remain more than a transport system. It will remain a symbol of progress, partnership, and possibility. Every day, as its trains move across the city, they carry not only passengers but also the promise of a more connected, modern, and confident Pakistan. —The writer is Deputy Manager PR Orange Line Metro Rail

Concerns raised over widening trade gap

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Shahid Rasheed Butt, on Friday voiced serious concern about the rapidly widening trade gap, warning that the persistent imbalance between exports and imports is putting increasing pressure on the country's fragile external account and overall economic stability. He said Pakistan's trade deficit with nine regional countries widened by 41.32 percent in 2025. Exports to China stood at \$1.467 billion in 2025, slightly down from \$1.482 billion a year earlier, while imports surged to \$11.097 billion from \$8.907 billion, an increase of 24.58 percent. Butt said repeated boom-bust cycles, a difficult business climate, weak governance and low investment continue to suppress exports. He noted that periodic fiscal and monetary stimulus has pushed domestic demand beyond sustainable limits, fuelling inflation and draining foreign exchange reserves amid a political preference for exchange rate stability. Each downturn, he added, has eroded investor confidence and undermined policy credibility. He said security concerns have weighed on exports to neighbouring markets, while geopolitical tensions have dampened regional trade flows. Shahid Rasheed Butt warned that India's forthcoming free trade agreement with the European Union could pose a challenge to Pakistan's exports to the bloc despite its GSP+ preferential access. Domestically, he linked recent economic pressures to conditions set by the International Monetary Fund. The Fund has called for full cost recovery in utilities, particularly in the power sector. Although electricity tariffs were recently reduced, he said this was achieved by retiring older, high-cost debt, adding that the debt service surcharge could be raised if required. He said there is little evidence of sustained improvement in the sector's performance. He also referred to the IMF's caution against easing fiscal and monetary policy to stimulate industry. However, the government later introduced targeted incentives, including subsidies for rice exporters, following India's lifting of its export ban. Shahid Rasheed Butt urged policymakers to focus on export-oriented manufacturing, adopt modern technology, and reduce production costs, warning that without structural reforms, the trade imbalance will persist, affecting foreign reserves, exchange rate stability and consumer prices.

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Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 06 Issue:

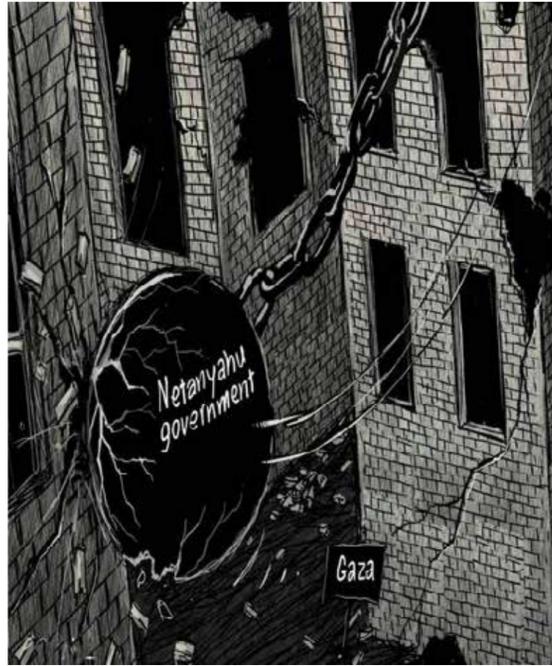
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A Perilous Rift Between Pakistan and Afghanistan

IN a dramatic escalation of long-simmering tensions, Afghan forces launched unprovoked attacks along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on February 26, triggering fierce retaliatory strikes from Pakistani security forces. The clashes, centered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur sectors, have resulted in significant casualties on both sides, exacerbating an already volatile regional security landscape. Pakistani officials claim their forces inflicted heavy losses, killing 133 Afghan Taliban soldiers and wounding over 200, while destroying multiple border posts and military equipment. Conversely, the Taliban government in Kabul asserts it captured several Pakistani outposts, killed 55 Pakistani soldiers, and took some troops alive, denying substantial losses on their side. Independent verification remains elusive amid the fog of war, but reports confirm at least two Pakistani soldiers killed and three injured, alongside civilian casualties, including injuries in Afghan refugee camps. This latest flare-up follows Pakistan's intelligence-based airstrikes on February 22, targeting Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) hideouts in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost provinces, which Pakistan says eliminated over 80 militants. Afghanistan condemned those strikes as violations of its sovereignty, claiming civilian deaths, including women and children. In response, Afghan forces initiated cross-border firing, prompting Pakistan to launch Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, including airstrikes on Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia. Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Asif declared it an "open war," signaling a dangerous shift from sporadic skirmishes to sustained conflict. All said and done, this development bodes ill for the region. Pakistan and Afghanistan, bound by geography, history, and shared ethnic ties across the porous 2,600-kilometer Durand Line, must coexist as neighbors. The human cost is staggering: families displaced, economies disrupted, and trust eroded. Retrospection is imperative. Both sides must learn from past mistakes—Pakistan's historical support for the Taliban during the 1990s, which backfired with the rise of anti-Pakistan militants, and Afghanistan's failure to curb cross-border terrorism post-2021 Taliban takeover. The TTP, often labeled "Fitna al-Khawarij" by Pakistani officials, has exploited Afghan soil for attacks inside Pakistan, including recent suicide bombings. Meanwhile, Kabul's grievances over border fencing and airstrikes echo



decades of unresolved territorial disputes. Without mutual accountability, these cycles of violence will persist, fueling instability in South Asia. External powers exacerbate the rift, adhering to a classic divide-and-rule strategy. Certain global actors—implicitly the United States and others with interests in Central Asia—benefit from prolonged discord, preventing a unified Pakistan-Afghanistan bloc that could stabilize trade routes and counterbalance influences in the region. More pointedly, India is accused of playing a pivotal role in supporting the Taliban government, allegedly as a proxy to destabilize Pakistan. Pakistan's leadership, including Asif, has claimed Afghanistan has become an "Indian colony," with New Delhi providing diplomatic, economic, and possibly covert aid to the Taliban to counter Islamabad.

This shift is evident in India's reopening of its Kabul embassy in 2022, high-level visits like Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's trip to New Delhi in October 2025, and statements condemning Pakistani strikes while affirming Afghan sovereignty. Allegations persist that India supports TTP elements through Afghan channels, intensifying Pakistan's security woes. Such maneuvers align with India's strategy to encircle Pakistan, leveraging historical animosities from the Afghan civil wars where New Delhi backed anti-Taliban forces. Pakistan now faces a two-front dilemma: the eastern border with India, marked by ongoing Kashmir tensions, and the western front with Afghanistan. Sustaining defenses on both requires immense resources, straining an economy already grappling with inflation and debt. Yet, victory abroad hinges on peace at home. Internal political harmony is crucial; without it, Pakistan risks fragmentation. Stakeholders must align, convincing all political parties—including the genuine leadership of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)—to prioritize national security over partisan divides. PTI's Imran Khan, despite legal hurdles, represents a significant voice; engaging him and his supporters could bridge gaps. A national all-parties conference (APC) is essential to forge cohesion. Such a moot would allow dialogue on border policies, counter-terrorism, and diplomacy, rallying the nation against external threats. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry's vow that "no one will be allowed to take away Pakistan's peace" resonates, but it demands unity. Drawing from past conflicts, like the May 2025 India-Pakistan skirmishes, Pakistan has shown resilience when cohesive. Emphasizing diplomacy with Kabul, perhaps through third-party mediation, while bolstering internal stability, could de-escalate tensions. In conclusion, this border crisis underscores the fragility of South Asian peace. Pakistan and Afghanistan must transcend blame, embracing lessons from history to build trust. External meddling, particularly India's alleged support for the Taliban, only perpetuates suffering. For Pakistan, the path forward lies in domestic solidarity—only then can it effectively navigate these dual fronts and secure a prosperous future for the region.

The India-Israel Nexus and Its Strategic Aftermath

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Yet strategic necessity gradually softened ideological rigidity. During the 1962 war with China and the 1965 conflict with Pakistan, Israel quietly supplied India with arms. The pattern became more structured in the 1970s. As tensions between India and Pakistan spiked in 1971, D.N. Chatterjee, India's ambassador to France, urged New Delhi to seek Israeli assistance. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi accepted the proposal. Through India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), arms were procured via Liechtenstein. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir reportedly sought diplomatic recognition in return, but India demurred...

IN an age that prides itself on enlightened conscience and codified international law, it remains a sobering paradox that territories may be held in prolonged occupation despite the universal principles that forbid acquisition by force. Many states in history have erred in moments of conquest, yet in our own era two cases continue to cast a long and troubling shadow over global diplomacy; Kashmir under Indian control and Palestine under Israeli occupation. For more than seven decades, these lands have endured cycles of resistance and repression, while the guardians of world order oscillate between protest and paralysis. That both India and Israel enjoy overt and covert patronage from powerful quarters has only deepened the complexity of these disputes. The moral contradiction is particularly striking in the case of India. During the 1930s and 1940s, under British colonial rule, India identified deeply with the Palestinian cause. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi wrote in 1938, "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English, or France to the French," while also expressing sympathy for Jewish suffering in Europe. Independent India voted against the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan and later opposed Israel's admission to the world body. Even after recognizing Israel in 1950, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru refrained from establishing full diplomatic relations, wary of alienating Arab partners and mindful of anti-colonial solidarity. Yet strategic necessity gradually softened ideological rigidity. During the 1962 war with China and the 1965 conflict with Pakistan, Israel quietly supplied India with arms. The pattern became more structured in the 1970s. As tensions between India and Pakistan spiked in 1971, D.N. Chatterjee, India's ambassador to France, urged New Delhi to seek Israeli assistance. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi accepted the proposal. Through India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), arms were procured via Liechtenstein. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir reportedly sought diplomatic recognition in return, but India demurred, preferring to maintain public distance even as covert cooperation deepened. This duality—public solidarity with Palestine and discreet security ties with Israel—became a defining feature of India's

West Asia policy for decades. Diplomatic relations were finally normalised in 1992, and since then defence and technological cooperation has flourished. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the relationship has moved from discreet engagement to open camaraderie. His 2017 visit to Israel—the first ever by an Indian premier—symbolised the shedding of long-held inhibitions. His recent visit now added significance, coming amid the continuing devastation in Gaza and heightened regional tensions. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has spoken of a "tremendous alliance" between the two nations, underscoring cooperation in defence, technology, innovation, and trade. Trade volumes have multiplied dramatically since 1992, and Israel has emerged as a major supplier of advanced weaponry to India. Joint ventures, military exercises, and intelligence exchanges illustrate a relationship no longer veiled in ambiguity. Yet India officially maintains support for a two-state solution and continues diplomatic engagement with the Palestinian leadership. Its voting pattern at the United Nations, however, reflects increasing caution; abstentions on resolutions critical of Israel have drawn scrutiny at home and abroad. The strategic calculus becomes more intricate when placed against the backdrop of rising tensions between the United States and Iran. Israel remains firmly aligned with Washington, and the possibility of a broader confrontation in the region cannot be discounted. Political analysts are examining whether, through Israel, India has conveyed assurances of support to the United States in the event of war. In return, Israel may be expected to facilitate an improvement in US-India relations. The facilitation India has recently provided to the United States and Israel in matters relating to Iran is not unnoticed. Such positioning inevitably generates unease among Gulf states that host millions of Indian workers and have long invested in close ties with New Delhi. For them, any overt alignment against Iran would represent a delicate and potentially destabilising shift. Equally significant are the security implications for South Asia. It is widely speculated that during high-level exchanges, discussions extend beyond bilateral cooperation to shared threat perceptions. According to some assessments, Israel and India view Pakistan through a similar strategic

lens. There is concern in Islamabad that efforts may be coordinated to counter Pakistan diplomatically and strategically, including by leveraging developments in Afghanistan. Information circulate that financial or military assistance could be extended to actors hostile to Pakistan's interests. While such claims remain within the realm of strategic conjecture, Pakistan is keeping a close watch, and its Senate has voiced formal concern over the evolving India-Israel proximity. This convergence, therefore, cannot be seen merely as a bilateral arrangement. It intersects with broader regional rivalries, superpower calculations, and unresolved territorial disputes. The Middle East remains unsettled: Gaza lies scarred despite ceasefire efforts; international courts and humanitarian agencies have documented grave suffering; and settlement expansion in the West Bank continues to provoke global criticism. In South Asia, Kashmir remains a flashpoint whose embers have repeatedly ignited armed confrontation. Nations pursue their interests with layered calculations, and India aspires to great-power status, seeking technological advancement, diversified energy sources, and expanded diplomatic leverage. Israel values India's demographic weight, economic potential, and strategic location. Yet moral and legal questions persist. When occupation endures and civilian suffering recurs, strategic pragmatism alone cannot provide lasting legitimacy. South Asia and the Middle East are passing through a critical hour. The convergence of enduring disputes, emergent alliances, and superpower tensions forms a combustible mixture. Should conflict widen—whether between the United States and Iran, within the Palestinian territories, Pak Afghan border or along the Line of Control in Kashmir—the repercussions will not remain confined. In the final analysis, the deepening India-Israel alliance symbolises the triumph of realpolitik over early post-colonial idealism. It reflects a world in which historical solidarities yield to contemporary calculations. Yet history also teaches that unresolved grievances seldom fade through neglect. If justice remains deferred in Kashmir and Palestine, no alignment, however formidable, can secure durable peace.

Hezbollah has no place in the future of Lebanon

Khaled Abou Zahr

Ultimately, Hezbollah, which is an integral part of the Iranian regime's military apparatus, needs to think wisely. Let me rephrase this: the new Hezbollah leadership, following the persistent wave of targeted eliminations, should stop for a minute and think. All the signs point to the end of its role. If we look at it from the Iranian side, it has become obsolete due to Israel's technological advances. And if we look at it from the US or Western side, whether Iran complies with the US' nonnegotiables or not, Hezbollah will no...

THE world is holding its breath about the possibility of a US military attack on Iran. As the US builds up the largest military force of warships and aircraft in the Middle East in decades while it sits and negotiates with the Iranian regime, the Lebanese are once again building a multitude of scenarios regarding what might happen. But there is one certainty: Hezbollah will not be able to participate meaningfully, if at all. If there were any doubts, Israel is erasing them. It has intensified its airstrikes, particularly against the Iranian proxy's missile capacity. One attack last week killed eight Hezbollah members, including senior commander Hussein Mohammed Yaghi. These operations are aimed at degrading Hezbollah's rocket and missile capabilities. Since the ceasefire came into effect in November 2024, Israel says it has destroyed 70 percent to 80 percent of Hezbollah's rocket fire capacity and more than 400 Hezbollah and allied operatives have been killed. The group is still believed to be storing thousands of missiles with various range capabilities. Tel Aviv has also targeted Hamas command centers in the Ain El-Hilweh refugee camp. I doubt that relations between Hezbollah and its masters in Tehran are peachy today. Beyond precision strikes built on credible intelligence, there is no doubt that Israel has induced doubt on both sides of the relationship. The absolute, blind obedience and alignment that led Hezbollah fighters to Syria and to launch attacks that destroyed Lebanon are in disarray. Just as drops of water break the rock over time, Israel has broken this iron-clad commitment. Just as drops of water break the rock over time, Israel has broken this iron-clad commitment. There is a double resentment. Hezbollah can easily claim that its master did not come to its aid when Israel hit it with deadly strikes. Even by ordering other proxies, such as the Iraqi ones, to intervene to alleviate their own front. And in the same way, Tehran

can accuse Hezbollah of not intervening when Israel struck it last year. In reality, both sides knew that it was useless to do so, but it brings into question, for the first time, Hezbollah's usefulness. The raison d'être of Hezbollah is to defend the Iranian regime until it can build nuclear military capacity. Once this is done, then a new "Iron Dome" will protect all of Tehran's interests and aggressive, expansionist policies. Lately, however, it has been incapable of fulfilling its designated role. In brief, Hezbollah is expected to fight when the mullahs are attacked, but the reciprocity does not stand. This is the role of a proxy. For many years, I have described Hezbollah as an artificial power and have been mocked for it quite often. Today, this has been confirmed. It has survived and thrived through the acceptance by the US and the West of a geopolitical order in the region and of a status quo toward Iran. This has allowed it to take control of Lebanon and kill at its own leisure. Truth be told, this artificial power has been fueled not by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' billions and arsenal, but by Lebanese blood and the destruction of a country. Ultimately, Hezbollah, which is an integral part of the Iranian regime's military apparatus, needs to think wisely. Let me rephrase this: the new Hezbollah leadership, following the persistent wave of targeted eliminations, should stop for a minute and think. All the signs point to the end of its role. If we look at it from the Iranian side, it has become obsolete due to Israel's technological advances. And if we look at it from the US or Western side, whether Iran complies with the US' nonnegotiables or not, Hezbollah will no longer be granted the "right to resistance" it gained in the 1990s. It is high time Hezbollah read this major geopolitical change and realized that its days are numbered. This means that being the only legally permitted armed group in Lebanon has become "caduque" (obsolete). It is high time Hezbollah read this major geopo-

litical change and realized that its days are numbered. Its members whose hands are not yet soaked in blood face a clear choice. They can either push the group to surrender its arsenal and shift toward a new political formation, one that would need to be described as "postreligious," meaning it would represent the Shiite community while not pushing a religious agenda for the entire state. If they do not, it will face complete destruction. In both outcomes, Hezbollah will not exist. Not in name and not in political representation. A new Shiite political leadership needs to emerge. Hezbollah has no place in the future of Lebanon. It can follow the example of European political parties post-Second World War. While staying rooted in Christian values, parties in Italy and Germany, for example, gradually evolved toward governance and economic policy rather than explicitly religious goals. Moreover, we can no longer have a group that follows transnational goals and whose loyalty and guidance originate from outside Lebanon's borders. The clock is ticking. Hezbollah should free itself from the Iranian regime. There is a very slight chance of this happening and one would imagine that the IRGC would want to make sure, in case US President Donald Trump decides on military action, that the proxy it created and invested in pays up, even if this means it will be the last thing it does. On the other hand, there is no doubt it will be on the menu if an agreement is reached between Washington and Tehran. This is why fully complying with the Lebanese plan to disarm Hezbollah is now in the group's interest, as many see its justification for existing as being destroyed in most of the possible scenarios facing the country. If it chooses the hard way, it is a certainty that this would be the last time it causes destruction and death in Lebanon. — Khaled Abou Zahr is the founder of Space Quest Ventures, a space-focused investment platform. He is CEO of Eurabia Media and editor of Al-Watan Al-Arabi.

Briefs

Over 274
Taliban
killed...

FROM PAGE 01
"Our choice is clear, and we will never hesitate to make a sacrifice for it," he said. The DG ISPR maintained that Pakistan's armed forces were fully prepared on both eastern and western borders, saying the country's interests would be safeguarded at all costs. Lt Gen Chaudhry announced that the Operation Ghazab li-Haq was ongoing and would continue until its objectives were achieved.

SC objects
to PTI's...

FROM PAGE 01
one inform us?" Khosa said. As per a source, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan also met CJP Afridi and sought the transfer of the incarcerated former premier to a hospital, citing family and party concerns about his health. However, he was told that SC would not interfere while his cases remained pending before the Islamabad High Court (IHC). Imran's health, who is imprisoned at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, has been garnering attention in recent days, with his family and party raising concerns since his eye ailment — right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) — came to light in late January. According to a doctor at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), Imran was brought to the hospital for follow-up treatment on February 24. However, his party took exception to the government's "secrecy" regarding the treatment.

Pakistan
security...

FROM PAGE 01
the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Security sources said Pakistan's armed forces destroyed several key Afghan Taliban posts. Following Pakistan's decisive action, Afghan Taliban reportedly raised white flags at multiple positions. The sources added that security forces effectively targeted Afghan Taliban positions using artillery and quadcopters, significantly weakening their defensive capabilities. Tarar said that the military carried out a coordinated and effective operation following cross-border hostilities. He said that the operation resulted in significant losses for the Afghan Taliban, as at least 133 Taliban were killed, and more than 200 were injured. In his statement, PM Shehbaz said there would be no compromise on the country's defence, and every act of aggression would be met with a firm and befitting response. He emphasised that the people and the Armed Forces of Pakistan remain fully prepared to protect the nation's security and territorial integrity.

World
reacts to...

FROM PAGE 01
deep concern over the surge in violence. In a statement delivered by his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, Guterres urged both nations to adhere strictly to their obligations under international law, with a specific emphasis on international humanitarian law. Guterres underscored the urgent need for both parties to prioritise the protection of civilians as confrontations continue. Iran: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who has been involved in intensive talks with the United States to avert conflict engulfing his own nation, has urged the two countries to resolve their differences through dialogue and good neighbourly principles, as he highlighted the significance of the holy month of Ramadan as a time for self-restraint and Islamic solidarity. In a post on X early Friday, Araghchi reaffirmed Iran's readiness to support the process, stating that his country is prepared to provide any necessary assistance to facilitate constructive dialogue, deepen mutual understanding and promote cooperation between Kabul and Islamabad.

Gerrys clinch 14th UAE
Ambassador's Cup football title

In the final, Gerrys delivered a commanding performance, with Khayam Khattak scoring a hat-trick while Saqib Anwar added another goal. Muhammad Abu scored for Qatar Embassy, but his effort was not enough to prevent Gerrys from sealing a comprehensive 5-2 victory



ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Gerrys emerged champions of the 14th UAE Ambassador's Cup Ramadan Football Tournament 2026 after defeating Qatar Embassy 5-2 in a thrilling final. The prestigious annual tournament was organized by the UAE Embassy in Pakistan in collaboration with the Pakistan Football Federation, which also provided full technical support. A total of 10 teams compet-

ed in 22 matches, showcasing competitive football and strengthening people-to-people connections among diverse communities. In the final, Gerrys delivered a commanding performance, with Khayam Khattak scoring a hat-trick while Saqib Anwar added another goal. Muhammad Abu scored for Qatar Embassy, but his effort was not enough to prevent Gerrys from sealing a comprehensive 5-2 victory. In the third-place playoff, Afghanistan defeated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) team 4-1.

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar graced the closing ceremony as chief guest. He distributed prizes among the players along with UAE Ambassador to Pakistan Salem Mohammed Salem Al Bawab Al Zaabi and President of the Pakistan Football Federation Syed Mohsen Gilani. Attaullah Tarar awarded Rs500,000 to the winning team, Rs300,000 to the runners-up, and Rs200,000 to the third-placed team. The ceremony was attended by Mem-

ber of the National Assembly Syeda Amnah Batool, ambassadors of Morocco, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Libya, the Deputy Head of Mission of Romania, senior Pakistani officials, members of the diplomatic corps and media representatives. The annual event aims to promote sportsmanship, cultural exchange and community engagement during the holy month of Ramadan, bringing together diverse communities in a spirit of friendship and mutual understanding.

T20 World Cup: India
eliminate Zimbabwe
to stay alive in
semi-final race

India's win against Zimbabwe sends South Africa into semi-finals

Blistering fifties from Abhishek Sharma and Hardik Pandya, complemented by a clinical bowling performance, steered India to a dominant 72-run triumph over Zimbabwe in their crucial Super Eights encounter of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup at the MA Chidambaram Stadium on Thursday. The victory marked India's first win in the Super Eights stage and kept them in contention to qualify for the semi-finals. Furthermore, the outcome of the crucial Group 1 fixture also marked Zimbabwe's exit, confirming South Africa's qualification into the knockouts. Consequently, India's remaining Super Eights match, scheduled to be played against West Indies in Kolkata on Sunday, has now become a virtual quarter-final as both teams have two points in as many games. — Agencies

Dubai
Basketball
Celebrates
Ramadan
with Big Win,
Donations

DUBAI: Dubai Basketball won their EuroLeague round 29 game against LDLC ASVEL here on Thursday and celebrated by pledging 3,055 meals to families in need across the UAE. The 96-85 win marked the club's first game of Ramadan. Through the "Basket for Basket" initiative, every point scored by Dubai Basketball counted as a meal donated, with every ticket purchased adding to the total. — APP

Pak-China Friendship Basketball
Championship Begins March 5

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Pak-China Friendship Cup 3x3 Basketball Championship 2026 will tip off on March 5 at the Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China. According to Federal Basketball Association (FBA) Secretary Dr. Ouj-e-Zohoor, the four-day event, being organized under the umbrella of the Pakistan Basketball Federation with the support of the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), will conclude on March 8 and promises high-level basketball action. The FIBA-endorsed 3x3 championship has attracted record participation from across the country. A total of 48 teams will compete in the club category, 16 teams in the departmental

category, and 26 teams in the women's category. The large turnout highlights the rapid growth of 3x3 basketball in Pakistan and the continued commitment to promoting the sport nationwide. Ouj-e-Zohoor emphasized that the event reflects the strong and longstanding brotherly ties between Pakistan and China, noting that sports diplomacy plays a vital role in fostering cooperation, unity, and international goodwill. As a FIBA-endorsed tournament, the championship will also contribute points toward the FIBA 3x3 international rankings, further strengthening Pakistan's presence in the global basketball community. The organizing committee has ensured professionally managed arrangements, promising competitive and thrilling basketball action throughout the four-day event.

Own goal enough for Al-Ahli as Matchday
24 win keeps pressure on Al-Nassr

Al-Ahli Edge Al-Riyadh to Go Top of Saudi Pro League as Set-Piece Drama, VAR Controversy and Ivan Toney Offside Calls Headline Ramadan-Fueled Matchday 24 Action in Riyadh

RIYADH: Matchday 24 of the Saudi Pro League kicked off on Thursday, less than 24 hours after the conclusion of the delayed Matchday 10. With the FIFA Arab Cup, World Cup Qualifiers and FIFA World Cup sandwiching the 2025/26 campaign, resting periods have been few and far between outside the international breaks. With fixtures coming thick and fast, Al-Ahli opted to rest Riyadh Mahrez and Enzo Millot for their clash with Al-Riyadh in the capital. Ramadan has further challenged the league schedule, with Matthias Jaissle's side only arriving in Riyadh at 5:30pm — just hours before kick-off. With their previous outing against Damac still dominating conversation, Jaissle was keen to ensure his players did not fall into the same trap — namely, being caught off guard by an opponent's unexpectedly proactive style. To his relief, Al-Ahli were largely in control this time. Yet the absence of Mahrez limited their creative spark. Relying heavily on Wenderson Galeno down the left, Al-Riyadh did well to crowd the Brazilian and deny him space to operate. The bane of any expansive side is a compact 5-4-1, and that is precisely how Al-Riyadh's recently appointed Brazilian manager Mauricio Dulac set his team up. A long-time assistant to former Al-Riyadh coach Odair Hellmann, this marks Dulac's first managerial role. Al-Ahli's attacking routes were severely restricted throughout the first half. Al-Riyadh denied them the opportunity



to press high, Mahrez's trademark diagonals were absent, and finding Ivan Toney in the six-yard box proved a difficult task. On the rare occasions the visitors broke the defensive line, Milan Borjan stood firm in goal — there was no getting past the Canadian. That was until first-half stoppage time. Al-Ahli had one more weapon in their arsenal: set-pieces. A lofted delivery from Galeno's free-kick met the head of Roger Iba ez, who nodded the ball towards goal. Borjan pushed it away, but it was too late — the ball crossed the line. VAR intervened within seconds. Iba ez was a shoulder offside, and the opener was chalked off. It was a notable twist, particularly as the simultaneous fixture between Al-Fateh and Damac in Al-Ahsa featured a celebration aimed squarely at Al-Ahli and VAR. Earlier in the week, Damac equalised late against Al-Ahli via Yakou Mé té, only for the goal to be overturned. Mé té reacted angrily and lashed out at referees, but Al-Ahli escaped with the three points. Mé té followed up with a goal against Al-Fateh, and celebrated by mimicking the referee's VAR signal. Back in Riyadh, Al-Ahli returned for the second half with renewed intensity. Zakaria Hawsawi grew more adventurous from left-back, threading lofted balls over the Al-Riyadh defence. In the 53rd minute, he found Toney behind the last defender, but the Englishman's volley was adeptly saved by Borjan. Five minutes later, Galeno latched onto Hawsawi's cross and thought he had broken the deadlock — only for the linesman's flag to rise once again. — Agencies

Afghan govt
says wants
'dialogue'

FROM PAGE 01
and territorial integrity. Dar underlined that Pakistan's response has been measured but decisive to unprovoked aggression. Both leaders highlighted the importance of peace and stability in the region, and agreed to remain in touch on evolving developments.

PM Shehbaz
gets briefing
at GHQ

FROM PAGE 01
defend the motherland under the leadership of Chief of Defence Force Field Marshal Asim Munir. He commended the armed forces' professional handling of recent Operation Ghazab li-Haq that repelled Afghan Taliban regime's incursions in border areas. He lauded the armed forces operational competence, and said the entire nation stands firmly alongside the military in safeguarding Pakistan's territorial integrity.

Indian court
acquits
Kejriwal

FROM PAGE 01
accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah of using a "political conspiracy" to finish AAP. On Friday, a Delhi court cleared him, his former deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others of all charges. A key opponent to Modi, he had consistently denied wrongdoing. Rekha Gupta, a member of Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, was elected as chief minister of the sprawling megacity of more than 30 million people in February 2025. Kejriwal began his career as a tax collector but quit his civil service job to become an anti-corruption crusader, bringing him national fame. Several of Modi's opponents have faced criminal investigation or trial in recent years, including two state chief ministers. In August 2025, the government introduced a bill to remove politicians if they are arrested and detained for 30 days, which opponents called a "chilling" bid to crush constitutional safeguards.

United
States-Iran
talks end...

FROM PAGE 01
The Omani minister's upbeat assessment followed indirect talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner in Geneva, with one session in the morning and the second in the afternoon. "We have finished the day after significant progress in the negotiation between the United States and Iran," Badr Albusaidi said. But with many analysts seeing the latest diplomacy as the last chance before Trump could decide to go to war, Badr Albusaidi provided no details and stopped short of saying the two sides had overcome their biggest stumbling blocks to a deal.

China
mediates
Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 01
tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan in their border areas, according to China Economic Net (CEN). Pakistan and Afghanistan are close neighbors and both are also neighbors of China. As a neighbor and friend, China is deeply concerned about the escalation of the conflict and is deeply saddened by the casualties caused by the conflict, Mao said. The intensity of the current round of Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict far exceeds previous incidents, and its continuation or escalation will bring harm and losses to both sides, the spokesperson added. China supports combating all forms of terrorism and calls on both sides to remain calm and exercise restraint, resolve differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation, and achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible to avoid more suffering. This serves the fundamental interests of the two countries and peoples, and will help maintain regional peace and stability, Mao said.

Briefs

Rupee gains 03 paise against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Friday appreciated by 03 paise against the US Dollar in inter-bank trading and closed at Rs 279.47 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.50. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.35 and Rs 282.15, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee decreased by 08 paise to close at Rs 329.94 from the previous day's close of Rs 330.02, 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 a decrease of Rs1.77 and closed at Rs 376.63 compared to the previous day's Rs 378.40. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham stood stagnant to close at Rs 76.09, while the Saudi Riyal came down by 01 and closed at Rs 74.51.—APP

Spring Festival cherries show trade is not zero-sum game

BEIJING: What appears to be a minor change in the fruit aisle actually tells a much larger story. The fall of the price of cherries offers a clear window into how China's approach to globalization works — and how its gains can be increasingly shared across borders. The driver is supply. Chile, China's largest source of imported cherries, has recorded a bumper harvest, pushing export volumes to record levels. But abundant harvests alone don't explain why the price reduction has traveled so quickly and visibly to consumers. In many countries, lower upstream costs are absorbed by tariffs, logistics inefficiencies or layers of intermediaries. What makes China stand apart is how sharply trade and logistics costs have fallen. On the trade side, China has steadily reduced tariffs on agricultural imports through expanded free trade arrangements with major producing countries. For example, the upgraded China-Chile Free Trade Agreement that took effect in 2019 placed roughly 98 percent of traded products under zero tariffs. Lower border costs mean that when supply rises, prices are no longer artificially supported. Market signals move faster, and consumers see the results. Logistics matter just as much. Shipping times for cherries from Chile to China have been cut from roughly five to six weeks to about 23 days following the opening of Peru's deep-water Chancay Port, a Belt and Road infrastructure project linking the Pacific coast more directly to Asian markets. For cherries, transit time is the cost story. Less time at sea means less waste and lower risk priced into each shipment, allowing products once sustained by luxury margins to be sold at scale.—APP

More than 100 charity workers killed in Sudan since war began

CAIRO: Enas Arbab fled Sudan's western region of Darfur after her hometown fell to Sudanese paramilitary forces, taking only her year-old son with her and the memory of her father, who was killed, she said, simply for working at a charity kitchen serving people displaced by the fighting. The Rapid Support Forces — or RSF, a paramilitary group that has been at war with the Sudanese army since April 2023 — had laid siege on El-Fasher in the western Darfur region, starving people out before it overran the city. UN officials say several thousand civilians were killed in the RSF takeover of El-Fasher last October. Only 40 percent of the city's 260,000 residents managed to flee the onslaught, thousands of whom were wounded, the officials said. The fate of the rest remains unknown. During the fighting, Arbab says RSF fighters took her father, Mohamed Arbab, from their home after beating him in front of the family, and demanded a ransom. When the family couldn't pay, they told them they had killed him, she says. To this day, the family doesn't know where his body is.—APP

MuP team leader Cummins meets Chairman Senate Gilani

Ms Cummins presented a comprehensive overview of the five-year strategic framework for the Mustehkam Parlmaan (MuP) programme, highlighting its key achievements, meaningful initiatives, and long-term objectives to strengthen parliamentary institutions in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD, Feb 27 (APP): Team Leader of Mustehkam Parlmaan (MuP), Mary Cummins on Friday called on Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, at the Parliament House on a farewell visit marking the culmination of her tenure. During the meeting, Ms Cummins presented a comprehensive overview of the five-year strategic framework for the Mustehkam Parlmaan (MuP) programme, highlighting its key achievements, meaningful initiatives, and long-term objectives to strengthen parliamentary institutions in Pakistan. She underscored MuP's continued efforts to enhance legislative processes, build the institutional capacity of Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff, and improve oversight and governance mechanisms through constructive collaboration and support of the European Union. The Chairman of the Senate commended the contributions of MuP toward institutional development and democratic consolidation in Pakistan. He observed that a strong, transparent, and



responsive Parliament remains the cornerstone of sustainable democracy. Reaffirming his vision, he emphasised the importance of reinforcing democratic norms, strengthening accountability frameworks, and ensuring meaningful public engagement in legislative affairs. Highlighting ongoing institutional reforms,

the Chairman shared that the Senate of Pakistan is pioneering forward-looking initiatives in the region, including the development of an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based system to facilitate legislators' access to real-time information. He added that the integration of modern technology into parliamentary functions would

significantly enhance legislative efficiency, informed decision-making, and oversight of public initiatives. Describing Parliament as the "mother institution" of the state, the Chairman reiterated that sustainable national development must be anchored in accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance. He expressed

appreciation for the constructive partnership between the Senate of Pakistan and international development partners committed to strengthening parliamentary democracy. Advisor to the Chairman Senate on Special Initiatives/PDU, Ms Rida Qazi, was also present during the meeting

Iran urges US to drop 'excessive demands' to reach deal

TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Friday that in order to reach a deal, the United States will have to drop its "excessive demands," after the two sides held talks in Geneva. In a phone call with Egypt's top diplomat Badr Abdelatty, Araghchi said "success in this path requires seriousness and realism from the other side and avoidance of any miscalculation and excessive demands." Araghchi did not clarify what demands he was referring to, but Washington has pointed to Iran's ballistic missile program and has repeatedly described Tehran's uranium enrichment capability as a red line. US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that Tehran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America." Also on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran is "not enriching right now, but they're trying to get to the point where they ultimately can," adding that Tehran "refuses" to discuss its ballistic missile program and "that's a big problem." Iran has repeatedly said its missile program is part of its defensive capabilities and has ruled out abandoning uranium enrichment, insisting its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes. Longtime adversaries Iran and the United States held their third round of Omani-mediated nuclear talks on Thursday in Geneva, seeking to avert military escalation as Washington expands its military build-up in the region. Both Iran and Oman cited progress after the talks, with technical discussions scheduled for Monday in Vienna ahead of a fourth round expected next week. The UN rights chief said Friday he was "extremely alarmed" at the risk of a regional escalation around Iran, which is facing repeated threats of US strikes. "I am extremely alarmed about the potential for regional military escalation its impact on civilians," Volker Turk told the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. "I hope the voice of reason prevails." Turk also highlighted Iran's domestic situation, after Tehran last month launched a mass crackdown on nationwide protests, killing thousands of people according to rights groups. "The situation in Iran remains volatile" after that crackdown, Turk told the council, pointing out that "recent days have seen a new wave of protests at universities, making it clear that the underlying grievances remain." "There are continued reports of repression, including and pressure on academic spaces," he said, highlighting that "thousands of people are still missing." Turk also said he was "horrified by reports that at least eight people, including two children, have been sentenced to death in connection with the protests.—DNA

Pak explores Central Asian markets to boost potato exports

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain on Friday chaired the second meeting of the Committee on Potato Export to review the current situation of potato production, surplus stocks and export facilitation measures. The meeting was attended by senior officials of the ministry, representatives from provincial agriculture departments, exporters, logistics companies, and other relevant stakeholders, a news release said. A detailed assessment of the estimated surplus potato crop was presented, along with an overview of traditional and emerging export markets. During the discussion, key challenges affecting exports were highlighted, including increased freight costs, logistical constraints, route-related issues, and visa facilitation for transporters. The committee also reviewed proposals regarding concessional freight rates, improved coordination with railways and logistics providers, and measures to streamline cross-border trade. Rana Tanveer emphasized the urgency of utilizing the current export window, particularly for Central Asian markets, to ease domestic supply pressure and protect farmers from distress sales. He directed all concerned departments to expedite pending matters, remove operational bottlenecks, and ensure smooth movement of surplus stocks. The minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting farmers, stabilizing market prices, and enhancing Pakistan's agricultural exports through coordinated and time-bound interventions. He stressed that practical solutions must be implemented swiftly to safeguard the interests of growers while strengthening Pakistan's position in regional markets. The meeting decided to maintain close monitoring of export trends and convene follow-up sessions to review progress on the agreed measures.—DNA

No retirement from learning Chinese seniors embrace overseas study for new beginnings

SHANGHAI: Sitting in a classroom at an art school in Florence, Italy, a retired teacher from Shanghai surnamed Wang began his first systematic lesson in sketching. This was a scene he had envisioned for over half a century. At the age of 28, he encountered a book of Raphael's paintings at a second-hand bookstore. From then on, the interplay of light and shadow of the Renaissance and the name "Florence" planted a seed of longing in his heart. Now, with the help of a club specifically serving the "mature-age" learners, he completed language preparation and interviews, embarking on a week-long dream-fulfilling journey. Wang's story is not an isolated case. A growing number of Chinese retirees, primarily those born in the 1960s and 1970s, are redefining their "golden years." No longer satisfied with traditional retirement lifestyles involving doting on grandchildren or community leisure activities, they choose to carry their schoolbags and go overseas to restart their lives as students. This trend reflects the intense pursuit of spiritual fulfillment and self-actualization among the increasingly large "new elderly" demographic. It also poses new challenges to existing social perceptions, market services and public policies. "The moment I retired was a big shock. My body and mind didn't feel old, but the familiar rhythm of society suddenly came to a halt, creating a strong sense of 'value vacuum'," admitted Zi Wenli, 56. After retiring, this former senior media professional and founder of an international education institution found that "the choices available for our generation, the 1960s and 1970s cohort, are too limited." Zi visited numerous universities for the elderly in China and discovered that the course content often stuck to the basics, focusing on rote imitation rather than inspiring creativity. "For example, they might teach you how to paint a big peach, a symbol of longevity, but not why it's painted that way. After learning, you still can't paint anything else," she said. In her view, this is a significant disconnect from the intrinsic needs of her generation, people who "changed their destinies through knowledge" and crave deep learning and intellectual renewal. "We don't just need to kill time; we want to regain a sense of value, even explore the possibilities of second careers. A turning point occurred on Christmas Eve in 2024. Zi shared her thoughts on retirees applying to study abroad on a short-video platform. To her surprise, it went viral. During a subsequent live stream, two to three thousand peers joined, eagerly asking, "How to get there?" Zi suddenly realized that her decades of experience and resources in international education could perfectly meet this vast, silent demand. "I suddenly felt I had found the second direction of my life." Thus, the "Teacher Zi's Retiree Study Abroad Club" (later renamed the "Mature-Age Learning Club") was born. Zi positioned herself as a "sharer" and "guide," connecting people primarily born between 1955 and 1979 with domestic and international educational resources. The pathfinding process was not smooth at the beginning. Initially, she tried to find opportunities domestically, only to find that formal continuing education or degree programs for those over 50 were almost nonexistent. Consequently, she had to look overseas. Although many foreign universities have no explicit age limits, receiving an organized cohort of senior students from China was unprecedented. Both sides needed repeated exchanges on details like course difficulty, language support, visa facilitation, and even accommodation standards. Zi concluded: "Perhaps the biggest obstacle is the conceptual gap. Society is accustomed to lumping people aged 50 to 85 together as 'the elderly' and providing undifferentiated services. This broad-brush categorization completely ignores the vast differences in psychological state, learning ability, and life aspirations among the 'younger elderly'.—DNA

Bill Clinton to face grilling on significant Epstein ties

CHAPPAQUA: Former US president Bill Clinton will be grilled by a Congressional panel on Friday on his well-documented links to Jeffrey Epstein, as Democrats seek to shift focus onto Donald Trump's own ties to the convicted sex offender. Clinton features prominently throughout the latest Epstein files disclosures, with the former president insisting that he broke ties with him well before the disgraced billionaire's 2008 conviction for sex offenses. Mere mention in the files released by the US Department of Justice does not imply wrongdoing, and Clinton has not been accused of crime or formally investigated. He follows his wife, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, who testified Thursday, defiantly calling for President Trump — who like Bill Clinton had ties with Epstein — to appear before the panel. "If this committee is serious about learning the truth about Epstein's trafficking crimes... it would ask (Trump) directly under oath about the tens of thousands of times he shows up in the Epstein files," she said in an opening statement published online. The depositions are being held behind closed doors even though the Clintons called for them to be open and televised, a move Bill Clinton de-

nounced as akin to a "kangaroo court." The grilling comes with greater peril for the former president than for his wife, as he has acknowledged extensive interactions with Epstein, but said he never visited the shady financier's private Caribbean island. Epstein associated with the world's rich, famous and powerful, and was convicted in 2008 for soliciting sex from girls as young as 14. He died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while facing trial on sex trafficking charges. His death was ruled a suicide. The Republican-led House Oversight Committee is probing those who were linked to Epstein, particularly in light of the Justice Department's disclosures of millions of new documents related to its investigation of him. Hillary insisted that she had neither flown on Epstein's plane nor visited his island. The Clintons had initially rejected subpoenas ordering them to testify in the panel's probe, but the Democratic power couple agreed to do so after House Republicans threatened to hold them in contempt of Congress. Hillary Clinton said in her opening statement to the panel that "I justified its subpoena to me based on its assumption that I have information regarding the investigations into the criminal activ-

ities of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell." Democrats say the investigation is being weaponized to attack Trump's political opponents rather than to conduct legitimate oversight. Bill Clinton features prominently in the trove of investigative files related to Epstein released by the Justice Department but has not been accused of any wrongdoing. Previously unseen photographs from the files include one showing the former president reclining in a hot tub, part of the image obscured by a stark black rectangle. In another, Clinton is pictured swimming alongside a dark-haired woman who appears to be Epstein's accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell. Clinton has acknowledged flying on Epstein's private plane several times in the early 2000s for Clinton Foundation-related humanitarian work. David Markus, an attorney for Maxwell, said recently that Clinton and Trump are "innocent of any wrongdoing." The depositions are being held in Chappaqua, New York, where the Clintons reside. Dozens of journalists have converged on the wealthy hamlet and the Secret Service erected metal barricades around the arts center where the depositions are happening.—DNA

Harry calls for aid corridors to be opened in Gaza

DUBAI: Britain's Prince Harry has called for aid corridors to be opened into Gaza urgently following his visit to Amman, Jordan. "Everything that I've heard and everything that I've seen, especially from World Central Kitchen, what we heard this morning on the live link, was that the food, the aid corridors need to be opened, that they're currently not," Prince Harry said in an interview with Britain's Channel 4 News. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex met children at a refugee camp in Jordan on Wednesday during their visit to Jordan. "It was really important for us to highlight the incredible work that Jordan does for this region and I think the work has been going on for decades but more so, recently as being a humanitarian hub for the Middle East, especially with what's going on in Gaza and Syria as well," he added. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were invited to visit the country by World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who met them after they arrived in Amman. "The entire world has spoken up. There is a lot of stuff in the news ... What's been happening in that region has been going on for a long time and it drops out of the news.—APP

Israeli fire kills eight people in Gaza

CAIRO: Israeli attacks killed five people in Gaza on Thursday, the territory's health officials said, and the Israeli military said it killed a militant who posed a threat to its forces in the south of the enclave. Medics said an Israeli airstrike against a group of Palestinians in Gaza City's Tuffah neighborhood in northern Gaza killed two people and wounded several others. Five people were killed and several others injured, some critically, in Israeli drone strikes on two police checkpoints in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis and in the Abu Hujair area northwest of the Bureij refugee camp later in the day, medics said. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the reports. Separately, the Israeli military said forces operating in the southern Gaza Strip killed a militant who posed an imminent threat to them after he crossed into an area still occupied by Israel inside the enclave. It described the incident as a violation of the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that began last October. Gaza has been reduced to rubble in the war that was triggered by an attack by the Palestinian militant group Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 in which 1,200 people were killed, according to Israeli tallies. The Gaza health ministry says more than 72,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed by Israeli fire since then. It also says that at least 600 people have been killed by Israeli fire since a ceasefire agreement came into effect last October. Israel has said four soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza since the ceasefire began. Both sides have traded blame for violations of the truce.—APP

Iraq armed fighters asked to prepare for long Iran-US war

BAGHDAD: A powerful Iran-backed Iraqi armed group told its fighters to prepare for the scenario of a long war in neighboring Iran should the United States launch strikes. Kataeb Hezbollah warned the US on Thursday of "immense losses" were it to start a war in the region, while a commander in an armed faction told AFP his group was "highly likely" to intervene in case of strikes. "Amid American threats and military build-up indicating a dangerous escalation in the region, it is necessary" for all fighters "to prepare for a potentially long war of attrition," Kataeb Hezbollah said in a statement.—APP

Briefs

Embarrassing defeat for UK's Starmer as Greens seize Labour stronghold

Green Party's Hannah Spencer wins the contest for the vacant parliamentary seat of Gorton and Denton

DNA

MANCHESTER: Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour suffered an embarrassing election defeat to the left-wing Green Party on Friday in an area of Manchester it had dominated for almost a century, a result that underscored the breakdown of Britain's two-party politics. The loss of one of Labour's safest seats, in the biggest electoral test in almost a year, piles further pressure on Starmer to prove that he should keep his job following weeks of political turmoil and calls for him to resign. The Green Party's Hannah Spencer won the contest for the vacant parliamentary seat of Gorton and Denton, with Nigel Farage's populist Reform UK party coming second, and Labour pushed into third place. The result was "clearly disappointing", said Labour Party chair Anna Turley. John Curtice, Britain's most respected pollster, called the result a "seismic moment", which means the "future of British politics looks more uncertain than at any stage" since the end of World War Two. Starmer had staked his personal authority on Labour winning the seat by blocking one of his rivals, the popular Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, from standing, and by visiting the constituency this week, when British leaders normally avoid campaigning in local areas if they risk losing.

Swedish military intercepts Russian drone

DNA

STOCKHOLM: The Swedish military has intercepted a suspected Russian drone off the south of the country as a French aircraft carrier was docked in the port of Malmö, officials say. Kremlin said it was 'absurd' to suggest drone jammed near French aircraft carrier was Russian. The armed forces said on Thursday that a Swedish naval ship observed the suspected drone during a patrol in the Öresund, the strait that divides Sweden from Denmark. They said that unspecified countermeasures were taken to disrupt the drone, and that contact with the drone was then lost. The French nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle is in the southern Swedish city of Malmö this week as part of regular NATO exercise activities. Malmö is located on the Öresund, opposite the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

Speaker Ayaz Sadiq lauds services of Portuguese envoy

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq conveyed that Pakistan greatly values its longstanding relations with Portugal. He lauded the exemplary services and constructive role played by the outgoing Ambassador in strengthening diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people bonds between the two countries

DNA

ISLAMABAD, February 27, 2026 — Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan, H.E. Frederico Silva paid a farewell courtesy call on Speaker of the National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, at the Parliament House in Islamabad. The meeting provided an opportunity to review the state of Pakistan-Portugal bilateral relations and explore avenues for enhanced cooperation in the coming years. Discussions also covered the current status of interparliamentary ties as part of the broader framework for comprehensive bilateral engagement between the two nations. During the interaction, Ambassador Frederico Silva formally presented his farewell compliments to the Speaker, marking the conclusion of his official tenure in Pakistan. He reflected on the positive trajectory of relations during his posting and expressed optimism about future collaboration. According to a note from the Speaker's office, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq conveyed that Pakistan greatly values its longstanding relations with Portugal. He lauded the exemplary services and constructive role played by the outgoing Ambassador in strengthening diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people bonds between the two countries. The Speaker hoped that rela-



The courtesy call aligns with a series of farewell engagements by Ambassador Silva in recent weeks. Just days earlier,

on February 18, 2026, he met with Federal Minister for Law and Justice & Human Rights, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, where both sides reaffirmed commitments to deepen cooperation, particularly in legal and judicial domains. Minister Tarar had similarly praised the Ambassador's contributions to advancing bilateral ties. Pakistan and Portugal maintain cordial relations rooted in shared interests in trade, culture, education, and multilateral forums. Recent interactions, including celebrations of Portugal's National Day and the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties in June 2025 (attended by Speaker Sadiq among others), have highlighted mutual goodwill. The two countries have also pursued avenues like bilateral political consultations and people-to-people exchanges to further solidify partnerships. Ambassador Frederico Silva, who assumed his role in mid-2023, has been active in promoting Portugal's interests in Pakistan through diplomatic outreach, cultural events, and visits to key regions such as Sindh and Karachi in late 2025. As Ambassador Silva prepares to depart, both Pakistani officials and the diplomatic community have acknowledged his efforts in fostering warmer ties. The National Assembly and Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed best wishes for his future endeavors.

PAF commemorates 7th anniversary of operation swift retort

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) commemorated the 7th anniversary of Operation Swift Retort at Air Headquarters, marking a landmark demonstration of resolve, professionalism and calibrated response in modern air warfare. Addressing the ceremony, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, NI (M), HJ, Chief of the Air Staff, stated that "Pakistan is a responsible country which desires peace with honour". He recalled that seven years ago, the aggressor miscalculated Pakistan's resolve and capability by challenging its sovereignty under the cover of darkness. PAF's measured broad daylight response re-established credible deterrence against a numerically superior adversary. Highlighting the complex global and regional security environment and evolving character of warfare, the Air



Chief underscored that since March 2021, despite fiscal constraints, PAF has pursued comprehensive modernization and indigenization to transition into a Next Generation Air Force. He noted that PAF recalibrated its Operational Doctrine and rapidly inducted advanced combat and support capabilities, including indigenously developed Unmanned Systems, Electronic Warfare, Space and Cyber assets, establishing a unique home-grown multi-domain Kill Chain. Referring to Marka-e-Haq in May 2025, he stated that when Pakistan's sovereignty was again challenged, PAF conducted, for the first time, full-spectrum multi-domain operations that were precisely executed and decisively overwhelmed the adversary. He highlighted the downing of advanced platforms including Rafale, SU-30 MKI, Mirage-2000, MiG-29 and Unmanned Aerial Systems, strikes deep inside hostile territory, and neutralization of S-400 air defence systems along with their Command and Control Centre. Reaffirming commitment to safeguarding national sovereignty, the Air Chief stated that PAF will continue to remain a symbol of pride, ensuring credible deterrence and a vigilant yet responsible defence posture. — DNA

Bangladesh Army Announces Second Major Senior Command Reshuffle

DNA

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Army has implemented another significant round of high-level command postings, marking the second major reshuffle within just one week. The changes, confirmed by sources at the Ministry of Defence and Army Headquarters, involve key leadership roles at the Army Headquarters, premier training institutions, and operational commands. The latest adjustments come amid ongoing restructuring following the formation of the new government under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman earlier this month. The first wave of changes on February 22 saw appointments to critical positions including the Chief of General Staff (CGS), Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division, and Director General of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), alongside shifts in several infantry divisions. In the new round of postings, effective immediately, Lt Gen Mohammad Shaheenul Haque, previously serving as Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC), has

been appointed as the new Quartermaster General (QMG) at Army Headquarters. Lt Gen Muhammad Faizur Rahman, who held the QMG position since October 2024 and has prior experience including a stint as Director General of DGFI, has been transferred to become the new Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC). Further changes at the major general level include: Maj Gen Hossain Al Morshed, formerly General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 19 Infantry Division and Area Commander, Ghatail (and noted for his previous role as Director General of the National Security Intelligence), has been appointed as the new Adjutant General at Army Headquarters. Maj Gen Md Hakimuzzaman, the outgoing Adjutant General, has been posted as the new Commandant of the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST). Maj Gen Md Nasim Parvez, previously Commandant of MIST, has been transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Maj Gen Mohammad Kamrul Hasan, who was GOC of the 66 Infantry Division and Area Commander, Rangpur, has been reassigned as GOC & Area Commander, Logistics Area, Dhaka Cantonment.

Hillary tells panel she had no idea of Epstein crimes

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Hillary Clinton told a congressional panel she "had no idea" about Jeffrey Epstein's crimes, as she called for lawmakers to question President Donald Trump under oath about his past association with the late sex offender. "I want to see the truth come out," the ex-US secretary of state said after testifying behind closed doors for hours to a congressional committee investigating Epstein. Her husband, former President Bill Clinton, will testify on Friday. The couple resisted the panel's subpoena, dismissing it as politically motivated, before agreeing to testify as potential contempt-of-Congress proceedings loomed against them. The Clintons and Trump deny wrongdoing in relation to Epstein. After spending six hours on Thursday speaking to House Oversight Committee members, Clinton told reporters she was "disappointed" that the testimony was not made public, "so I wouldn't have to be out here characterising it for you". She also commended Chairman James Comer for raising a series of significant questions about the nature of the investigation and for hearing her out about the areas she thinks need to be explored. "I appreciated that. I want to see the truth come out, so that was a reassuring way to end a very long, repetitive deposition," she said of Comer.

US embassy staff leaves Israel

NEWS DESK

TEL AVIV: The United States has authorized the departure of some embassy personnel and their families from Israel due to safety risks, the US embassy said in a post on X on Friday. It said the US embassy could further restrict US government employees and their families from traveling to certain areas of Israel, Jerusalem's Old City and the West Bank without advance notice, and advised US citizens to consider leaving Israel while commercial flights remain available.

Bid to topple Malaysia govt; probe launched

The Attorney-General's Chambers in a statement called for the probe to be conducted comprehensively and professionally without interference

NEWS DESK

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's top police official said on Friday authorities were investigating an alleged conspiracy to "topple the government and sabotage national stability." The alleged plot involved a local influential figure as well as an international media agency, Inspector-General of Police Mohd Khaiid

Ismail said in a statement. He did not name the person or the media agency. The investigation was being carried out under laws against undermining parliamentary democracy, an offense that carries a maximum jail term of 20 years upon conviction, he said. Police have not released details about the alleged plot. Government spokesperson and Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil told a regular press conference the issue was "a very serious matter" but did not elaborate, adding "we will leave it to the police to conduct a full investigation." The Attorney-General's Chambers in a statement called for the probe to be conducted comprehensively and professionally without interference.

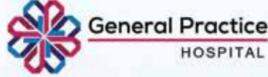
Pak strongly condemns Israel's illegal settlement expansion

DNA

JEDDAH/ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar delivered a forceful statement at the Extraordinary Open-Ended Ministerial Session of the OIC Executive Committee in Jeddah on February 26, 2026, condemning Israel's ongoing illegal measures to expand settlements, pursue de facto annexation, and impose sovereignty over the Occupied West Bank. Addressing the gathering, which included high-level representatives from OIC member states, the State of Palestine, Türkiye, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, DPM/FM Dar extended Ramadan greetings and thanked the Gambia (Chair of the Islamic Summit), Türkiye (Chair of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers), Saudi Arabia, and Palestine for convening the timely session. He also appreciated the OIC Secretary-General and his team for preparations. Highlighting the gravity of the situation, Dar described the Palestinian cause as the central concern of the Ummah and a core responsibility of the OIC. He noted that while diplomatic efforts continue to consolidate the ceasefire under UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (adopted November 2025) and implement the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, Israel's ceasefire violations, settlement expansion, and annexation attempts undermine these initiatives and threaten regional stability. Recalling engagements at the UN General Assembly in September 2025, where the

Group of Eight Arab-Islamic countries (including Pakistan) secured assurances from the US President against West Bank annexation. Dar lamented Israel's brazen impunity in converting Occupied West Bank areas into so-called "state property." He labeled these actions as reflecting an "annexationist and expansionist mindset" that flagrantly violates international law, the UN Charter, and relevant resolutions. Pakistan strongly condemned these measures and reiterated its full engagement in the Group of Eight to secure a permanent ceasefire, Gaza reconstruction under Palestinian Authority ownership, and a time-bound path to an independent Palestinian state on 1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Dar outlined key collective demands: immediate reversal of annexation measures, protection of holy sites including Al-Aqsa Mosque, end to displacement and collective punishment, faithful implementation of Resolution 2803, Gaza recovery, accountability for war crimes, and a credible political horizon for Palestinian statehood. He affirmed Pakistan's frontline role as a UN Security Council member in advancing the Palestinian cause across multilateral platforms. Notably, Prime Minister Mohammad Shehbaz Sharif participated in the Board of Peace inaugural meeting in Washington on February 19, 2026, and Dar addressed a high-level UNSC meeting on February 18. Dar also condemned recent inflammatory remarks by the US Ambassador to Israel suggesting acceptability of Israeli control over Arab territories, including the West Bank—statements he called irresponsible, inconsistent with international law, and emboldening illegal actions.





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