



# Daily Islamabad POST

Thursday, February 19, 2026

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## Major action

# CTD guns down 14 terrorists in two Quetta operations

Pakistan Customs official, policeman martyred in Dera Ismail Khan attacks

DNA

QUETTA: Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Wednesday gunned down 14 terrorists during two different engagements in Balochistan capital Quetta, a spokesperson said. According to the CTD spokesperson, an operation was carried out in Dera Ismail Khan on Quetta's outskirts. Six suspects were killed in an exchange of fire. Three CTD personnel were injured during the operation. Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain militants, who were said to be affiliated with a banned organisation.

In a separate intelligence-based operation in Balochistan, CTD personnel killed six terrorists during an exchange of fire, the spokesperson added. Weapons and explosive materials were recovered from the suspects, who were allegedly involved in suicide attacks. The operation was conducted on Wednesday, a day after 12 terrorists belonging to an India-based proxy group were killed and 11 security personnel embraced martyrdom in a terrorist attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district.

The provinces of KP and Balochistan, which border Afghanistan, have been particularly affected by terrorism since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021.

Earlier this month, India-backed Fitrat al-Hindustan - Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) carried out attacks in different parts of Balochistan, killing 36 security personnel, including women and children, and 11 security personnel martyred, according to the ISPR. In response, the security forces launched Operation Raddul Faraa-1 and eliminated at least 216 terrorists in various coordinated engagements and clearance operations. Meanwhile, terrorists attacked a Pakistan customs office and a police station near York Interchange in Dera Ismail Khan, according to a police spokesperson. Customs official Israr Khan and police officer Muhammad Bilal were martyred in the exchange of fire.

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**Two officials martyred in DI Khan**

NEWS DESK

PESHAWAR: Two officials were martyred and two others injured when militants attacked Yarik police station and a customs office in Dera Ismail Khan on Wednesday, police said. According to officials, an attacker opened fire with automatic weapons on the Yarik police station and a nearby customs office, located along the road to Bannu. The Economic Corporation (CECO) police station was also attacked. A police spokesperson said that the officials martyred in the attack were customs official Israr Khan and police constable Mohammad Bilal.

The injured, identified as Harar Umar and Khaya Mohammad, were shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital's trauma centre, where they were undergoing treatment. Police said the attackers also fired at a passenger bus travelling on the CPEC route, killing a passenger in the attack and a vehicle set alight during the assault. Security personnel returned fire, prompting the assailants to flee.

A heavy police contingent reached the site soon after the incident, and a search operation was launched in the surrounding area. Investigations are underway, and officials said efforts were ongoing to apprehend those involved in the attack. Earlier this month, at least four policemen, including a station house officer (SHO), were martyred when armed militants attacked a police party in Pania's Wands Budhi area of Dera Ismail Khan. On January 24, five people, including a

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**PEACE BOARD MEET**

## PM Shehbaz to seek clarity on troops for Gaza in US visit

"We will not be part of any other role, such as disarming Hamas. It is out of the question," says Pm's aide

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NEWS DESK / DNA

at least 20 countries. Trump, who will chair the meeting, is expected to announce a multi-billion dollar reconstruction plan for Gaza and detail plans for an UN-authorised stabilisation force for a Palestinian enclave.

Three government sources said during the Washington visit PM Shehbaz wanted to better understand the goal of the USP, who authorised the military strike, and what the chain of command was before making a decision on deploying troops.

"We are ready to send troops. Let me make it clear that our troops could only be part of a peace mission in Gaza," said one of the sources, a close aide of PM Shehbaz. "We will not be part of any other role, such as disarming Hamas. It is out of the question," he said, adding that the USP had to be clear on what and who the chain of command was before making a decision on deploying troops.

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## US to stop Iran's nuclear arms Ambitions, says energy secretary

US and Iranian officials held talks in Geneva aimed at averting the possibility of US military intervention to curb Tehran's nuclear programme

DNA

WASHINGTON: The United States remains steadfast in its commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, with high-level officials issuing stark warnings amid ongoing diplomatic efforts.

On Wednesday, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright declared in Paris that Washington would deter Tehran's nuclear ambitions "one way or the other." Speaking on the sidelines of International Energy Agency (IEA) meetings, Wright emphasized that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. "They're been very clear about what they would do with nuclear weapons. It's entirely unacceptable," Wright stated, adding, "So one way or the other, we are going to end, deter, Iran's march towards a nuclear weapon."

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## Briefs

**UAE President remerges after health rumors**

NEWS DESK

ABU DHABI: United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has appeared in a meeting with US Senator Lindsey Graham for the first time after rumours about his health spread following a now-deleted Turkish presidency statement. Earlier this month, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan went to Saudi Arabia and was meant to later visit the neighbouring United Arab Emirates, amid an ongoing rift between the two Gulf powers. But on Sunday, it was said he was postponing his Abu Dhabi trip because the Emirati leader had a "health problem" - in a statement that was later deleted.

**Govt to ensure gas supply during Ramazan**

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday announced that it would ensure gas supply during Shohr and Iftar hours to facilitate consumers across the country during the holy month of Ramazan. Addressing a joint press conference alongside Petroleum Minister Arif Pervaiz Malaik, Wright declared in Paris that Washington would deter Tehran's nuclear ambitions "one way or the other." Speaking on the sidelines of International Energy Agency (IEA) meetings, Wright emphasized that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. "They're been very clear about what they would do with nuclear weapons. It's entirely unacceptable," Wright stated, adding, "So one way or the other, we are going to end, deter, Iran's march towards a nuclear weapon."

ISLAMABAD: Before Pakistan commits to sending troops to Gaza as part of the international Stabilisation Force it wants assurances from the United States that it will be a peacekeeping mission rather than tasked with dismantling Hamas' three sources told.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is set to attend the first formal meeting of President Donald Trump's Board of Peace in Washington on Thursday, alongside delegations from

Continued on Page 06

**Imaan, Hadi appeals fixed for hearing**

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday fixed for hearing the appeals of human rights lawyer advocate Imaan Mazar and her husband Hadi Ali Chatta against their conviction in the IHC's social media posts case. According to the cause list issued by the registrar's office, IHC's Justice Muhammad Asif will take up the appeals on Thursday (February 19). The court also scheduled for hearing applications seeking the suspension of sentences awarded to the two lawyers. Last month, Imaan and Hadi were handed a total of 17 years in jail on multiple charges under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Pecca) by a sessions court in Islamabad, sparking outrage among rights groups, opposition parties, and other segments of society.

The written order by Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Attaf Majoka said the prosecution had proved its case against Imaan and Hadi under Section 9 of Pecca (possession of an offence), 10 (cybercrimes) and 16-A (false information) of Pecca. Under Section 9 of Pecca, both were sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs5 million each, with an additional year in default. For Section 10, they were each handed 10 years' rigorous

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**Ramadan moon sighted in Pakistan**

DENA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will observe the first day of Ramadan 2026 tomorrow (Thursday) as the crescent moon for the holy month has been sighted, announced Central Religious Committee Chairman Mian Aslam Khanbuk Azez and Khanbuk Azez on Wednesday. Reports of testimonies started coming in around 6:30pm, with sources saying at least 40 were received from across the country.

Testimonies were received from different areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After analysing the committee was convened in Peshawar around 5pm to sight the moon for the holy month, with zonal committees across the country also convened to collect testimonies of moon sightings. Ministry of Science and Technology, Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), and Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) were also part of the committee and assisted the body in moon sighting. The Suparco had forecast that the

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**PARIS: Vice President Shan Michelle of Fives Group met with Zahra Mumtaz Baloch Pakistan Ambassador to France. Fives Group is a French global leader in industrial engineering solutions. Discussions focused on exploring opportunities for collaboration in manufacturing, innovation and sustainable technologies. - DNA**

## To get him released

## PTI announces 'Imran Khan Release Force'

KP CM says force will be formally registered, will take oath after Eid, and pursue peaceful struggle for jailed leader

**TTAP announces ending parliament protest**

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced the formation of "Imran Khan Release Force," which will struggle to secure the former prime minister's release from jail. The cricketer-turned-politician, 73, has been in jail since August 2023, convicted in a string of cases he claims were politically driven following his ouster from the prime ministerial office. The PTI seems to have sped up its call to seek his release following the revelation, in a medical report submitted to the Supreme Court, that he only has 15% vision left in his right eye. The government, however, maintains that the ex-premier is getting the best treatment possible. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi recently told journalists that the PTI leadership and Imran's personal doctors were satisfied with the

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**Zelenskiy accuses Russia 'Difficult' Ukraine peace talks end**

Russia's chief negotiator Vladimir Medinsky says further negotiations will be held soon

sky to ensure the talks were successful. "We can see that progress has been made, but there are positions that because the negotiations were difficult, Zelenskiy told reporters in a WhatsApp chat shortly after talks concluded. Rustem Umerov, the head of Kyiv's negotiating team, said separately that the second day had been "intensive and substantive." Both sides were working toward decisions that can be sent to their presidents, he said. Russia's chief negotiator, former culture minister

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**FEBRUARY 2026**

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## 4.2m families to receive financial support under Nigehban Package: Azma

LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Information and Culture Salma Bokhari has announced under Pakistan's largest-ever Nigehban Ramazan package, 4.2 million families will receive direct financial assistance of Rs 10,000 each, without any PIN requirement or service charges. In a press conference at the DGPR on Wednesday, she said that eligible individuals who were missed during survey and did not receive assistance can contact the "Maryam Ko Rata" helpline at 1000. By providing their CNIC number, eligibility will be verified immediately and complaints resolved within 24 hours.

According to the minister, funds can be withdrawn directly from ATMs or bank centers, and strict action will be taken against those who commit illegal charges. These cases have already been registered against violators. She added that distribution of cards across Punjab will be completed by March 10. Conveying Chief Minister's message, Arma Bokhari emphasized that assistance will reach every family with dignity, without the need for crowds or long queues. Every eligible household will receive its entitlement without obstruction. Special Assistant to the CM Salma Butt said free Iftar arrangements have been made in

every tehsil, serving around 2,000 people daily. Bokhari said the government has directed that certificates and awards be given to those supporting public welfare. The SAGM urged citizens not to misuse the helpline or engage in hoarding, stressing that the Punjab government is ensuring transparency and secure distribution so that the assistance reaches the correct families. Re 10,000 assistance during Ramazan, Salma Butt further stated that all Sahulat Bazaars in Punjab have been converted into Ramzan Sahulat Bazaars, enabling citizens to shop from home using the Nigehban Ramazan Card. More than 17,000 grocery stores have been linked to the card. The monthly amount has been increased from Rs 3,500 to Rs 10,000, while over 700,000 cards have already been distributed. Ramazan control rooms have also been activated in all districts to monitor prices and supply. For the Christian community, 157,000 cards have been distributed so far, and 100,000 more will be issued. Bachat Bazaar at Jallian Park, the government provided subsidies worth Rs 20 million, benefiting more than 300,000 citizens. Azma

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### Punjab cities illuminated ahead of Ramazan

LAHORE: On the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, cities and villages across the province have been illuminated ahead of Ramazan, with decorative lights and thematic installations adorning major roads, markets and public spaces. According to a handout, in Rawalpindi, preparations to welcome the holy month are in full swing. Neon signs bearing the slogan "Ramazan Nigehban" have been installed, while main roads, markets and intersecting sections have been brightly lit. Green belts are decorated with colourful lights and illuminated inscriptions of the names of Allah have been laid out in key arteries, creating a festive atmosphere. Trees along major roads have also been wrapped in vibrant lighting. Market entrances feature arch-shaped lighting installations designed around the Ramazan theme. In Chakwal, decorative lights and illuminated arches have been installed on the chief minister's special instructions, while illuminated arches at Nigehban Ramazan Bazaars and Dasterkhwan centres have attracted public attention.

### Farewell reference honors to retire professor at H-8 college



DNA

ISLAMABAD: A farewell ceremony was hosted by Islamabad Model Post-graduate College H-8/2 in honor of Prof. Tahir Mahmood, Head of the Department of Economics, and Prof. Abdul Rehif, Head of the Department of Mathematics, on the eve of their retirement. The event, held on campus in Islamabad, was attended by the faculty members.

Prof. Tahir Mahmood served the former FG colleges of Islamabad with distinction in various capacities. He also remained as office bearer and later President of Federal Government College Teachers Association. During his tenure, teachers secured several important benefits, most notably the introduction of the Higher Time Scale, a promotion formula that ensured faster career progression for ex-FG colleges and other

federal teaching cadres. Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Attaf Awan praised Prof. Tahir Mahmood's unwavering commitment to the teaching community. In his remarks, Prof. Tahir expressed heartfelt gratitude, describing teaching as his lifelong passion. Principal Prof. Attaf Awan also spoke of the contributions of the professors to their exemplary services. The ceremony concluded with a standing ovation and presentation of commemorative shields to the distinguished professors.

## Relief Package immediate disbursement ordered

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection Syed Irfan Ahmed Shah Wednesday chaired a high-level review meeting on the Ramazan Relief Package 2026 to ensure smooth and timely assistance to beneficiaries, in line with the directives of the Prime Minister. The meeting was attended by representatives of National Database and Registration Authority, State Bank of Pakistan, the Ministry of National Revenue and Broadband and Digital Income Support Program, National Telecommunications Corporation, Press Information Department, and officials from various banks. Addressing the participants, the federal minister directed the State Bank of Pakistan to immediately begin crediting Ramazan relief funds to beneficiaries' accounts from today. He further instructed that all banks must ensure full operational readiness on the first day of Ramazan to avoid any difficulties in payment. In response, Minister Shah directed the minister to order that pending beneficiary bank accounts be opened on a priority basis. He also called for the formation of a dedicated WhatsApp group comprising focal persons from all relevant institutions to strengthen coordination and ensure twice-daily progress updates. Later, Syed Irfan Ahmed Shah visited the control room established to monitor the disbursement of the Prime Minister's Ramazan Relief Package.

According to the control room dashboard, nearly 200,000 calls have been received so far, with over 95,000 resolved through the IVR system and around 23,000 handled by call agents. The minister directed BISP to keep the control room operational 24/7 at least during the first ten days of Ramazan to promptly address public concerns. A day earlier, the federal minister had also visited the NTC call center set up for the Ramazan Relief Package. The center, located in the Faisalabad office of NTC, has been operational since February 15, 2026, with 50 trained call agents providing assistance. To further facilitate the public, a second call center in Lahore has also become operational. The officials informed the minister that on February 16 alone, approximately 43,000 calls related to the Ramazan Relief Package were received, reflecting strong public engagement and the importance of efficient service delivery. The federal minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring transparent, timely, and hassle-free financial support for deserving families during the holy month of Ramazan. -DNA

**Ramzan Mubarak**

**Historic**  
**RAMZAN RELIEF PACKAGE**  
by Prime Minister  
Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

**38 BILLION**  
Under the Ramzan Relief Package  
being distributed to beneficiaries via  
Digital Wallets and Bank Accounts

**Benefiting 12.1 Million**  
Deserving Families Nationwide  
with Transparency & Dignity

**Information regarding transfer of money  
should be received by 10:00 PM  
every day through**

**HELPLINE 9999**

**28 Billion Fund | 13000**  
Benefiting 2.1 Million deserving families with  
monthly cash relief  
from the Federal Government

**10 Billion Additional Stipend**  
Benefiting 10 Million deserving families  
with monthly stipend

**Benefiting More than 60 Million Pakistanis Nationwide**

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ISLAMABAD: Chairman NAB, Lt. Gen. (R) Nazir Ahmed presenting a shield to Ambassador of the State of Qatar Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khatar at NAB (HQ).

### Senator announces major relief for women beneficiaries

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Senator Rubina Khalid Wednesday announced major financial relief for women beneficiaries in fairer facia in view of the upcoming holy month of Ramazan, including an increase in quarterly stipends and additional support for education and nutrition programmes. The chairperson was speaking during a meeting with members held at the BISP headquarter. The primary objective of the session was to directly hear public concerns, understand issues faced by beneficiaries, and ensure timely and effective resolution of complaints. While addressing participants, the chairperson said that Ramazan is a month of blessings, patience and compassion, and in line with this spirit, BISP is extending maximum possible relief to deserving families across the country. She announced that the quarterly installment of the Benazir Khalid Program has been increased by Rs. 1,000, raising the amount from Rs. 13,000 to Rs. 14,500 for eligible women beneficiaries. In addition, stipends under the Benazir Nasheen Programme and Benazir Educational Scholarships have been enhanced by Rs. 500 each to further strengthen nutritional and support children's education.

Senator Khalid urged deserving women to ensure they receive their full entitlements. -APP

## FUUAST launches Turkish language

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Urdu University Islamabad (FUUAST), on Wednesday held its first class of Turkish language in a move to not only enhance the educational profile of students in minority languages but also to promote cultural understanding among students. The initiative has been introduced by the Department of International Relations (DIR) in collaboration with the Turkish Embassy. The first class is to be held in two days, initially two classes will be held every week. As the regular sessions formally began on Wednesday, February 18, Dr Yusuf Ziya Ozan, an expert in Turkish language and literature is serving as the language instructor for the course. Students from various departments attended the first class with great enthusiasm. Professors, lecturer and other staff members also participated in the initiative. The introduction of Turkish language is indeed a remarkable opportunity. Dr Faisal Javaid also expressed his gratitude to Vice Chancellor Dr. Zahid Khan Shinwari and Incharge Campus Dr. Sabi Bashir for facilitating this initiative. Dr. Saima Javaid, IR lecturer Saima Kazmi thanked the Turkish Embassy and the instructor for their support and cooperation. She described the launch of Turkish language classes as a reflection of Dr Faisal Javaid's academic vision. -DNA

### Call for urgent action to bridge gender wage gap in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), convened a national dialogue on "Holding the Gender Wage Gap in Pakistan: From Evidence to Action." The event brought together policymakers, development partners, labour experts, private sector representatives, and civil society to advance evidence-based strategies for achieving wage equality. Opening the session, Chairman Umme Laiba Arshad underscored that "equal pay is not just about numbers, it is about justice, governance, and economic transformation." She highlighted that women in Pakistan continue to earn 25-30% less than men, driven by structural inequalities and informality. She noted that women's labour force participation has improved according to recent surveys, but challenges such as gender bias, lack of access to equal opportunities, and barriers to participation in decision-making forums remain. She reaffirmed NCSW's commitment to strengthening policy frameworks, institutional accountability, and partnerships to ensure equal pay and promote inclusive economic growth. Geneva Tomaček, Country Director, ILO, emphasized that closing the gender wage gap is both an economic and social priority, calling for greater transparency, compliance, and economic transformation. She highlighted that strengthened data systems, the reaffirmed ILO's support for promoting decent work and pay equity. Samad Riaz, Resident Representative, UNDP, stressed that wage equality is fundamental to human rights and sustainable development, reiterating UNDP's commitment to supporting Pakistan through the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and gender-responsive governance. Nafoorat Aslam Chaudhary, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, highlighted ongoing institutional reform and labour governance initiatives, reiterating the government's resolve to strengthen compliance, enforcement, and inclusive labour market systems. -APP

National  
Days and  
Armed  
Forces Days

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

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15  
Bomb Disposal.....15  
Fire Services Rawalpindi/Islamabad.....1122 & 16  
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.....1451122  
Motorway Police.....9286044  
Motorway Police.....9270001-20  
Women Police Stations  
Islamabad.....922596  
Rawalpindi.....927001-20



## Hospitals

CMH.....561111  
MHI.....561116  
Cantt Hospital.....9270097-11  
DHQ.....5556311-4  
RGIH.....9290301-7  
Holy Family.....9290322-79  
PIMS.....9281170-79  
Polyclinic.....9218300-09  
Shifa International.....4603666

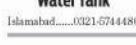


## Departments

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Met Office.....9250360-6  
RDA.....5555864  
TMA.....5770886  
Contonment Board.....9270151-3

Islamabad  
Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224  
Potshar Town.....9209244  
Rawal Town.....5773343

American  
author John  
Kiser visits IRS

The visit concluded with a reaffirmation of the importance of continued dialogue and research collaboration on themes of ethical leadership, regional stability, and inter-civilizational understanding



## DNA

ISLAMABAD: Mr. John Kiser, distinguished American author, historian, and interfaith advocate, visited the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, during his recent trip to Pakistan. During his visit, Mr. Kiser interacted with the Institute's researchers and scholars, where he shared insights from his extensive intellectual work focusing on

moral courage, ethical leadership, and interfaith harmony. He particularly highlighted the insights from his acclaimed book Commander of the Faithful, which chronicles the life and legacy of Amir Abdolkarim Soltani as a model of humanitarian values, spiritual depth, and principled leadership in times of conflict. Ambassador Soltani, the President of the Institute, welcomed Mr. Kiser to the Institute. He commended his scholarly contributions

and efforts to promote interfaith understanding and mutual respect, according to a statement. Ambassador Soltani appreciated Mr. Kiser's work in highlighting shared moral values and underscored the importance of intellectual engagement in fostering global harmony and peaceful coexistence. The interaction provided a unique opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas on religious coexistence, ethical leadership, regional stability, and inter-civilizational understanding.

ties, and the importance of building bridges between civilizations. Mr. Kiser also reflected on the need to challenge prevalent stereotypes and promote a more balanced understanding of Islam and the West through scholarship and dialogue. The visit concluded with a reaffirmation of the importance of continued dialogue and research collaboration on themes of ethical leadership, regional stability, and inter-civilizational understanding.

## Tanzanian tax delegation visits mohtasib's office

ISLAMABAD: Owing to persistent efforts for speedy resolution of public complaints, the institution of Wafaqi Mohtasib has emerged as the poor man's court, enjoying the trust and confidence of the general public. This was stated by the Wafaqi Mohtasib (Federal Ombudsman), Mr. Qasim Ali Qureshi, while talking to the press. The delegation from the Tax Ombudsman Service of Tanzania (TOST), headed by Mr. Erasmus Vincent Mui, which called on him at the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat here today He said that it has processed and decided a record number of 261,601 complaints during the outgoing year 2025, as against 223,198 cases decided in 2024. The record number of complaints decided has been attributed to initiatives like the Khali Katcheries (Open Courts), Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR) mechanism, the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) and Inspection and disposal of public complaints. It has achieved an unprecedented implementation rate of 96.89, during the year, he maintained. Qureshi further informed that with a view to enhancing outreach and accessibility, a number of new Regional Offices and Complaint Collection Centres (CCCs) have been established during the last two years, mostly in the remote and far-off regions of the country. Now this institution has presence in 28 cities across the country, which is instrumental in dispensing administrative justice virtually at the doorsteps of the people. He particularly called for the exchange of experiences and best practices between the two institutions, with a view to enhance accountability and institutional capacity building. Later, the delegation was given a detailed presentation on the Federal Ombudsman's mandate, operational modalities, role and functions, particularly the mechanism for receipt

Visits of government agencies and departments. It has followed by a lively Question/Answer session. The leader of the Tanzanian delegation commended the performance of the Wafaqi Mohtasib's institution, saying that it is rendering very useful service to the people. He emphasised the need to strengthen closer mutual linkages between the Wafaqi Mohtasib's institution and Tax Ombudsman of Tanzania to their mutual advantage. The delegation also visited the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA)'s Secretariat located in the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Office premises, wherein it was briefed on its history and evolution alongwith its present performance in the establishment of the Association. It was informed that the country currently holds its Presidency and playing an active role in carrying out its mandated functions and activities. -DNA

SSP Operations Qazi  
chairs key meeting

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (Operations) Islamabad Qazi Ali Raza chaired an important meeting to review crime prevention measures and security arrangements for the holy month of Ramazan. An official toll APP on Wednesday that the meeting was attended by zonal SPs, SDPOs, and SHOs. He said a detailed review of the overall law and order situation, security deployment, and crime control strategy was conducted. SSP Qazi directed concerned officers to ensure that the security measures are in place at all costs and strict enforcement of strict security arrangements against crime elements. He said strict crackdowns were ordered against pickpockets, illegal beggars, loiterers, habitual criminals, and groups involved in motorcycle and car theft. Qazi said a zero-tolerance policy was reiterated against kite selling and flying, while tenant registration was also emphasized. He said effective action was ordered against professional beggars and their facilitators. He said special security arrangements have been made for Ramazan, including the installation of walk-through gates at mosques and deployment of additional personnel. SSP Qazi said foodpoison security was directed during Iftar and Tarawish hours, while patrolling and checking mechanisms were ordered to be further strengthened. He said officers were instructed to ensure field presence, particularly during prayer timings.

Food prices surge ahead of Ramazan  
Rising costs squeeze households  
and small businesses

exposed weaknesses in price enforcement mechanisms. Under provincial price control laws, district authorities can impose fines, seal shops and initiate criminal proceedings. Price enforcement has often remained inconsistent, with inspections tapering off once the fasting month begins. Shahid Rasheed Butt cautioned that government direct cash transfers may not fully offset inflation if retail prices continue to rise unchecked. If enforcement fails, the real value of assistance erodes quickly, reducing the intended relief for

vulnerable households. He noted that higher food costs disproportionately affect families that spend more than 40 percent of their income on groceries. Dr. Aslam Khan, a key inflation analyst, claims that soaring oil prices have hit household budgets. Consumers argue that when notified rates are prepared with input from trader bodies that later fail to comply, public confidence in the system weakens. For low-income households, rising fruit and edible oil prices often mean cutting back on protein and overall nutrition during the fasting month.

Spring festival  
brings message of  
hope, prosperity, &  
unity to the world

ISLAMABAD: The Chinese Lunar New Year, traditionally marked as the Spring Festival, carries a universal message of hope, prosperity, and solidarity and its celebration is emerging as a meaningful avenue to deepen Pakistan-China friendship and strengthen people-to-people ties across borders. Talking to news agency on Wednesday, senior journalists and experts on international relations, Riaz Safi said that according to the Chinese lunar calendar, the new year is associated with the "Horse," which symbolizes determination, perseverance, struggle, and speed. He added that such festivals reinforce cultural harmony, friendship, and the shared commitment to development, according to Rashid Safi, the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China is not limited to economic cooperation rather, it is based on people-to-people connections, cultural exchanges, and a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation. China's global development and policy of openness—particularly its initiatives to promote sustainable investment and regional connectivity—are creating new opportunities for Pakistan and expanding economic cooperation between the two countries. He expressed hope that enhanced friendship, cultural exchanges, and economic partnership between the two countries would usher in a new era of development and stability in the region.—APP

POL import  
bill declines  
by 4.39 %

ISLAMABAD: The imports of the overall petroleum group decreased by 4.39 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (2025-26) as compared to the corresponding months of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The total value of the petroleum group during January-September (2025-26) stood at \$ 4,946,783 million against the imports of \$ 9,461,924 million during the same months of last year. Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 1.81 percent, from \$ 3,486,22 million last year to \$ 3,258,472 million during the period under review year. Likewise, the imports of Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) decreased by 26.20 percent from \$ 2,202,415 million last year to \$ 1,625,298 million while the import of Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) grew by 4.98 percent in the first seven months and stood at \$ 609,843 million.—APP

کنونمنٹ بورڈ راولپنڈی چھاونی  
شرانط نیلام منڈی میشیان راولپنڈی چھاونی

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## Briefs

## FCCP seeks data on informal settlements

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court, while hearing an important case concerning informal settlements (tatchi abad), has directed all relevant federal and provincial departments to submit comprehensive reports concerning the latest statistics and data on such settlements. The hearing was conducted on Wednesday by a two-member bench headed by Chief Justice of the Federal Constitutional Court Justice Amjad Ali Khan. In the proceedings, the court observed that the provision of accurate and authentic information regarding informal settlements was essential for an effective and fair adjudication of the matter. It directed all concerned to update statistics and progress reports within the stipulated time frame. The court adjourned further hearing of the case until the first week of April, instructing that a detailed report of progress would be undertaken in light of the submitted reports at the next hearing—APP.

FDE notifies  
Ramzan  
timings for  
educational  
institutions

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) on Wednesday notified revised timings for the holy month of Ramazan for all educational institutions, operating under its administrative control. According to a notification issued by the FDE, the revised timings will be observed by all educational institutions in the country. A circular issued by the FDE on Wednesday, with the signature of the Director General FDE, said that institutions observing single-shift classes will operate from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm from Monday to Thursday, while on Friday classes will conclude at 12:00 pm. The same schedule will be followed by educational institutions, including FDE Colleges. For double-shift institutions, the morning shift will be held from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm from Monday to Friday. The evening shift will commence from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm on Monday to Thursday, and from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm on Friday. —APP

IRSA releases  
112,200 cusecs  
water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River Authority (IRA) on Wednesday released 11,22,000 cusecs of water from various river stations with inflow of 38,300 cusecs according to the data released by the IRA, water level kept in the River Indus, Lahore. The data is at 18,147.1 feet which was 7047 feet higher than the dead level of 14,012.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 14,200 cusecs and 35,300 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was recorded as 14,012.00 feet which was 605 feet higher than its dead level of 13,500 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 6,900 cusecs and 8,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Tausia, Gordeel and Sialkot was recorded as 43,100, 39,500, 29,500, and 7,500 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Ravi River, a tributary of the Indus, was released at Nowshera and 1,500 cusecs were released from Ravi Chenab at Manjra—APP.

Railways transports 8.2m tonnes of freight

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways targeted 8.2 million tonnes of freight in its financial year 2024-25, carrying petroleum products, containers, coal, rock phosphate, fertilizer, wheat and other bulk commodities. As per the National Transport Policy 2018, the department is envisaged to play a primary role in long-haul freight movement between industrial zones across the country. The minister of railways, Syed Aslam Baloch, however, said that ageing infrastructure, limited line capacity and shortages of rolling stock have constrained freight operations. To address these challenges, the official said Pakistan Railways has initiated several measures to enhance freight transportation. Among them is the construction of a 1,600-km railway line, in collaboration with the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC).



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistan and HRD, Chaudhry Salik Hussain inaugurates MIS and Mobile Application for Worker Welfare Fund users at a local hotel in the Federal Capital.

## **ICCI to expand facilitation desks for business community: Tahir**

Traders of I-8 markaz demand parking plaza, civic improvements

ISLAMABAD: President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Sardar Tahir Mehmood has reiterated that the Chamber, being the mother body of the business community, is fully committed to promoting business growth by playing an effective advocacy role between the public and private sectors to ensure ease of doing business. He expressed these views while addressing a large delegation of Traders Welfare Association 18 Markaz, which visited the Chamber under the leadership of its President, Chaudhry Waheed Mushtaq Cheema. Highlighting the Chamber's initiatives, the ICCI President said that various facility desks are already operational at the Chamber and efforts are underway to establish additional desks for MOCB, Tawarikh and Tawarikh. He also directed the chamber to facilitate the business community. He emphasized that the Chamber's facilities remain in constant contact with all stakeholders of relevant government institutions, which has enabled ICCI to successfully resolve several pressing issues relating to CDA and the Federal Board of Revenue, in addition to matters concerning the district administration, ESDCO, and Sui Gas. Sardar Tahir Mehmood urged traders and industrialists to become members of the Chamber, stating that a larger membership base would strengthen the Chamber's voice and enhance its effectiveness in resolving community issues. Speaking on the occasion, President, Traders Welfare Association 18 Markaz Chaudhry Waheed Mushtaq Cheema thanked the ICCI President for his support and highlighted the efforts made by traders to maintain the quality of the community as a major driving parameter of success. He also highlighted the need for a flower market, improved cleanliness and sanitization, laying of new sewerage lines, and restoration of street lights. General Secretary Rana Mohammad Bilal pointed out harassment by officials of certain departments as a major concern for traders, particularly in connection with the installation of POS systems by the FBR. Chairman Yasir Jaseel Abbasi expressed pride in being associated with ICCI, describing it as the apex body of the business community. He outlined the benefits of Chamber membership, including one-window solutions to business issues and cash discounts at hospitals, cash and carry outlets, and hotels. President All Pakistan Jangam-Darjan Ajman Baloch also reaffirmed his commitment to stand firmly with the business community and support its initiatives. In his vote of thanks, the participants of the Chamber's fall support meeting in Faisal Chodhry, in his vote of thanks, assured the participants of the Chamber's full support in promoting ease of doing business. Among those present on the occasion also included Councilor Mamoon Chaudhry Masood, Executive Members Zulqarnain Abhasi, Ishaq Sial, former Senior Vice President Khalid Mehmood Chaudhry, Tauseef Zaman, and others. **DNA**

## 6 Ramazan bazaars set up across Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has set up six Ramzan bazaars across Islamabad to provide essential food items at official rates. The district administration said vegetables, fruit, chicken, eggs, sugar, ghee and grocery items will be available under the government rate list, with price checks and daily monitoring in place. The move aims to support residents during the holy month by making available items available at rates set by the government. According to the administration, the Ramzan bazaars have been established in Tariq, H-9, Barri Imam (Barra Kalu), G-6, G-11 and Pakistan Town. These locations were selected to cover major population areas so that residents can access markets without long travel. In that regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Mehmood visited all six Ramzan bazaars to review arrangements and issued directions to field officers to ensure uninterrupted availability of essential items. During the visits, he inspected stalls selling vegetables, fruit, eggs, chicken and grocery goods. He also reviewed the stock and quality of sugar, ghee and other daily-use items. The deputy commissioner directed that all items must be sold strictly according to the displayed rate list. He said no vendor will be allowed to sell the items above the displayed rates. The administration stated that price control magistrates will remain present at the bazaars throughout the day. Their duty will include checking prices, monitoring supplies and addressing complaints on the spot. Security arrangements, cleanliness and parking facilities were also reviewed during the inspections to ensure smooth movement of shoppers. Officials said that assistant commissioners have been instructed to submit daily reports on the functioning of Ramzan Bazaars. These reports will cover price compliance, availability of items, cleanliness conditions and any public complaints received during the day. The reports will be reviewed to take timely action where needed. The deputy commissioner emphasized that the supply of essential food items must be ensured at all times, especially during peak shopping hours. He instructed relevant departments to maintain coordination so that shortages do not occur during Ramzan. Citizens were advised to purchase items only according to the displayed rate lists. The administration requested buyers to remain vigilant and check prices before payment. In case of overcharging or any other issue, residents were asked to immediately contact the price control magistrate present at the bazaars. The district administration also appealed to citizens to cooperate with officials by reporting violations instead of engaging in arguments with vendors. Complaints received on the spot will be addressed without delay, officials said. The administration reaffirmed that strict action will be taken against those found involved in overcharging or violating price regulations. Officials said inspections will continue throughout the holy month to ensure that Ramzan Bazaars serve their intended purpose of providing relief to the public. **DNA**

Govt committed to youth, women empowerment: Mashhood

ISLAMABAD: Chairman, Prince Minister, Youth Parliament, Riaz-e-Mashq Ahmed Khan has said that this government is fully committed to empowering youth and women as key drivers of Pakistan's economic revival. Addressing a gathering at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry here on Tuesday, he appreciated the Chamber's role in promoting Islamabad's business environment and lauded the Women's Chamber for effectively supporting female entrepreneurs through handholding and mentorship. A release issued here on Wednesday said a release issued here on Wednesday. The ceremony featured the distribution of goods boxes among women to help them start their own small business. The ceremony was organized by House Collection in collaboration with Mumtaz Vocational Training & Placements Institute as part of efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. Riaz-e-Mashq Ahmed Khan said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's economic scenario has strengthened significantly. Remittances have crossed \$38 billion, an all-time high and are expected to exceed \$40 billion, while global financial institutions

increasingly viewing Pakistan as a viable employment destination. In fact, the government aims to facilitate 2.1 million Pakistanis for overseas employment next year through structural skill development and international placements. Highlighting the success of the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme, he shared that the scheme offers loans in three tiers to young entrepreneurs, with a focus on growing businesses, and an enhanced loan limit from Rs.67.5 million to Rs.125.5 million. Beneficiaries have surged from 71,000 to more than 271,000 in the past two years, with the loan portfolio set to expand from Rs. 200 billion to Rs. 250-300 billion in the coming years. The scheme has also been successful in women currently account for 11% of beneficiaries, with efforts underway to raise this to 25% through dedicated initiatives. He also announced that Pakistan's first Youth Employment Policy has been approved, mandating at least 35% female participation in the labour force by 2025. In addition, the government is working to support entrepreneurship through youth and women empowerment. Pakistan is also achieving sustained economic growth an

properly. Speaking on the occasion, President Asif Ali Zardari said that he warmly welcomed the Chief guest and appreciated his dedicated services to youth development and human capital enhancement. He stated that it is necessary to consistently take practical measures to promote vocational training, entrepreneurship, and job creation, particularly for women and young people. Zardari said that the government's policy of strong public-private sector partnership is vital for putting the country on the path of sustainable economic progress. He reaffirmed that IUCN remains committed to working hand in hand with government and private stakeholders to expand employment opportunities and support small and medium enterprises. In his speech, Farid, President Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the saving government is fully supporting the women entrepreneurs and that now it is the responsibility to derive benefit from the facilitation. Tahir Ayaq, Senior Vice President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that he was formed as master of the ceremony and also highlighted the women's role in the country's development.—DNA

**ICT export remittances rise 19.78pc to \$2.61b**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's information and communication technology (ICT) sector recorded strong growth with export remittances increasing by 19.78 per cent to \$2.61 billion during July-January of fiscal year 2025-26. During the same period last year, exports stood at \$2.18 billion. The Official data released by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications showed that ICT services exports reached \$374 million in January 2026. This was 19.5 per cent higher than \$313 million recorded in January 2025. The sector's monthly increase reflected continued global demand for Pakistan's IT and IT-enabled services. From July 2025 to January 2026, total ICT export remittances stood at \$2.61 billion, making it the best-performing segment in the services sector. It fared better than all other segments.

Punjab mulls interest-free loans for poultry industry

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government is considering providing interest-free loans to entrepreneurs in the commercial

Dr Tariq  
extends  
Chinese new  
year greetings

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Wednesday extended greetings to the Chinese government and people on the Chinese New Year. He expressed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening ties between the two countries. In a message posted on Monday, the minister congratulated the Chinese leadership and people on the New Year. He expressed hope that the New Year would bring prosperity, peace and progress to China. He said the long-standing friendship between Pakistan and China is based on mutual trust, respect and strategic cooperation, and continues to strengthen. Dr Tariq Fazal also acknowledged China's achievements and its positive role in global affairs. He expressed confidence that the bilateral relations would continue to grow in the coming years.

## Iran at a crossroads after 47 years of revolution

HASSAN AL-MUSTAFA

**H**AVING followed and observed the Islamic Revolution in Iran consistently and closely for several decades, I find that the 47th anniversary of Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Tehran aboard an Air France flight is markedly different this year from those in the past. The occasion transcends its ceremonial character to pose serious questions about the fate of a system founded on a revolutionary doctrine that fundamentally reordered priorities and policies in the Middle East; one that replaced the crown of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi with Khomeini's turban, and substituted alignment with Israel and the US with open hostility.

Today, Iran stands at a crossroads. The pressures it faces exceed its capacity to endure: an isolated economy, and US and international sanctions limiting its ability to invest, sell energy, and conduct trade in proportion to its true economic size. Internally, there are social problems stemming from rising costs of living and inflation that grows day by day. Protest erupts from time to time, some accompanied by unrest and violence. Nor can we overlook external factors of the US and its allies' role in creating intelligence exposure revealed during the 12-day conflict between Tel Aviv and Tehran, in which Mossad demonstrated its ability to operate either through direct elements or local agents to strike military and vital facilities and carry out assassinations that surprised the pillars of the Iranian regime. US President Donald Trump is now strongly present in Iran's landscape after 47 years of revolution, presenting it with a choice between a diplomatic agreement or naval fleets equipped with the most advanced military technologies.

Amid all this, pressing questions remain: Where is Iran heading, and which path will it choose? This approach does not produce lasting social stability. The political and economic changes are testing the Iranian state's ability to redefine its legitimacy, from legitimacy rooted in revolutionary mobilization and external confrontation to legitimacy based on delivering development, prosperity, and social stability. This transformation is not a luxury; it is a necessity imposed by economic and social realities and shaped by the structure of conflict with the US and Iran's network of regional relationships.

In his speech marking the anniversary of the revolution, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reflected that "a revolution is not merely a matter of arrangement, but above all the capacity of society to reform."

Here, Khamenei sought to emphasize that the state considers the "domestic front" to be the primary front of security, and that legitimacy is preserved through cohesion and national unity. Yet this perspective faces the challenge

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of high cost when "endurance" becomes a daily burden on the middle class, and endurance itself becomes subject to repeated social testing, influenced by low-income levels and protests driven by the collapse in the purchasing power of the Iranian rial. The authorities are addressing these popular challenges through a logic of "preventive control," regulating public space and restricting the ability to reproduce waves of protest. This approach may provide short-term security stability, but it does not produce lasting social stability. In this, the causes of the internal unrest remain unaddressed and Iranian do not feel enough improvements in their daily lives. Iran's policy deeply intertwined social, economic, security, and political challenges, linked both internally and externally. These issues cannot be managed through mobilizing rhetoric and "strategic patience" because they affect the fundamental conditions of citizens' daily dignity and livelihood. The root causes of the problems remain unaddressed Iranian policymakers are aware of the dangers posed by the economic situation. For this reason, Tehran seeks to case sanctions pressure through a negotiating track with Washington, while at the same time maintaining red lines that prevent expanding negotiations to include ballistic missile programs and regional influence.

Statements by President Masoud Pashéhian affirmed that his country does not seek to possess nuclear weapons and is prepared to take verification measures in that regard, while simultaneously rejecting external dictates and opening a window for dialogue and diplomacy. This window cannot be approached as before through buying time; rather, it requires a serious and genuine framework that enables Iran to reach real points of understanding with the US and other regional powers to end a new war in the Middle East. This is a conflict that would open the door to a new wave of violence, and pose a threat to energy security and maritime routes. These are risks that neighboring Arab states do not wish to see materialize, and they are pursuing diplomatic efforts to encourage all parties to make dialogue, not war, the path to resolving outstanding disputes.

Iran's most likely trajectory will be determined by its ability to achieve three simultaneous transitions. First, a realistic and fair nuclear settlement with the US that reduces economic sanctions and promotes Iran's economic integration with the Gulf states and its neighbors. Second, reorganizing its internal affairs so that the government provides prosperity and development as the foundation of sustainable legitimacy. Third, adopting a regional good-neighbor policy that moves away from the principle of exporting the revolution and is based instead on cooperation across various issues. These three contexts are critically important for the Iranian system. Without them, Iran will remain a state striving to endure under American pressure, while being watched by Israel as a potential target for a new war, it will remain a cause of instability and a source of regional conflict. The real risk is that the "revolution" that has not yet fully transformed into a development state in the complete sense—a transformation that regional countries encourage and desire, as it serves the interests of the Iranian people and the peoples of a region burdened by conflict and seeking lasting security and development.

## The Great Return: Post-Conflict Resettlement and State-Building in Azerbaijan's Liberated Territories

Professor Adam Saud



The initiative taken by the President Ilham Aliyev, its major emphasis is on three interlinked principles; security, sustainability, and dignity. The Great Return is beyond a logistical move, it's symbolic in nature. It's a long-term development strategy initiative taken by the government.

Returns are to be voluntary and phased, guided by careful assessment of landmine clearance, infrastructure readiness, and socio-economic viability

**T**HE 44 days patriotic war was Azerbaijan resulted in the liberation of its occupied territories by Armenia. Azerbaijan's government initiated a post-liberation resettlement programme named the "Great Return". It encourages the voluntary return of the internally displaced people back to their original homes. The programme ensured safe and dignified return of the affected people. Besides humanitarian nature, the Programme also enhances the economic, social, educational, organization, security, consolidation, and national reconciliation. The early 1990s occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia resulted into forced displacement of around 700,000 people. Armenia illegally occupied around 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory of Karabakh and surrounding districts. Although, Azerbaijan's government provided them best places to live, yet they were forced not to come to their original lands. Over the period of time, their living conditions alongside housing, employment opportunities, and health and education facilities were improved, displacement remained a central national trauma and a defining feature of Azerbaijan's domestic policy. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's history in the South Caucasus is marked by its creating its territories only after Armenia constantly violates the peace agreements. With the liberation of these territories, long standing conflict and turbulence in the region came to an end. It has also given birth to the new geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus region.

The initiative taken by the President Ilham Aliyev, its major emphasis is on three interlinked principles; security, sustainability, and dignity. The Great Return is beyond a logistical move, it's symbolic in nature. It's a long-term development strategy initiative taken by the government.

Returns are to be voluntary and phased, guided by careful assessment of

landmine clearance, infrastructure readiness, and socio-economic viability

halted the economic activities in all the liberated regions. Removal and dismantling of landmines is the top priority of Azerbaijan government at the moment. However, those areas which have been cleared of this danger, are opened for the returning families. International organisations have provided helped to the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) for demining of this area. Nevertheless, the process of demining is time taking, and needs a very careful and systematic approach to ensure the safety and timely completion of the process. The slow pace of demining underscores a central reality: the Great Return is inherently a long-term process rather than an immediate post-war outcome. Mine action has therefore become the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's post-war recovery strategy. At the core of reconstruction of the areas is the concept of Smart Cities and Villages. The process has already been started in areas such as Aghali (Zangilan), Fuzuli, Shusha, and Lachin. These projects integrate renewable energy, digital governance, modern infrastructure, and climate-resilient design. This model has multiple objectives. For the sake of economic development, this model will attract investment and generation of employment opportunities in these regions. Politically, it gives a sense to the population that state acts like a protector and facilitator, and has the capability to ensure complete sovereignty. Symbolically, it projects an image of renewed, modern, and irreversible return.

Provision of housing facilities alone will not the serve of rehabilitation. The process needs availability of health facilities, education, sustainable livelihood, and most importantly social cohesion. The Azerbaijani government has therefore linked return policies with regional economic development plans focusing on agriculture, tourism, logistics, and light industry. Government focuses on the agricultural development in areas like Karabakh and Lachin. While the return of the population to their lands has been started after a very careful examination of such other cases across the globe in order to avoid inescapable and social tensions. Azerbaijan's model seeks to avoid these pitfalls by synchronizing return with reconstruction, employment creation, and service provision.

After occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, Armenia heavily mined most of the region. Besides hundreds of thousands of landmines, other weapons have also been left behind by the Armenian forces endangering the lives of returnees to their lands and homes. These landmines have also

shifted the rehabilitation of the displaced people. It also reflects that the social contract between the state and citizens have been reinforced. Return to the homelands had been decades promise of Azerbaijan's government to the displaced people. The state never forgot its prime duty, and now when the time came, regime immediately started materialization of this duty. This realization has further strengthened public trust and confidence in the state. The state is calling to return back to their homelands, even when mining and infrastructure has not been completed, show the bravery of people as well as it puts a pressure on the state to timely complete the rehabilitation process.

The Great Return is not confined to domestic domain of Azerbaijan only, it has certain regional and global imprints as well. Regionally, it consolidates the post-2020 status quo and alters demographic realities in the South Caucasus. The Return also presents a case study to international community as a model of post-conflict recovery within the limits of set principles on international law. The resolution of occupied territories also led to a process of normalization of relations with Armenia, which is a key to broader regional stability. It will eventually help in achieving the regional connectivity projects and increased trade. It will also help easier cross border movement of good, services, and people. Sustainable peace remains a necessary condition for the long-term success of resettlement.

The Great Return is a transformative moment not only for the IDPs but the whole nation of Azerbaijan. It has become a symbol of national pride, resilience, and cohesion. However, it is important to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and community participation in order to avoid top-down planning that overlooks local needs. It also important to consider that quality of life is more important than quantity of returnees, and the quantity of returnees to their homes. Despite the challenges like stress on resource, demining, and long-term economic sustainability, the initiative can be declared as one of the best in the modern history. It is expected that the Great Return will lead to the lasting peace, development, and social justice in the liberated lands. If managed effectively, it has the potential not only to restore communities but also to reshape the socio-economic and political landscape of the South Caucasus for decades to come.

## A Changing Global Order

Qamar Bashir



The Ukraine war further deepened these tensions.

While Europe and the United States remain aligned in supporting Kyiv, debates over burden-sharing, diplomatic engagement, and long-term security guarantees exposed differing strategic visions. Europe began discussing the possibility of enhancing its own defense capabilities independent of US leadership, including increased defense spending and greater coordination under EU frameworks

**F**OR decades, the United States has exercised unmatched global influence. From military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria to sanctions regimes and regime-change rhetoric elsewhere, Washington has often justified its actions as necessary to defend democracy, human rights, or international security. Yet power, when exercised without constraints, can easily become a source of tension. The tensions surrounding Greenland, Europe's diplomatic pushback, and disagreements over Venezuela and Iran reveal a deeper transformation underway in the international system—one where even long-standing allies are increasingly unwilling to accept unilateral dictates. The controversy over Greenland became symbolic of this shift. When suggestions emerged from Washington that the United States had strategic interest in acquiring Greenland, the US administration, long seen as a leader in the transatlantic alliance, have increasingly asserted strategic autonomy. Disagreements over trade, defense spending, immigration policies, and approaches toward Russia and China have widened the transatlantic gap. When criticism of Europe's social and immigration policies was delivered in blunt terms from Washington, European officials responded not with silence but with institutional confidence, reiterating that domestic policy decisions belong to sovereign governments and the European Union does not have a say.

The Ukraine war further deepened these tensions. While Europe and the United States aligned in supporting Kyiv, debates over burden-sharing, diplomatic engagement, and long-term security guarantees exposed differing strategic visions. Europe began discussing the possibility of enhancing its own defense capabilities independent of US leadership, including increased defense spending and greater coordination under EU frameworks. The conversation about "strategic autonomy" gained momentum as a rejection of NATO, but not the notion that overreaching by any single power carries risks. Beyond Europe, the situation in Venezuela has also sparked controversy. The US position toward Venezuela's leadership, including recognition of opposition figures and sanctions targeting state

institutions, has been criticized by some international actors as interference in sovereign affairs. Supporters argue such measures promote democratic accountability; critics contend they undermine international norms. Regardless of perspective, the episode underscores a central question of modern geopolitics: who has the authority to determine legitimacy within another state's borders? This question is at the heart of the dynamic, US-led deployments in the Persian Gulf, sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program, and rhetoric surrounding regime behavior have heightened tensions. European states, while critical of certain Iranian policies, have often favored diplomatic engagement and adherence to negotiated frameworks such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The divergence illustrates a growing reluctance among US allies to endorse military escalation, particularly in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, global power distribution is shifting. China's Belt and Road Initiative has expanded infrastructure and trade partnerships across Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe. More than 140 countries have engaged in some form of cooperation under this framework. For many developing nations, China's model—emphasizing economic investment without overt political conditions—offers an alternative to Western engagement strategies. Whether one views this approach as pragmatic partnership or strategic influence expansion, it has gained significant traction in international relations models. Canada, too, has demonstrated quiet but meaningful realignment. In response to trade pressures and tariff disputes, Ottawa diversified its trade relationships, signing agreements beyond the United States and strengthening ties with Asia and Europe. This was not confrontation, but adaptation—evidence that even close allies hedge against unpredictability. At the heart of these developments lies a philosophical tension about power. The principle that "power corrupts" is often invoked, but one can also isolate when a power is too concentrated. In a globalized world, economic interdependence, multilateral institutions, and global norms limit unilateral action. Aircraft carriers and sanctions regimes remain formidable tools, yet ideology increasingly derives from coalition-building rather than coercion. This brings us to the role of the United Nations. Critics frequently describe the UN as toothless or ineffective. Yet the UN's authority depends entirely on the willingness of its member states—especially permanent Security Council members—to abide by its decisions. When powerful states exert influence to block resolutions, the UN authorization for major actions, institutional credibility erodes. Reform debates persist, but strengthening the UN requires political will from its most influential members. The larger lesson emerging from Europe's assertiveness and broader global reactions is not the decline of American power, but the recalibration of global expectations. Allies are no longer passive recipients of US leadership; they are stakeholders demanding consultation and respect. Sovereignty, multilateralism, and rule-based order remain guiding principles for much of the international community. While any nation—however powerful—appears to have a role to play in the world, the challenge is how to do so without threatening the stability of the international system.

There is also a practical dimension. Military intervention in complex societies has historically produced unintended consequences, including instability and migration flows that affect neighboring regions. European reluctance to engage in new conflicts reflects lived experience from past interventions. Diplomacy, sanctions calibrated within international law, and negotiated agreements may lack dramatic visibility, but they offer more sustainable outcomes. In the long run, the international system will be more stable if it can manage to transition toward multipolarity. The United States remains a superpower with unmatched military and economic capabilities. Europe is consolidating political cohesion. China continues to expand its economic footprint. Regional actors assert greater independence. In such a system, responsible leadership requires restraint, coalition-building, and respect for sovereignty. Power, in its most destructive form, means capacity to dominate, rather than destabilize; to convert power than to expand it. This is a key to maintaining international order in the circumscribed history. Domination that has dominant powers benefit from alliances grounded in mutual respect. The pushback witnessed from Europe over Greenland and other policy disputes may, in fact, serve as a corrective—reminding all nations that diplomacy anchored in international law carries greater legitimacy than unilateral declarations. Ultimately, the question is not whether the United States possesses power. It undoubtedly does. The question is how that power is exercised in an interconnected world and facing shared challenges—from climate change, economic inequality to nuclear proliferation, terrorist financing, and so on. The signs of weakness are not instruments of durability. Strengthening multilateral institutions, respecting sovereignty, and engaging adversaries through dialogue may not yield immediate victories, but they preserve long-term stability. The future international order will not be shaped by dominance alone. It will be shaped by responsibility. And in that responsibility lies the true measure of leadership.

— Press Secretary to the President (Retd)  
Former Press Secretary  
Embassy of Pakistan to France  
Former Press Attaché to Malaysia  
Former MD, SRBC  
Macomb, Michigan



## Briefs

**PSX gains 5,702 points to close at 178,853 points**

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Wednesday turned around to finish the session, gaining 5,702.68 points, a positive change of 3.29 percent, to close at 178,853.10 points compared to 173,150.42 points on the previous trading day, according to PSX data.

During the session, the market recorded a trading volume of 497,720 million shares with a traded value of Rs 49,992 billion, against 716,035 million shares valuing Rs 40,471 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization increased to Rs 29,227 trillion from Rs 19,464 trillion a day earlier, a rise of 48.1 percent. The companies in the ready market, 334 advanced, 103 declined, and 47 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 116,966 million shares, followed by The Bank of Punjab with 71,110 million shares and Pak Petroleum with 27,579 million shares. The top gainers included PIA Holding Company Limited, which rose by Rs 183.00 to close at Rs 18,325.00, and Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which gained Rs 150.00 to settle at Rs 26,655.00. On the other hand, the selected Pakistan Limited declined by Rs 142.43 to close at Rs 4,352.59, while Khyber Textile Mills Limited fell by Rs 46.98 to close at Rs 1,612.00. In the futures market, turnover stood at 164,954 million shares with a traded value of Rs 13,111 billion, compared to 227,400 million shares worth Rs 12,657 billion in the previous session. Out of 322 future-market companies, 285 recorded gains, while 35 declined and two remained unchanged.—APP

### Rupee gains 03 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 0.3 paisa against US Dollar in the foreign trading and closed at Rs 27,297.57 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 27,309.60. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 269.00 and its 269.50, respectively. The price of the Euro against Rupee increased by 0.2 paisa to close at Rs 330.83 from the previous day's close of Rs 330.81, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 0.1 paisa to settle at Rs 1.48, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 0.22 and closed at Rs 379.14 compared to the previous day's Rs 379.36. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Royal Rial both by 0.1 paisa each to close at Rs 76.21 and Rs 74.54, respectively. President RCCI said that the chamber sought early engagement with the government to brief them about the visit and identify key reform areas as well as the opportunities explored during their visit to expand bilateral trade.—APP

### Germany does not need same fighter jets as France: Merz

BERLIN: Germany does not need the same fighter jets as France, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in an interview broadcast. While the US is insisting that Berlin could abandon a flagship joint defense project, "The French need, in the next generation of fighter jets, an aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons and operating from an aircraft carrier. That's not what we can currently need in the German military," Merz said on the German podcast Machtwelt. The Future Combat Aircraft System (FCAS) program was launched in 2017 to replace France's Rafale jet and the Eurofighter planes used by Germany and Spain by 2040.—APP

# Tariq says investments crucial for eco stability

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that business is not solely about earning profits but also about upholding trust, ensuring quality, and delivering service. "We want this supermarket to become a symbol of convenience, transparency, and reasonable prices for consumers," he stated.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Founder Group of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tariq Sadig, has said that new investment in the prevailing economic conditions sends an encouraging and positive message for the country's future.

He expressed these views while addressing the inauguration ceremony of Best Price Super Market at Sulehri Center in Bahria Town Islamabad.

The supermarket was formally inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony by Tariq Sadig along with Syed Qasim Ali, Vice Chairman of GICCI, and URCZ Zafar Bakhtawari, former ICCI President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, and Hasmain Qasim. Speaking on the occasion, Tariq Sadig emphasized that the retail sector is a vital pillar of Pakistan's economy. He noted that the sector not only provides employment to millions but also plays a crucial role in documenting the economy, extending the tax net, and organizing the supply chain. "The launch of new businesses during challenging economic times reflects confidence and resilience," he said, adding that such investments help strengthen economic activity and boost market confidence.

A large number of prominent



members of the business community attended the ceremony, including ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mahmood, President Islamabad Chamber of Sulehri Traders and Small Industries Sulehri Satti, President Blue Area Arora Younus Rajput, and several ICCI executive members and market representatives. In his address, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that business is not solely about

upholding trust, ensuring quality, and delivering service. "We want this supermarket to become a symbol of convenience, transparency, and reasonable prices for consumers," he stated. He further stressed that the private sector must play a proactive role in stabilizing the country's economy. "When we establish new businesses, we do not merely build

our own institutions; we create employment opportunities, support local suppliers, and foster healthy competition in the market," he said. Arora Younus Rajput remarked that new ventures help generate an atmosphere of confidence in the market. "With increased investment comes greater employment and a faster-moving economic wheel," he said.

Former Senior Vice President ICCI Naveed Malik, while thanking the participants, highlighted that unity within the business community is crucial. Arora Younus Rajput mentioned that the ceremony was attended by leading figures from various trade bodies and markets, along with a large number of members of the business community, reflecting strong support for the new retail venture.

## Chinese visitors to Japan slump as spat rumbles on Follow

TOKYO: Mainland Chinese visitors to Japan tumbled 60.7 percent in January year-on-year, figures showed Wednesday, as the continued fallout from the countries' diplomatic spat. "Last year, the lunar new year began in late January, it fell in mid-February," the Japan National Tourism Organization said as it published the data. "Additionally, the Chinese government has issued a travel advisory to its citizens to avoid travel to Japan as well as other countries in the region." In the number of foreign visitors to Japan fell by the lowest level since last year," a statement said. Previously, Chinese visitors were the biggest contingent, contributing to a tourism boom in the land of cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji that was fuelled by a weak yen making shopping cheap. But in January this year, South Korea was the biggest source with 1.2 million visitors, up 21.6 percent, compared with 385,300 from mainland China, down from 980,520 in January 2023. Visitors from Hong Kong also tumbled 17.9 percent. Overall the number of visitors to Japan fell 4.9 percent to 3.597 million in January compared to the same period last year. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested in November that Japan could intervene militarily if Beijing sought to take Taiwan by force. China, which regards the democratic island as part of its territory and had not ruled out force to annex it, was not ready. Beijing summoned Tokyo's ambassador and on November 14 warned Chinese citizens against visiting Japan, citing "significant risks to the personal safety and lives of Chinese citizens." The number of Chinese visitors also fell sharply in December, down 11.6 percent. In January, 145 jets for China's Liaoning aircraft carrier twice landed radar on Japanese aircraft in international waters near Okinawa, 640 miles off Japan. China also tightened controls on exports to Japan for items with potential military uses, fueling worries that Beijing may choke supplies of vital rare-earth minerals. Japan's last two planes were even returned to China last month. Takachi, 64, was seen as a hawk before becoming Japan's first woman prime minister in October. She won a landslide victory in snap elections on February 8, putting her in a strong position for the next four years to stamp her mark on Japanese domestic and foreign policy. Takachi said after her election win that Tokyo would bolster its defenses and "steadfastly protect" its territory. She also said she was "open to various dialogues with China." But China's foreign ministry said "seemingly dialogue should be built on respect for one another." "Proclaiming dialogue with one's mouth while engaging in confrontation – no one will accept this kind of dialogue," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said Tuesday. Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday that forces in Japan are seeking to "revive militarism."—DNA

## Libya brings in Western traders in blow to Russian fuel flows

LONDON: Global oil firms and traders including Vitol, Trafigura and TotalEnergies have won tenders to supply Libya with crude and diesel as the country grants large Western traders wider access and reduces imports of Russian fuel, three trade sources told Reuters. Libya is in the process of overhauling its oil sector 15 years after the fall of leader Muammar Qaddafi and years of civil wars. The country produces some 1.4 million barrels a day of crude but lacks the infrastructure to refine it, leaving it reliant on fuel imports. After issuing upstream licensing rounds for the first time in 20 years in an effort to bring crude output to 2 million bpd, Africa's second-largest oil producer is now changing how it sells its oil and buys the fuel it requires. Rather than swapping fuel imports for crude exports, it has instead awarded tenders to cover its fuel needs. In the tenders in recent weeks, which have not previously been disclosed, Vitol, Trafigura and TotalEnergies are to supply 5.1 million barrels a month and some diesel to Libya's state-owned National Oil Corporation (NOOC) in return for the right to buy its crude. The tenders could not establish the exact volumes, Vitol, Trafigura, and TotalEnergies declined to comment. Libya's state-owned National Oil Corporation did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the tenders. The tenders will further reduce Russian product imports into Libya as Western firms source their volumes from refineries in the Mediterranean. Russian fuel exports to Libya have fallen to around 5,000 bpd in 2026 from 20,000 bpd in 2024–2025, when it was the dominant supplier, according to live data from global analytics firm Kpler. Italy has become Libya's top fuel supplier this year with 59,000 bpd, mainly from the ISAB and Sarroch refineries run by Trafigura and Vitol, the Kpler data showed. Moscow has relied heavily on Africa, Asia and South America for fuel sales after its refined products were banned from the West under sanctions linked to the war in Ukraine. The Kremlin has also seen its oil exports to India and Turkey fall under US pressure, pushing more oil toward China.—DNA

## High time to turn strong Pak-US eco ties: RCCI President

RAWALPINDI: President of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), Usman Shaukat, has said that Pakistan stands at a decisive moment in its relations with the United States, urging policymakers to urgently convert renewed diplomatic goodwill into a structured and expanded business partnership. He reiterated the chambers resolve to stand by structural reforms for improved foreign investment. Addressing a press conference at RCCI today, after RCCI's high-level delegation visit to the US, Usman said that the current diplomatic environment presents a strategic opportunity that must be translated into measurable economic outcomes. "Pakistan has a unique opportunity to take advantage of this missed opportunity," he remarked, stressing that both countries are presently aligned for deeper engagement. Pakistan and the US maintain bilateral trade exceeding US\$10.0 billion with textiles forming the backbone of exports. However, Shaukat said this figure is below potential and should be tripled through diversification into high-value sectors, regulatory reforms and investor facilitation. During engagements at Capitol Hill with members of Congress and Senators, as well as the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Usman Shaukat and officials from the Departments of Commerce and State, American stakeholders expressed readiness to expand trade ties, he said. However, they emphasized that sustained investment flows require structural reforms in Pakistan's legal and

regulatory framework. "Incentive industrial sectors including pharmaceuticals, IT, medical equipments, textiles etc. were discussed in details of various levels during the visit with positive vibes," he said. Usman highlighted that American market imports significantly share the medicine and medical devices, where Pakistan can better exploit opportunities. According to Usman Shaukat, US interests highlighted the reforms necessitating contract enforcement, dispute resolution delays, policy inconsistency and cost of doing business. He noted that mid-tier investors and internationally credible arbitration models adopted by other countries where specialized arbitration forums involving international judges and neutral dispute resolution systems significantly boosted foreign direct investment. "Strong American interest was conveyed in collaboration across mining and minerals, information technology, data infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, medical devices, construction materials and SME development," he said. A USD-based US\$500 million fund will be established for focused on energy and infrastructure interest in Pakistan's IT infrastructure, contingent upon regulatory clarity and policy stability. The RCCI President also highlighted the growing visibility of the Pakistani diaspora within American political institutions, particularly in

states such as New Jersey, describing it as a strategic asset in strengthening economic diplomacy and policy advocacy. He underlined that to attract meaningful US investment, Pakistani government must prioritize structural reforms to reduce the cost of doing business, rationalize taxation, ensure exchange rate stability, and introduce internationally accredited arbitration mechanisms. "We must build the structure that supports the investment," he stated, adding that economic diplomacy must now move beyond symbolism to practical implementation. Referring to RCCI's engagement with US Congress, Shaukat said that the US Congress has a strong interest in Pakistan's achievements in digital government, service delivery, and cybersecurity (solutions in data protection and cloud computing), as well as the economic impact on the city (real estate, commerce, and investment). As Quzifirza previously reported, Almaty has become Kazakhstan's unstoppable tourism magnet.—APP

## Paris HQ evacuated after 'bomb threat'

PARIS: France's far-left France Insoumise party said Wednesday it had to evacuate its Paris headquarters following a "bomb threat," after it was accused of partial responsibility in the killing of a far-right activist. "The national headquarters of LFI have just been evacuated following a bomb threat. Police services are on site. All employees and activists are safe," the party's coordinator Manuel Bompard said on X.

### Jazz sets regional benchmark in network evolution

ISLAMABAD: Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator from JazzWorld, has completed a Proof of Concept (PoC) for a fully converged Single Voice Core (SVC), validating the technical and operational feasibility of the proposed multi-mission-critical voice services onto a single voice platform.

Conducted in collaboration with Huawei, the PoC evaluated the consolidation of 2G voice services alongside VoLTE and VoWiFi services

within a unified core architecture. The PoC was designed to assess performance improvements, architectural simplification, interoperability across 2G and 4G/VoLTE layers, and readiness for future 5G voice evolution.

Commenting on the milestone, Khalid Shehzad, Chief Executive Officer of JazzWorld, said, "The successful trial of a fully converged Single Voice Core marks an important step in Jazz's network modernization journey.

By unifying voice services across all generations onto a single intelligent core, we are simplifying our network architecture, facilitating scaling for next-gen technologies. This enables better service quality today and a more agile platform for future innovation."

Gold price up by Rs1,300 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,300 and was sold at Rs59,000 on Wednesday compared to its sale at Rs57,472 on the previous trading day, the All Pakistan Gold and Jewellers Association reported. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased an increment of Rs1,200 to Rs1,112 to Rs1,112 from Rs441,235, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs1,021 to Rs405,583 from Rs404,562. The price of per tola silver increased by Rs32 to Rs8,049 from Rs8,044, while that of 10 grams silver went up by Rs2,200 to Rs6,870. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$13 to \$4,933 from \$4,920, whereas that of silver rose by \$0.32 to \$75.62 from 75.30, the Association reported.—APP

### Spiritual atmosphere marks first Tarawih at the Prophet's mosque

MADINAH: Large numbers of worshippers performed Isha and Tarawih prayers at the Prophet's Mosque on the first night of Ramadhan 1447 AH, amid a spiritually charged atmosphere and comprehensive services for worshippers. The General Authority for the Care of the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque completed its operational preparations in coordination with relevant entities to receive worshippers. The mosque's compounds and expansion areas were prepared and carpeted to accommodate large numbers, with Zamzam water and other supporting services provided.

The authority aims to provide the best possible services to worshippers, making available facilities to perform their rituals with ease, comfort, and tranquility. Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince of Madinah, performed his first Tarawih prayer in the mosque, which was attended by the heads of delegations from 100 countries. The RCCI delegation said that the chamber sought early engagement with the government to brief them about the visit and identify key reform areas as well as the opportunities explored during their visit to expand bilateral trade.—Agencies

**Briefs**

**HRCP raises alarm over 'staged encounters' in Punjab**

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: A fact-finding report issued by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has found that the Punjab Crime Control Department (CCD) followed a deliberate pattern of staging police encounters in the province, leading to extrajudicial killings. The News reported. The commission said the staged encounters fundamentally undermined the rule of law and constitutional protections in the province. Based on reports in the press, the commission found that at least 670 CCD-led encounters over the course of eight months in 2025, resulting in the death of 924 suspects, with only two police officers killed during the period.

The extreme casualty imbalance – averaging more than two fatalities per encounter daily – combined with the uniformity of operational patterns across districts, indicates an institutionalised practice rather than isolated incidents of misconduct. The fact-finding mission has therefore called for an urgent high-level judicial inquiry into the matter.

The mission found that CCD operations fail to comply with the UN basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials, which require that lethal force be absolutely necessary and proportionate, and that violators be held accountable. Among other measures, the report calls for an immediate province-wide moratorium on all encounter operations until comprehensive legal safeguards and independent oversight mechanisms are established.

**Bangladesh PM Tariq names cabinet**

DNA

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tariq Rahaman has named a former commerce minister to steer the country's troubled economy. He kept the finance portfolio for himself as he formed his first cabinet. Rahaman was sworn into office on Tuesday after a landslide election victory, taking over from the interim administration that had led the country of 170 million people since a deadly 2024 coup that toppled the autocratic leader of Sheikh Hasina.

The 50-member cabinet announced in a gazette notification issued late Tuesday includes Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, 75, a businessman and veteran lawmaker who has returned to the finance ministry. Chowdhury is tasked with reviving growth after months of turmoil that rattled investor confidence in the world's second-largest garment exporter. He had previously served in the cabinet of Rahaman's late mother, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, but was forced to resign in 2024.

**Lahore court convicts' man**

DNA

LAHORE: A model criminal court (minor offences) on Wednesday issued a judgment in a domestic abuse case, convicting a man of assaulting his wife. The much-heralded法官 Majeed Hamid Rehman Nasir conducted the trial, which involved testimony from several witnesses, including the victims and police investigators.

The incident took place on April 2, 2021, when a dispute over the ownership of his residence in the jurisdiction of the Shafqatpura police station. According to the first information report (FIR), the conflict began when the man allegedly pressured his wife to seek employment against her wishes. When she refused, he and several of his family members reportedly began to beat her.

**Govt likely to appoint ad-hoc body**

# Pakistan hockey players revolt against management

In response to the players' bold stand and the mounting public outcry, the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and government authorities have begun the process of identifying and appointing new management for national hockey team

SPORTS DESK / DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan national hockey team returned home amid a deepening crisis on February 17, 2026, after an explosive air press conference in Lahore where captain Amna Shabab Butt and several players categorically refused to work with the current team management, coaching staff, manager, administration, and technical director of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) over severe mismanagement during their recent FIH Pro League tour in Australia.

Upon arrival, the players detailed a series of humiliating experiences, including being forced to wait 13-14 hours at Syed airport without proper arrangements for onward travel or meals, followed by the cancellation of their hotel bookings in Canberra due to price hikes by the PHF.

They described substandard accommodations, inadequate food, and a lack of basic

facilities, with the team left to cook, clean, and manage independently in what they called a nightmare tour marked by financial discrepancies and apparent neglect.

Tensions escalated when Captain Amna Shabab Butt declared that the players categorically refuse to work with the current team management, coaching staff, manager, administration, and technical director of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) over severe mismanagement during their recent FIH Pro League tour in Australia.

Facilities, with the team left to cook, clean, and manage independently in what they called a nightmare tour marked by financial discrepancies and apparent neglect.

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The controversy has intensified scrutiny on financial accountability, as the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has confirmed releasing substantial funds – including over 10 million rupees specifically for hotel accommodations – while conflicting accounts from the PHF have raised serious questions about transparency, fund misuse, and possible attempts to solicit additional contributions from the Pakistani community in Australia despite prior allocations.

In response to the players' bold stand and the mounting public outcry, the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and government authorities have begun the process of identifying and appointing new management for the national hockey team. Sources indicate that a revamped administrative and coaching structure is likely to be finalized and put in place before the critical FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifying Round in Ismailia, Egypt, running from March 1 to 7, 2026.

Pakistan, drawn in Pool B alongside Malaysia, China, and Austria, faces a tough path to secure one of the limited qualification

## Israeli police arrest Al-Aqsa Mosque imam

TEL AVIV: Israeli police have arrested the imam of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Mohammad Abu Al-Abasi, in occupied Jerusalem. The Palestinian news agency Wafa, citing local sources, reported that "Israeli forces detained Sheikh al-Abasi inside the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Mosque" on Monday evening without giving any reason. It added that the arrest "comes amid escalating Israeli measures against the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, including the closure of its gates, restrictions on the entry of worshippers, and intensifying incursions carried out by settlers under heavy protection from Israeli police". Hanan condemned the arrest of al-Abasi in a statement on Tuesday, saying he had been "served with an order banning him from the mosque". – DNA



ISLAMABAD: H.E. Ina Lepel and First Sect. Jamine Rohwer visited Chairperson NCHR Rabiya Javeri Agha to discuss human rights landscape in Pakistan. German delegation commended NCHR's work in strengthening accountability, advancing rights, and institutional reform. – DNA

## Australian High Commissioner extends Ramadan greetings

DNA

ISLAMABAD: With the holy month of Ramadan now underway in Pakistan (following local moon-sighting confirmations, with the first day of fasting observed today or imminently), His Excellency Timothy Kane, Australia's High Commissioner to Pakistan, has issued warm Ramadan greetings to the people of Pakistan. In his message, High Commissioner Kane expressed "the best month of the year" and said "Ramadan is bound to be one of the world's most multicultural occasions, where more than 800,000 Muslims contribute richly to our national life. The Pakistan-Australia community, now over 140,000 strong, plays an important role in strengthening ties between our countries. Ramadan Mubarak – may that month deepen the friendship between Australia and Pakistan." The greeting underscores the deep cultural and people-to-people links between the two nations, spotlighting the shared values of family, faith, and community.

Recent estimates place the Pakistan-born population in Australia around 120,000+, with broader community figures (including descendants) aligning closely with the highlighted strength of over 140,000, enriching Australian society across sectors like business, education, healthcare, and sports.

High Commissioner Kane, who presented his credentials in late 2025 and has since engaged actively with Pakistani officials, communities, and institutions—including visits related to trade, education, and cultural diplomacy—uses his occasion to reaffirm Australia's commitment to fostering closer bilateral relations during this time of reflection, charity, and unity. The message resonates with Australia's tradition of inclusive multicultural recognition, as similar greetings are shared annually with Muslim communities both domestically and internationally. Ramadan Mubarak to everyone observing in Pakistan, Australia, and around the world.

## T20 World Cup

### Pakistan advance to Super Eight after beating Namibia

Usman Tariq takes four wickets, with Shabab Khan chipping in with three important dismissals

SPORTS DESK

COLOMBO: Sabihzada Farhan's century and disciplined bowling propelled Pakistan to a commanding 102-run win over Namibia in the crucial match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 at Colombo's SSC Cricket Ground. The win, achieved despite the Greenbacks' valiant effort in the Super Eight stage, Chasing a challenging target of 200, Namibia were bundled out for just 97 in 17.3 overs. The innings had a promising start as openers Louren Stoepkamp and Jan Frylinck put together a 32-run partnership. Frylinck contributed 9 of 11 balls, including a boundary off Salman Mirza, before being clean bowled. Namibia's troubles intensified when Jan Nicol Loft-Eaton was run out for five in the final over of the powerplay, leaving the visitors at 39-2 in 5.2 overs. The Greenbacks' collapse continued with the loss of four wickets in the next four overs and a run before Mohammad Nawaz dismissed him. Skipper Gerhard Erasmus managed only seven before Shabab Khan took his wicket. Alexander Basing-Volchenk tried to stabilize the innings with 20 off 20 deliveries but was soon trapped by Shabab, who claimed his second wicket. Namibia were reduced to 79-5 in 12.3 overs. Usman Tariq further tightened Pakistan's grip, dismissing JJ Smits for nine and Ruben Trumper for a duck, leaving Namibia at 83-7 in 13.2 overs. With the loss of the remaining two wickets (7), while Tariq picked up two more wickets, dismissing Bernard Scholtz (1) and Willem Myburgh (8) to complete a comprehensive Pakistan bowling performance.

## Russia reaffirms commitment to Pakistan partnership: Envoy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Mr. Albert P. Khorev, today addressed students at Bahria University in a compelling lecture focused on the evolving dynamics of Russia-Pakistan relations. The event underscored the deepening bilateral cooperation amid a complex global landscape and highlighted opportunities for enhanced academic and strategic partnerships. Ambassador Khorev emphasized that, despite challenges in international relations, the two countries have remained consistently constructive. He pointed to historical examples of Soviet-era support in the 1970s and 1980s, including the establishment of major industrial projects such as the Pakistan Steel Mills in Karachi and the Gudri Thermal Power Plant. These initiatives, he noted, laid a strong foundation for mutual benefit and long-term collaboration.

The Ambassador described contemporary Russia-Pakistan relations as "informed by a wide range of interactions in political dialogue, economic partnerships, trade, energy cooperation, and humanitarian exchanges. He highlighted recent developments that reflect shared interests in regional stability, connectivity, and countering common challenges. Shifting to geopolitical issues, Ambassador Khorev provided an overview of the situation in and around Ukraine. He elaborated on what Russia views as the root causes of the crisis, attributing significant responsibility

to Western policies that have contributed to instability in the Eurasian region. The Ambassador stressed Russia's ongoing efforts to protect the rights and interests of Russians abroad, particularly in Ukraine, and the necessary actions as essential for safeguarding security and cultural identity. The lecture drew keen interest from students of international relations, political science, and related fields, who engaged in discussions on bilateral prospects and broader Eurasian security trends.

On the sidelines of the event, Ambassador Khorev held a productive meeting with Vice Admiral Abid Haemeed HI(M), Rector of Bahria University. The two sides exchanged views on furthering academic and research cooperation, including potential partnerships with Russian universities, student exchanges, joint research programs, and faculty collaborations. Both expressed strong commitment to fostering such initiatives to build people-to-people ties and intellectual bridges between the two nations. The visit aligns with broader efforts to strengthen Russia-Pakistan relations, which have gained traction in recent years through high-level engagements, economic forums, and mutual visits. The meeting also underscored the importance of academic and diplomatic outreach as vital for sustaining positive momentum and exploring new dimensions of partnership in trade, energy, defense, and education. Bahria University officials described the lecture as an enriching opportunity for students to gain firsthand insights into international diplomacy and bilateral relations from a key regional player.

## Pakistan braces for \$1.3bn Eurobond payoff

Washington-based lender review mission prepares to arrive in Islamabad later this month

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is preparing to repay about \$1.3 billion in principal and interest on a maturing Eurobond in April 2026, as negotiations continue under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approach under the country's \$7 billion reform programme. As the IMF review mission prepares to arrive in Pakistan later this month, officials said the delegation will stay in Karachi for a couple of days before traveling to Islamabad around March 2, 2026, for key discussions under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

These talks are expected to focus on fiscal reforms, external financing and progress on structural reforms under the program. Officials indicated that the Ministry of Finance plans to launch Panda bonds shortly after the end of holidays in China in an effort to raise the first tranche of \$250 million.

According to sources, there are indications of strong interest among investors in the Eurobond, despite the expectation for the bond issuance. The government, officials said, repaid a \$700 million Chinese commercial loan ahead of schedule to demonstrate its repayment capacity, while Chinese banks have remained committed to lending within the ongoing fiscal year. Pakistan is also engaged in negotiations with international commercial banks to secure an additional \$500 million in fresh financing during the current fiscal cycle.

## Armenia offers Visa-Free Entry to Pakistanis

ARMENIA: Countries, including Pakistan, move to enhance tourism and international connectivity, the Republic of Armenia has implemented a temporary visa exemption effective from January 1, 2026, to March 31, 2026, for citizens of 110 countries, including Pakistan, who hold a valid residence permit issued by: The United States of America, European Union Member States, Schengen Area States, or selected Gulf countries: United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, or Sultanate of Oman. Eligible travelers can enter Armenia without a visa and stay for up to 180 days within any one-year period, provided the residence permit remains valid for at least six months from the date of entry.

This exemption targets expatriates, diplomats, business professionals, and tourists from those nations who reside in the qualifying jurisdictions, making spontaneous or extended visits much easier during the six-month window. For travelers not meeting these criteria (or from countries outside the list), Armenia continues to offer a convenient e-Visa system via its official portal, with options for 21-day or 120-day stays processed online quickly. – DNA

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