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Ukraine President accuses Russia of stalling peace talks

Detailed News On Page-01

Australian HC extends Ramadan greetings to Pak

Detailed News On Page-08

Over 4 mn families to get support

Detailed News On Page-02



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 the Darakhshan area of Quetta, where 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 Barikhan, 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 subversive activities. The operations were conducted a day after 12 terrorists belonging to an India-backed proxy were killed and 11 security personnel embraced martyrdom in a terrorist attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bappur 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 Pinnah Jihadistan - Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) carried out attacks in different parts of Balochistan. The attacks left 36 innocent civilians, including women, and 22 security personnel martyred, according to the ISPR. In response, the security forces launched Operation Raddul Fitan 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 Yark Interchange in Dera Ismail Khan, according to a police spokesperson. Customs official Iqbal Khan and police official Muhammad Bilal were martyred in the exchange of fire.

Continued on Page 06

Two officials martyred in DI Khan

NEWS DESK

PESHAWAR: Two officials were martyred and two others injured when militants attacked Yark police station and a nearby customs office, located along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route. A police spokesperson said the officials martyred in the attack were customs official Iqbal Khan and police constable Muhammad Bilal. The injured, identified as Huzair Umar and Khayal Muhammad, were shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital's trauma centre, where they were undergoing treatment. Police said the attackers also fired at passenger buses travelling on the CPEC route, causing panic in the area. A customs vehicle was set ablaze 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 Paniala's Wanda Budh area of Dera Ismail Khan. On January 24, five people, including a

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

UAE President remerges after health rumors

NEWS DESK

ABU DHABI: United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has appeared in a meeting with US Senator Lindsey Graham for the first time after rumors about his health spread following a now-deleted Turkish presidency statement. Earlier this month, Turkey's 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, Erdogan 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 Ramadan

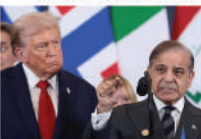
FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday announced that it would ensure gas supply during Shri and Iftar hours to facilitate consumers across the country during the holy month of Ramadan. Addressing a joint press conference alongside Power Minister Anwar Leghari, Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik said that all arrangements were in place to ensure gas supply at "maximum pressure" from 2am to 10:30pm throughout the fasting month. In order to facilitate consumers, the minister said that "additional volume" of gas had been arranged.

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



NEWS DESK / DNA

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 disarming 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

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 a UN-authorised stabilisation force for the Palestinian enclave.

Three government sources said during the Washington visit PM Shehbaz wanted to better understand the goal of the ISF, what authority they were operating under 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. Last month, Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said that Pakistan would continue to engage with international efforts aimed at peace and security in Gaza. "Pakistan will remain engaged with international

Continued on Page 06

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 at the sidelines of International Energy Agency meetings, Wright emphasized President Donald Trump's belief that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. "They've 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."

"The comments come against the backdrop of indirect talks between US and Iranian officials in Geneva, mediated by Oman, aimed at averting potential US military intervention to curb Iran's nuclear program. Following the second round of discussions on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi described the exchanges as "serious, constructive, and positive," claiming "good progress" and an agreement on a set of "guiding principles" for a potential deal to avoid conflict. Iran has signaled willingness to discuss limitations on its uranium enrichment activities, which have been significantly degraded following US and Israeli strikes on key facilities in June 2025. Tehran insists any agreement must preserve tangible economic benefits while preserving its sovereignty.

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 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 (Peca) 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 Afzal Majoka said the prosecution had proved its case against Imaan and Hadi under Sections 9 (glorification of an offence), 10 (cyberterrorism) and 26A (false information) of Peca. Under Section 9 of Peca, 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

Continued on Page 06

Ramadan moon sighted in Pakistan

DNA

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 Board of Secondary Education Chairman Maulana Abdul Khaliq Azad on Wednesday.

Reports of testimonies started coming in around 6:30pm, with sources saying at least testimonies 40 were received from across the country. Testimonies were received from different areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A meeting of the committee was convened in Peshawar around 7pm 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, the 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

Continued on Page 06



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

FAISAL SHEIKH

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 cricket-turned-politician, 73, has been in jail since August 2023, convicted in a string of cases that he claims were politically driven following his ouster in a 2022 parliamentary vote. 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 opposition 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

Continued on Page 06

TTAP announces ending parliament protest

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Azadi alliance Tehreek Tahaffuz-e-Aayeen Pakistan (TTAP), Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, on Wednesday announced ending the Parliament House sit-in staged over the health of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan. Speaking to journalists outside the Supreme Court, Allama Nasir Abbas said members of parliament had launched the protest solely over concerns about the PTI founder's health and that

Continued on Page 06

Zelenskiy accuses Russia 'Difficult' Ukraine peace talks end

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

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Peace talks between Ukraine and Russia in Geneva ended on Wednesday after only two hours, with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy describing them as "difficult" and accusing Russia of deliberately delaying progress toward a deal to end the four-year-old war. The two days of US-mediated peace talks in Switzerland took place as US President Donald Trump has twice in recent days suggested it was up to Ukraine and Zelenskiy to ensure the talks were successful.

"We can see that progress has been made, but for now, positions differ 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

Continued on Page 06

FEBRUARY 2026

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4.2m families to receive financial support under Nigeban Package: Azma

LABORE: Punjab Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari has announced that under Pakistan's largest-ever Nigeban Ramadan 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 surveys or did not receive assistance can contact the "Maryam Ko Batain" 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 anyone demanding illegal charges. Three cases have already been registered against violators. She added that distribution of cards across Punjab will be completed by March 10. Governing Chief Minister's message, Azma 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 lift arrangements have been made in

every tehsil, serving around 2,000 people daily. Philanthropists have also contributed generously, and the chief minister has directed that certificates and awards be given to those supporting public welfare.

The SACM urged citizens not to misuse the helpline or engage in hoarding, stressing that the Punjab government is ensuring transparent and secure distribution so that all deserving families receive their Rs 10,000 assistance during Ramadan. Salma Butt further stated that all Sahulat Bazaars in Punjab have been converted into Ramadan Sahulat Bazaars, enabling citizens to shop from home using the Nigeban Ramadan Card. More than 17,000 grocery stores have been linked to the card. The minority card amount has been increased from Rs 3,500 to Rs 10,000, while over 700,000 cards have already been delivered. Ramadan 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. Regarding the three-day Ramadan Bazaar at Jilani Park, the government provided subsidies worth Rs 20 million, benefiting more than 300,000 citizens. Azma

Bokhari criticized the PTI, alleging that those responsible for political oppression are now seeking relief. She questioned why international human rights advocates remained silent during PTI's tenure when, according to her, human rights were violated and political opponents were ridiculed.

She said propaganda regarding the PTI founder's health had been disproven by medical reports and that the government was fulfilling its responsibilities by providing all necessary facilities and healthcare.

Commenting on PTI's 13-year rule in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, she claimed that road closures caused severe public hardship, with ambulances stranded and courts forced to intervene, while terrorism incidents continued. The minister stated that the government would provide legal assistance wherever required but will not tolerate anarchy, street, or attacks on state authority. She added that prisoners, including the PTI founder, are receiving facilities beyond past precedents, but politics cannot be used as a justification to challenge the state. She concluded that Punjab's position is clear: all legal rights will be provided in accordance with the law and constitution, but no compromise will be made on the authority of the state. —APP



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

Senator announces major relief for women beneficiaries

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Senator Rubina Khalid Wednesday announced major financial relief for women beneficiaries in view of the upcoming holy month of Ramadan, including an increase in quarterly stipends and additional support for education and nutrition programmes. The chairperson was speaking during a live e-Katcheri held at the BISP headquarters. The primary objectives of the session were to directly hear public concerns, understand issues faced by beneficiaries, and ensure timely and effective resolution of complaints. While addressing participants, the chairperson said Ramadan 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 Kafalat Programme has been increased by Rs. 1,000, raising the amount from Rs. 13,500 to Rs. 14,500 for eligible women beneficiaries. In addition, stipends under the Benazir Nashonuma Programme and Benazir Educational Scholarships have also been enhanced by Rs. 500 each to further strengthen maternal nutrition and support children's education. Senator Rubina Khalid urged deserving women to ensure they receive their full entitlements. —APP

FUUAU launches Turkish language

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Urdu University Islamabad (FUUAU), on Wednesday held its first class of Turkish language in a move to not only enhance skills and expertise of students in multiple languages, but also to promote cultural understanding among students. The initiative has been introduced by the Department of International Relations (IR) in collaboration with Turkish Embassy. According to details, initially two classes will be held every week. As the regular sessions formally began on Wednesday, February 18, Dr Yusuf Ziya Ozon, 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. Professor, lecturer and other staff members expressed satisfaction over the initiative and called it a positive step towards students' career and future. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Faizal Javid termed the introduction of Turkish language teaching at the university a positive and welcome development. He said that students from the Department of IR, as well as other departments of the university, are benefiting from this valuable academic opportunity. He added that the Turkish language holds significant importance across the

Middle East, Central Asia and many other regions of the world. Providing students in Islamabad with the chance to learn an internationally recognized cultural and scholarly language is indeed a remarkable opportunity. Dr Faizal Javid also expressed his gratitude to Vice Chancellor Dr. Zahra Khan Shumari and In-Charge Campus Dr. Saba Bashir for facilitating this initiative. IR lecturer Saira Kamsi 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 Faizal Javid's academic vision. —DNA

Punjab cities illuminated ahead of Ramadan

LABORE: On the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, cities and villages across the province have been illuminated ahead of Ramadan, 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 "Ramadan Nigeban" have been installed, while main roads, markets and inter-sections have been brightly lit. Green belts are decorated with colourful lights and illuminated installations of the names of Allah have been displayed along 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 Ramadan theme. In Lahore, all Taluq, streets and bazaar have been decorated on the chief minister's special instructions, while illuminated arches at Nigeban Ramadan Bazaars and Dastarkhwan centers have attracted public attention.

Farewell reference honors to retire professor at H-8 college



DNA
ISLAMABAD: A farewell ceremony was hosted by Islamabad Model Postgraduate College H/8/2 in honor of Prof. Tahir Mahmood, Head of the Department of Economics, and Prof. Abdul Rauf, 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, federal teaching cadres. Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Afzal 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. Afzal Awan lauded both retirees for their exemplary services. The ceremony concluded with a standing ovation and presentation of commendation shields to the distinguished professors.

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 "Bridging 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, Chairperson Ume Laila Ashraf 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 underemployment, limited 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 inclusive economic growth. Getir Thomas Tsonak, Country Director, ILO, emphasized that closing the gender wage gap is both an economic and social priority, calling for greater transparency, compliance with labour standards, and

strengthened data systems. He reaffirmed ILO's support for promoting decent work and pay equity. Sumair 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. Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, highlighted ongoing institutional reforms and labour governance initiatives, reaffirming the government's resolve to strengthen compliance, enforcement, and inclusive labour market systems. —APP

Relief Package immediate disbursement ordered

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection Syed Inam Ahmed Shah Wednesday chaired a high-level review meeting on the Ramadan 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 Information and Broadcasting, the Benazir Income Support Programme, National Telecommunication 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 Ramadan relief funds to beneficiaries' accounts from today. He further instructed that all banks must ensure full operational readiness on the first day of Ramadan to avoid any disruption in payments. Emphasizing uninterrupted disbursement, the minister ordered that pending beneficiary bank accounts be opened on a priority basis. He also called for the formation of a dedicated WhatsApp group comprising local persons from all relevant institutions to strengthen coordination and ensure two-way progress updates. Later, Syed Inam Ahmed Shah visited the control room established to monitor the disbursement of the Prime Minister's Ramadan Relief Package.

According to the real-time 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 Ramadan to promptly address public concerns. A day earlier, the federal minister had also visited the NTC call center set up for the Ramadan Relief Package. The center, located in the F-6 Building, has been functional 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 15 alone, approximately 13,000 calls relating to the Ramadan 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 Ramadan. —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 2.1 Million

Deserving Families Nationwide with Transparency & Dignity

28 Billion Fund

13000 per family cash relief

10 Billion Additional Stipend

During Ramzan for 10 Million deserving families

60 Million Pakistanis Nationwide

Benefiting from that

HELINE 9999

Information regarding transfer of money and account Bank shall be sent only through

SCAN TO VERIFY BENEFICIARY AND ID

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Feb 06/N. Zealand National Day
Feb 06/Uganda Army Day
Feb 11/Iran Revolution day
Feb 16/DPK 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.....8494919



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & 16
Motorway Police.....9266644
Motorway Police.....9270901-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222566
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



Enquiry

Ethi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Enquiry.....117
WASA Exchange/9270831-6
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DRQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9291170-79
Polyclinic.....9218306-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

CDA.....9221334-43
CIA.....9218301-44
Met Office.....925360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Contentment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potstar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

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 themes from his acclaimed book *Commander of the Faithful*, which chronicles the life and legacy of Emir Abdelkader as a model of humanitarian values, spiritual depth, and principled leadership in times of conflict. Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of the Institute, welcomed Mr. Kiser to the Institute. He commended his scholarly contributions

and efforts to promote interfaith understanding and mutual respect across cultures. Ambassador Saleem 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 interactive session provided an opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas on religious coexistence, ethical traditions in Muslim societies,

and the importance of interfaith bridges between civilizations. Mr. Kiser also reflected on the need to challenge prevailing 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. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi while talking to a 17-member delegation from the Tax Ombudsman Service of Tanzania (TOST), headed by Mr. Erasmus Vincent Muli, which called on him at the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat here today. He said that it has processed and decided a record number of 261,101 complaints during the outgoing year 2023, as against 223,188 cases decided in 2024. This increase in the number of complaints decided has been attributed to initiatives like the Khatu Khatu (Open Courts), Outreach Complaint Resolution (OCR) mechanism, the Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) and Inspection

Visits of government agencies and departments. It has achieved an unprecedented implementation rate of 96.8% 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 (CCC) have been established during the last two years, mostly in the remote and far-off regions of the country. Now the institution has presence in 28 cities across the country, which is instrumental in dispensing administrative justice virtually at the doorstep of the people. He particularly called for the exchange of experiences and best practices between the two institutions in areas of public sector 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

and disposal of public complaints. It was followed by a lively Question/Answer session. The leader of the Tanzanian delegation commended the outstanding performance of the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Institution, saying that it is rendering very useful service to the people. He emphasised the need to establish closer professional 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 alongside Pakistan's pioneering role in the establishment of the Association. It was informed that the country currently holds its Presidentship 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 Ramadan. An official top APP on Wednesday that the meeting was attended by zonal SSPs, SDPPs, and SPPs. 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 the protection of citizens' lives and property at all costs and to continue indiscriminate action against criminal elements. He said strict crackdowns were ordered against law grabbers, illicit weapons holders, and drug peddlers. He said officers were instructed to accelerate operations against active gangs, proclaimed offenders, habitual criminals, and groups involved in motorcycle and car thefts. Qazi said a zero-tolerance policy was reiterated against lile selling and flying, while tenant registration was also emphasised. He said effective action was ordered against professional beggars and their facilitators. He said special security arrangements have been made for Ramadan, including the installation of walk-through gates at mosques and deployment of additional personnel. SSP Qazi said foolproof security was directed during Iftar and Taraweeh hours, while patrolling and checking mechanisms were ordered to be further strengthened. He said officers were instructed to ensure full presence, particularly during prayer timings.

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

ISLAMABAD: Business leader and former president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Shahid Rashid Butt, said food prices have risen sharply across major markets ahead of Ramadan, with retailers in several cities ignoring officially notified rate lists despite repeated warnings from local administrations. He said the seasonal spike, driven by stronger demand for dates, cooking oil, gram flour, sugar, fruits and vegetables, has once again

exposed weaknesses in price enforcement mechanisms. Under provincial price control laws, district authorities can impose fines, seal shops and initiate cases against violators. However, enforcement has often remained inconsistent, with inspections tapering off once the fasting month begins. Shahid Butt criticised that government direct cash transfers may not fully offset inflation if retail prices continue to rise unchecked. He 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. Each year, prices of key food essentials climb, squeezing already tight 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 journalist and expert on international and Chinese affairs, Rashid 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 shared vision of prosperity. He said 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 imports of the petroleum group during July-January (2025/26) stood at \$ 9,046,783 million against the imports of \$ 9,461,921 million during the same months of last year. Among petroleum commodities, the import of petroleum products declined by 1.81 percent, from \$ 4,129,592 million last year to \$ 4,028,472 million during the period under review year. Likewise, the imports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) decreased by 26.30 percent from \$ 2,202,415 million last year to \$ 1,625,298 million while the import of specified Petroleum Gas (LPG) went down by 4.98 percent in the first seven months and stood at \$ 609,843 million.—APP

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Briefs

FCCP seeks
data on
informal
settlements

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court, while hearing an important case concerning informal settlements (katchi abadis), has directed all relevant federal and provincial departments to submit comprehensive reports containing the latest and complete 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 Anwarul Karim Khan. During 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 institutions to present updated statistics and progress reports within the stipulated timeframes. The court adjourned further hearing of the case until the first week of April, instructing that a detailed review 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 Ramadan for all educational institutions, operating under its administrative control. According to a notification issued by Assistant Director Academics Ahsan Ali Khan with the approval of the Director General FDE, institutions observing single-shift classes will operate from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm on Monday to Thursday, while on Friday classes will conclude at 12:00 pm. The same schedule will also be applicable to ECE, F.G. Colleges. For double-shift institutions, the Morning shift will be held from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm on Monday to Thursday. The Evening shift will operate 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 System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 112,200 cusecs of water from various rain stations with inflow of 38,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 148.17 feet which was 79.47 feet higher than the dead level of 140.20 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 14,200 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 116.73 feet, which was 137.20 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 6,900 cusecs and 80,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Goda and Sukkur was recorded as 3,100, 30,500, 29,500, and 7,500 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Ravi, a total of 9,200 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 1,500 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Mianwali.—APP

Railways trans-
ports 8.2m
tonnes of
freight

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways transported 8.2 million tonnes of freight during the 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 logistical freight movement between industrial zones across the country and to seaports, said an official in the Ministry of Railways. However, the official 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 104-kilometre railway line, in collaboration with the Saudi government.—APP



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 I-8 Markaz, which visited the Chamber under the leadership of its President, Chaudhry Waheed Mushtaq Cheema. Highlighting the Chamber's facilitation initiatives, the ICCI President said that various facilitation desks are already operational at the Chamber and efforts are underway to establish additional desks for MOFA, Passport, Excise and Taxation, and driving licenses to further facilitate the business community. He emphasized that the Chamber's leadership remains in constant contact with the high-ups 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, IESCO, 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 I-8 Markaz Chaudhry Waheed Mushtaq Cheema thanked the ICCI leadership for its proactive role and highlighted key issues faced by traders in the market. He called for the construction of a multi-storey parking plaza, installation of a tube well, allocation of space for a flower market, improved cleanliness and sanitation, 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 Yaqub Jameel Abbas 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 Ali Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajwan Ajmal Baloch also reaffirmed his commitment to stand firmly with the business community and pledged close collaboration with ICCI leadership to address traders' concerns. ICCI Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, in his role 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 Council Member Chaudhry Masood, Executive Members Zulqarnain Abbasi, Ishaq Sial, former Senior Vice President Khair Mehmood Chaudhry, Taseem Zaman, and others.—DNA

6 Ramazan bazaars set
up across Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has set up six Ramazan 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 bazaars are set up to support residents during the holy month by making daily necessities available at rates set by the government. According to the administration, the Ramazan bazaars have been established in Tarlo, I-8, Bari Imam (Barah Kohn), 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 this regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Meemon visited all six Ramazan 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 official rate list. He said that no vendor would be allowed to charge above the notified prices. Clear display of rate lists at each stall was made mandatory so that buyers can check prices before making purchases. 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 Ramazan 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 Ramazan. 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 magistrates 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 Ramazan Bazaars serve their intended purpose of providing relief to the public.—DNA

Govt committed to youth, women
empowerment: Mashhood

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan has said that the 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 proactive role in promoting a conducive business environment and lauded the Women's Chamber for effectively supporting female entrepreneurs through hand-holding and mentorship. During the event, he said that the Chamber's efforts in facilitating the distribution of goods to women to help them start their own small businesses. The initiative was organized by Iqbal Collection in collaboration with Minor Vocational Training & Job Placement Institute as part of efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan stated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's economic outlook has strengthened significantly. Remittances have crossed \$28 billion, an all-time high and are expected to exceed \$40 billion, while global financial institutions

are increasingly viewing Pakistan as a vibrant, emerging economy. He added that the government aims to facilitate 2.1 million Pakistanis for overseas employment next year through structured 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 up to \$65 lakh for startups, \$81.5 million for growing businesses, and an enhanced up to \$100 million for established enterprises. 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 year. Emphasizing industry, he noted that women currently account for 11% of loan beneficiaries, with efforts underway to raise this to 25% through dedicated facilitation centres. He also announced that Pakistan's first Youth Employment Policy has been approved, mandating at least 35% female participation in the labour force. Reaffirming the government's unwavering support for entrepreneurs, he expressed confidence that through youth and women empowerment, Pakistan will achieve sustained economic growth and

prosperity. Speaking on the occasion, President ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood warmly welcomed the Chief Guest and appreciated his dedicated services for youth development and human capital enhancement. He stated that ICCI has consistently taken practical measures to promote vocational training, entrepreneurship, and job creation, particularly for women and young people. Sardar Tahir Mehmood further emphasized that strong public-private sector partnership is vital for putting the country on the path of sustainable economic progress. He reaffirmed that ICCI remains committed to working hand in hand with the government and private stakeholders to expand employment opportunities and support small and medium enterprises. Mrs. Samina Pariz, President Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the sitting government is fully supporting the women entrepreneurs and that now it is their responsibility to derive benefit from the facilitation. Tahir Ayub, Senior Vice President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry who presided as master of the ceremony also highly commended the women's role in country's development.—DNA

Punjab mulls
interest-free loans
for poultry industry

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government is considering providing interest-free loans to entrepreneurs in the commercial poultry sector, particularly for value-added units such as processing plants and cold storage facilities besides exploring options to facilitate the import of state-of-the-art machinery. Various plans are being discussed with stakeholders to formulate a policy in this regard, said Dr Sajid Hussain Kasfi, Director General (Research), Punjab Livestock Department. The poultry sector remains a key component of Punjab's economy. More than 70% of total poultry farming, 80% of egg production, 85% of feed production, and all poultry processing units are located in Punjab. Talking to Wealth Pakistan, Dr Kasfi said the Livestock Department is conducting research to address industry-related challenges while fostering a business-friendly environment through the implementation of relevant laws and regulations. He noted that the poultry most plays a critical role in stabilizing the prices of mutton, beef, and pulses. Any disruption in the poultry sector can have a ripple effect on essential food items and overall food security, he added. He said the Poultry Research Institute (PRI) Rawalpindi is providing diagnostic services to farms through its extensive provincial network. He added that the institute also trains farm workers in flock management and offers extension services for disease prevention and treatment. Dr Ali Karim Bhatti, former central chairman of Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA), said that with an investment exceeding Rs700 billion only in Punjab, the sector has generated around 1.5 million jobs, particularly in rural areas. He said Punjab, with an estimated 4,800 layer farms, 17,400 broiler farms and numerous high-density controlled sheds, remains a key driver of affordable white meat and egg supply for Pakistan's population of over 250 million. Dr Bhatti highlighted the importance of encouraging documented and hygienic processing, noting that a policy environment that promotes processed and branded meat would strengthen food safety standards and consumer health outcomes. Dr Bhatti said that a predictable and market-oriented pricing mechanism would further enhance investor confidence and help producers manage both upward and downward price cycles more effectively. "Poultry is a dynamic business driven by demand and supply, and a stable, business-friendly environment will enable it to continue contributing to food security, employment, and economic growth," he added. He maintained that with consistent policy support and a level playing field, the poultry industry in Punjab is well-positioned to expand operations, sustain rural livelihoods, and meet the country's growing protein needs.—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. Official data released by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication showed that ICT services exports reached \$374 million in January 2025. This was 19.5 per cent higher than \$313 million recorded in January 2024. The steady monthly increase reflects 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 performed better than all other services categories. "Other business services" ranked second, recording \$1.21 billion during the same period. Experts say the growth is driven by better internet connectivity, a rising number of freelancers, competitive pricing, and government support measures to promote exports. The strong performance highlights the increasing importance of the ICT sector in Pakistan's economy.—APP

Dr Tariq
extends
Chinese new
year greetings

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Wednesday extended greetings to the government and people of China on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening ties between the two countries. In a message posted on X, the minister congratulated the Chinese leadership and people on the festival. 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 grow stronger each year. Dr Tariq praised the leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping and acknowledged China's achievements and its positive role in global affairs. He expressed confidence that bilateral relations would expand further in the coming year.—APP

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Iran at a crossroads after 47 years of revolution

HASSAN AL-MUSTAFA

HAVING 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. Protests erupt from time to time, some accompanied by unrest and violence. Nor can we overlook external infiltrations of the domestic arena, reflected in extensive 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 reaffirmed that "national strength" is not merely a matter of armament, but above all the capacity of society to endure. 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 so long as the root causes of the problems remain unaddressed and Iranians do not feel tangible improvements in their daily lives. Iran today faces 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 ease 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 Pezeshkian affirm 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 peace and understanding with the US and prevent the outbreak of a new war in the Middle East — a conflict that would open the door to chaos and further 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 prospects for 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 country limited in its ability to produce prosperity. This is the dilemma of 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

THE 44 days patriotic war by 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 ensures safe and dignified return of the affected people. Besides humanitarian nature, the Programme also embarks on the postwar state-building, economic revitalization, 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 along with housing, employment opportunities, and health and education facilities were improved, displacement remained a central national trauma and a defining feature of Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policy. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan wrote a history in the South Caucasus by liberating its territories only after Armenia constantly violated 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. This initiative has been taken after a very careful examination of such other cases across the globe in order to avoid insecurities 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

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 help to the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) for demining of the area. Nevertheless, the process of demining is time taking, and needs a very careful strategy. It also needs latest technology for the 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 area 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 sustainability, 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, modernity, 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 Azerbaijan 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 East Zengezur. While historic city of Shusha is being built as the cultural hub and tourism attraction, by aligning resettlement with economic opportunity, the state aims to prevent secondary displacement and ensure that return is durable rather than symbolic. The Great Return is also a test of governance for the authorities. Coordinating demining, reconstruction, social services, and population movement requires strong inter-agency cooperation and effective governance. Government of Azerbaijan has established a special setup to effectively materialize this task. It reflects the government's

sincerity towards 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 national cohesion. Furthermore, citizens' urge to return back to their homelands, even when coming 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 implications 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 postconflict recovery within the limits of self-principles on international law. The resolution of disputed territories also led to a process of normalization of relations with Armenia. This approach will bring broader regional stability. It will eventually help achieving the regional connectivity projects and increased trade. It will also help easier cross border movement of goods, services, and people. Sustainable peace requires 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 economic revival. However, its importance lies in inclusivity, transparency, and community participation in order to avoid top-down planning that overlooks local needs. It is also important to consider that quality of life in the liberated lands is more important than the quantity of returnees to their homelands. Addressing 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 long-term peace, development, and social cohesion 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

FOR 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 consensus or legitimacy, invites resistance. The recent 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 longstanding 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—a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark—the reaction from Europe was swift and unified. Denmark rejected the notion outright, and European leaders closed ranks in defense of territorial sovereignty. The message was clear: Europe would not tolerate transactional geopolitics that treated sovereign territories as negotiable assets. What might once have been dismissed as rhetorical bravado instead triggered serious diplomatic backlash, reinforcing Europe's commitment to sovereignty and collective unity. This episode reflected a broader pattern. European leaders, long accustomed to operating within the transatlantic alliance, have increasingly asserted strategic autonomy. Disagreements over trade tariffs, 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 with silence but with institutional confidence, reiterating that domestic policy decisions belong to sovereign governments and the European Union collectively—not external actors. 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 U.S. leadership, including increased defense spending and greater coordination under EU frameworks. The conversation about "strategic autonomy" gained momentum—not as a rejection of NATO, but as recognition that overreliance on any single power carries risks. Beyond Europe, the situation in Venezuela has also sparked controversy. The U.S. 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? Iran represents perhaps the most volatile example of this dynamic. U.S. naval deployments in the Persian Gulf, sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program, and rhetoric condemning 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 U.S. allies to endorse military escalation without clear multilateral backing. Meanwhile, global power distribution is shifting. China's Belt and Road Initiative has expanded infrastructure and partnerships across Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe. More than 140 countries have engaged in some form of cooperation within this framework. For many developing nations, China's model-emphasizing economic investment without strict political conditions—offers an alternative to Western engagement strategies. Whether one views this approach as pragmatic partnership or strategic influence expansion, its appeal signals dissatisfaction with older interventionist models. Canada, too, has demonstrated quiet but meaningful leadership. 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 geopolitical tension about power. The principle that "power corrupts" is often invoked, but power can also isolate when it disregards consensus. In a globalized world, economic interdependence, trade pressures, and diplomatic networks limit unilateral action. Aircraft carriers and sanctions regimes remain formidable tools, yet legitimacy increasingly derives from coalition-building rather than coercion. This brings us to the role of the United Nations. Critics frequently decry the UN as toothless or ineffectual. Yet the UN's authority depends entirely on the willingness of its member states—especially Permanent Security Council members—to abide by collective decisions. When powerful states exercise veto power, the UN's role in resolving disputes, authorizing 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 U.S. leadership; they are stakeholders demanding consultation and respect. Sovereignty, multilateralism, and rule-based order remain guiding principles for such a new world order. When any nation—however powerful—appears to deviate from these norms, resistance grows. There is also a practical dimension. Military intervention in complex societies has historically produced unintended consequences, including instability and humanitarian crises 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 than unilateral force. The evolving geopolitical landscape suggests a 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 sovereign rights. Power, in its most constructive form, means capacity to stabilize rather than destabilize; to convene rather than coerce; to strengthen institutions rather than circumvent them. History demonstrates that even 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 decisions. Ultimately, the question is not whether the United States possesses power. It undeniably does. The question is how that power is exercised. In an interconnected world facing shared challenges—from climate change to economic inequality to nuclear cooperation—no single nation or group are not signs of weakness but 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 (Rtd)

Former Ambassador of Pakistan to France
Former Press Attaché to Malaysia
Former MD, SRBC
Macomb, Michigan

Briefs

CTD kills 14
terrorists in two Quetta...

FROM PAGE 01

The attackers also set two customs vehicles on fire and opened fire on passengers. Police retaliated, after which the terrorists managed to escape, while a search operation is currently underway.

Two officials
martyred
in DI Khan

FROM PAGE 01

A peace committee leader, was killed, while 10 others were injured in an explosion — said to be a suicide attack — during a wedding ceremony in the district.

Imaan, Hadi
appeals
fixed for...

FROM PAGE 01

Improvement and fixed Rs30m, with two more years in default. Under Section 26-A, they received two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs1m each, with six months' additional jail time in case of non-payment. All sentences will run concurrently.

PM Shehbaz
to seek
clarity on...

FROM PAGE 01

Efforts for peace and security in Gaza, leading to a lasting solution to the Palestine issue in accordance with United Nations resolutions," he said. Pakistan has reiterated at international forums its readiness to play a "constructive role" in the US peace plan for Palestine. US President Trump launched his new board at World Economic Forum in Davos in late January, with world leaders, including PM Shehbaz, signing on to pursue a lasting agreement for Gaza. Force to oversee reconstruction and recovery. Trump's 20-point Gaza plan calls for a force from Muslim nations to oversee a transition period for reconstruction and economic recovery in the devastated Palestinian territory, and Washington has been pressing Islamabad to join.

PTI
announces
'Imran...

FROM PAGE 01

Treatment, but his sister, Al-eema Khan, was politicising the issue. In a press conference outside the Supreme Court today, Imran's loyalist Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi said that he had been assigned the responsibility of leading a "street movement" by the incarcerated PTI founder. He alleged that court orders were being "thrown into the dustbin" and claimed that the PTI founding-chairman is still being denied access to his personal documents. Announcing the formation of "Imran Khan Release Force", the provincial chief executive said the force would be formally registered and would pursue a peaceful struggle. He added that members of the force would take an oath in Peshawar immediately after Eid ul Fitr.

TTAP
announces
ending...

FROM PAGE 01

The matter had also been taken to court. The announcement comes shortly after consultations on the plea were held in the Supreme Court, where Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi was also present. Sources told Geo News said leaders of the opposition alliance continued consultations outside the Supreme Court following court proceedings, while discussions on the future course of the plea also remained underway after the hearings concluded. Imran's health has emerged as the latest point of contention between the government and the opposition comprising PTI and the TTAP alliance after a report, filed by his lawyer and SC's amicus curiae, said Imran's health was deteriorating.

Japan women win speed skating team pursuit bronze, set record

Japan suffered a close loss in the semifinals after crossing in 2 minutes, 55.95 seconds, beaten by the Netherlands by just 0.11 second

MILAN: Japan secured the women's speed skating team pursuit bronze to win the nation's 19th medal of the Milan Cortina Olympics, the most it has won at a single Winter Games the other day. Japan fell short of reclaiming the gold medal it won at the 2018 Games though Miho Takagi, who was part of that gold medal-winning team in Pyeongchang, won her third bronze, adding to those she won in the 500 and 1,000-meter events at Milano Speed Skating Stadium. Canada beat the Netherlands in the final by 0.96 second.

It was Takagi's 10th Olympic medal in total, with the 31-year-old still to skate the 1,500, while it was the first medal of the 2026 Games for Takagi's teammates Ayano Sato, Hana Noake and Momoko Horikawa. Japan suffered a close loss in the semifinals after crossing in 2 minutes, 55.95 seconds, beaten by the Netherlands by just 0.11 second. Takagi, Sato and Horikawa had a seesaw battle with the Dutch and led into the final lap, but lost their slender advantage by the time they reached the line.

"We've climbed this far, but I think we lost

because I have not amassed enough experience as the pacesetter over the past four years. It was more about my lack of ability than the team," Takagi said. "Horikawa was saying she couldn't provide the push from the back when the pace is high at the start of the season, but she can easily do it now. That was really heartening, and I could go all out because of that."

The Japanese trio — now with Noake in place of Horikawa — cruised past the United States in the bronze medal final. They led

all six laps and clocked 2:58.50 to clinch a third straight podium finish in the event, 3.50 ahead of the Americans. "I'm very frustrated that we couldn't beat the Netherlands. I felt I gave 100 percent in that race, but looking at the gap, it left me feeling we didn't push enough," Sato said. "But we didn't have time to dwell on it, a fresh Noake came in, a skater with ability, when Miho and I were really feeling fatigued. I thought we could get the medal if we kept our cool and raced as normal, and that's what we managed to do."

Eala storms to victory over world
No. 8 Jasmine Paolini in Dubai

Alexandra Eala
Stuns World
No. 8 Jasmine
Paolini in Dubai
For First Top-
10 Victory as
Elena Rybakina,
Elina Svitolina
Advance to Last
16 at Dubai
Duty Free
Championships

both inside the 5,000-capacity stadium and outside in the tennis village, where Filipinos had congregated to watch on beanbags surrounded by the nation's flags and cheering support here during her 2024 title win, seemed to feel the sold-out crowd were not wishing her quite so well this time.

Eala appeared to sense it too, immediately giving her supporters plenty reason to cheer, breaking her opponent twice in quick succession to go 5-1 up before serving out the set to kick start wild celebrations.

As good as Eala was, Paolini hit seven unforced errors in the opening set, and let her chin sink further into her chest as every error was greeted with cheers. "I think today I came out on fire," said Eala. "She's a great opponent obviously being top 10. To be able

Olympics: Japan
women win speed
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IMF urges Japan
to avoid lowering
consumption tax

WASHINGTON: Japan should avoid lowering the consumption tax, the International Monetary Fund said cautioning that such an "untargeted measure" to deal with the rising cost of living could further deteriorate the country's fiscal health the other day. The warning came as Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced his intention to suspend the 8 percent tax on food and beverages for two years, after his ruling party's historic election win earlier this month. "Support for vulnerable households and firms most affected by rising costs of living or large external shocks should be budget neutral, temporary, and targeted to the most vulnerable," the IMF said in a statement after concluding regular consultations with Japanese authorities. The IMF sounded the alarm that Japan's public debt, the highest among major economies, is projected to grow over the long term, although spending restraints and stronger tax collection have had positive effects on its post-pandemic fiscal consolidation efforts. The Washington-headquartered organization said that instead a "system of refundable tax credits," which the Japanese government is considering introducing after the two-year suspension, "if well-designed, could provide better-targeted support to the most vulnerable Japanese households." — APP

Trump unveils 1st
set of Japan projects

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's administration said Japan will finance the production of synthetic diamonds and two energy projects worth about \$30 billion as the initial tranche of investments under a deal reached last year following months of tariff negotiations the other day. Trump's announcement that the three projects had been selected, as part of a \$550 billion package that Japan committed to in exchange for his administration reducing tariffs on Japanese cars and other goods, was confirmed hours later by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. "These projects are so large, and could not be done without our special work, TARIFFS," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "America is building again. America is producing again. And America is WINNING again." Calling it a historic time for the United States and Japan, he said a critical minerals project will be carried out in Georgia, along with plans for an oil facility in Texas and power generation infrastructure in Ohio. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the United States and Japan will build the largest-ever natural gas infrastructure in Ohio, expected to produce 9.2 gigawatts of power, a deepwater crude oil export facility in the Gulf of Mexico and establish synthetic industrial diamond manufacturing capacity in the United States. Lutnick said the deepwater facility is likely to generate \$20 billion to \$30 billion in US crude oil exports annually. — APP

Abdul Nabi Memon Named
SSBP Secretary General

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move aimed at improving the lives of underprivileged and destitute individuals across the country, the Society for Support of Destitute Persons (SSDP) has appointed renowned social figure Abdul Nabi Memon as its Secretary General. The decision was taken during the eighth meeting of the Managing Committee, chaired by Chairman and former Chief Secretary Sindh, Ghulam Sarwar Khairo. The meeting approved key appointments and reviewed preparations for a comprehensive five-year strategic plan to strengthen the organization's outreach and impact. Alongside the appointment of renowned social figure Abdul Nabi Memon as Secretary General, Sub

hail Akbar Shah was named Senior Vice Chairman, Dr. Naseem Ghani Jam as Deputy Secretary General, and Syed Fazal Shah Kazmi as Secretary General.

Participants expressed confidence that under the dynamic leadership of Chairman Ghulam Sarwar Khairo, SSDP has entered a new phase marked by vision, unity, and progress. The newly elected team pledged full cooperation and practical initiatives to deliver tangible and sustainable results. The committee also reviewed measures to ensure effective and swift assistance to deserving individuals across Sindh, emphasizing the formulation of a three-to-five-year strategic plan to further enhance the organization's outreach and impact.

PSG rally from early deficit to beat Monaco 3-2
away in Champions League playoff

The 20-year-old Doue replaced Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, who went off injured after 27 minutes, and proved decisive for the visitors as he struck two superb goals plus set up one for Achraf Hakimi

MONACO: Champions League holders Paris St-Germain overcame a horror start and a two-goal deficit to beat 10-man Monaco 3-2 away in the first leg of their knockout round playoff tie on Tuesday. Desire Doue came off the bench to engineer an impressive turnaround for PSG, who conceded a goal in the opening minutes and were 2-0 down after 18 minutes as Florian Grillon grabbed a double for the hosts. The 20-year-old Doue replaced Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, who went off injured after 27 minutes, and proved decisive for the visitors as he struck two superb goals plus set up one for Achraf Hakimi. Monaco spent most of the second half down to 10 men after Aleksandr Golovin was shown a red card for studs-up tackle that raked down the shin of Vitinha with the referee us-

grading his original caution to a sending-off after consulting the touchline VAR screen. PSG are now in an advantageous position for the return leg in Paris next Wednesday as they look to progress to next month's last 16. However, the European champions were in all sorts of trouble after 50 seconds when their fullback Nuno Mendes had a stray cross-field pass cut out in midfield, handing Monaco a first attack with Klichewich for Balogun to head home from close range. Monaco looked to be in the driving seat as Balogun netted a second goal after Maghnes Aklouch's cleverly weighted pass allowed the American striker to outstrip PSG captain Marquinhos and slot home. Their fortunes were still looking good despite a defensive slip by Wout Faes, which led to the defender pulling back on Klichewich

Kvaratskhelia and giving away a 22nd-minute penalty, but Vitinha's effort was saved by Philipp Kohn. But the swing was Doue's, came on for Dembele and scored with his first touch in the 29th minute with a left-footed effort after being teed up by Bradley Barcola. The goal was confirmed after a VAR check denied Monaco's claims for a foul on defender Vanderson in the buildup. Doue's rifling shot in the 41st minute was parried away by Kohn, but Hakimi roared quickly to pounce on the rebound and slot it 2-2 before the break. Klichewich's dismissal in the 48th minute left Monaco on the back foot as the visitors then dominated proceedings and Doue once again had more than just the 67th-minute winner from Doue. He struck a superbly struck shot that flew into the goal from the edge of the penalty area.

"I didn't feel I had to show something starting on the bench, I tried to play as usual. Tonight it paid off. I was able to score, to help the team. That's my job," Doue said. "The coach makes his choices, he thinks about putting the best players in the team. Tonight he fielded this starting eleven, which is very good. Whether it's a defeat or a victory, it's always a team effort. A PSG midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery missed a couple of good chances and Hakimi came close to a late fourth goal when his 86th-minute angled effort went close across the face of the goal. "Disappointment is the overriding feeling," said Monaco captain Denis Zakaria. "We went into this match with the aim of winning, but we didn't manage to do it today. We still have our chances. We're going to Paris and trying to win there." — APP

US to stop
Iran's
nuclear
arms...

FROM PAGE 01

However, optimism remains cautious, US Vice President JD Vance noted that while some progress was made, Iran has not yet acknowledged all of Washington's "red lines," particularly the demand that Tehran must not obtain a nuclear weapon. Vance highlighted concerns that a nuclear Iran could spark a regional arms race and pose direct threats to US interests and allies. US officials have stressed that talks must address not only enrichment but also Iran's ballistic missile program and support for regional proxies, though Iran has resisted expanding the scope beyond nuclear issues. On the other hand, Iran has made it clear that it maintains the right to develop and advance its nuclear program for peaceful purposes and the benefit of its people. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recently reaffirmed Iran's commitment to a nuclear industry, including uranium enrichment, describing it as essential for national development and energy needs. Iranian officials argue that the program is solely for civilian applications, such as power generation, and reject demands for zero enrichment on Iranian soil as infringements on sovereignty. Tehran has proposed ideas like temporary lifts to enrichment or regional facilities but maintains that permanent restrictions would undermine its scientific and technological progress.

'Difficult'
Ukraine
peace...

FROM PAGE 01

Vladimir Zelenskyy, told reporters that further negotiations would be held soon, without specifying a date. Earlier on Wednesday, Zelenskyy had accused Russia of sabotaging talks on negotiations that could already have reached the final stage. Ukrainian officials have said they want Moscow to withdraw its troops from a winter bombing campaign against Ukraine's energy system and pursue a battlefield ceasefire. Zelenskyy also said any plan requiring Ukraine to give up territory that Russia had not captured in the eastern Donbas region would be rejected by Ukrainians if put to a referendum. "I hope it is just his tactics and not the decision," Axios quoted Zelenskyy as saying in the interview.

Ramadan
moon
sighted...

FROM PAGE 01

celebrant for Ramadan 1447 hijri would be visible today. Pakistan will begin observing the holy month on the same day as Bangladesh and India, where the crescent moon was also sighted today. Several Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, marked the first day of Ramadan today (Wednesday) after sighting the crescent moon a day earlier. The countries reporting no sighting on Tuesday included Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, Japan, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei. The Muslim world welcomes Ramadan with deep religious devotion, as over a billion believers fast to practice patience, self-discipline, and generosity. Islamic months last 29 or 30 days, with their start and end determined by the sighting of the crescent moon, so Ramadan does not fall on the same Gregorian date each year. As the ninth month of the 12-month Islamic calendar — which is about 10 days shorter than the Gregorian year due to its lunar basis — Ramadan shifts annually across the Gregorian calendar.

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 bullish trend, 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 ready market recorded a trading volume of 697,682 million shares with a traded value of Rs 49,992 billion, against 716,055 million shares valued Rs 40,471 billion in the previous session. Market capitalization increased to Rs 20,257 trillion from Rs 19,666 trillion a day earlier out of 484 active companies in the ready market, 334 advanced, 103 declined, and 47 remained unchanged. K-Electric Limited topped the volume chart with 116,967 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 14,335.00, and Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited, which gained Rs 150.00 to settle at Rs 26,655.00. On the losing side, Hoechst Pakistan Limited declined by Rs 142.41 to close at Rs 4,352.59, while Khyber Textile Mills Limited fell by Rs 46.98 to close at Rs 1,613.06. In the futures market, turnover stood at 164,954 million shares with a traded value of Rs 13,111 billion, compared to 227,556 million shares worth Rs 12,657 billion in the previous session. Out of 322 futures-market companies, 285 recorded gains, while 35 declined and two remained unchanged.—APP

Rupee gains 03 paise against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 02 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.57 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.60. According to the Foreign Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 280.30 and Rs 282.45, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee increased by 02 paise 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 01 paise and closed at Rs 1.84, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decrease of Rs 0.22 and closed at Rs 378.14 compared to the previous day's Rs 378.36. The exchange rate of the Emirati Dirham and the Saudi Riyal came down by 01 paise each to close at Rs 76.31 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 offered 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 Wednesday, signaling that Berlin could abandon a flagship joint defence 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 currently need in the German military," Merz said on the German podcast Machtwechsel. 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 Sadiq, 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 Sukh Center in Bahria Town Islamabad. The superstore was formally inaugurated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony by Tariq Sadiq along with Syed Qasim Munir, Secretary General IBICI, President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, and Hasnain Qasim. Speaking on the occasion, Tariq Sadiq 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, expanding 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 IBICI President Sardar Tahir Mahmood, President Islamabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industries Owais Satti, President Blue Area Yousaf Rajput, and several IBICI executive members and market representatives. In his address, 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. 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 added. President Blue Area Yousaf 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 IBICI Naveed Malik, while thanking the participants, highlighted that unity within the business community remains its greatest strength. 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 resumes in February

TOKYO: Mainland Chinese visitors to Japan tumbled 60.7 percent in January year-on-year, figures showed Wednesday, in the continued fallout from the countries' diplomatic spat. "Last year, the lunar new year began in late January, but this year it fell in mid-February," the Japan National Tourism Organization said as it published the data. "Additionally, the Chinese government issued a warning advising against travel to Japan. Factors such as reduced flight frequencies also contributed to the number of foreign visitors to Japan falling below the level of the same month last year," a statement said. Previously Chinese visitors were the biggest contributor, contributing to a tourism boom in the land of cherry blossom and Mount Fuji that was fueled by a weak yen making shopping cheap. But in January this year, South Korea was the biggest source with 12 million visitors, up 21.6 percent, compared with 9,852,300 from mainland China, down from 180,520 in January 2025. Visitors from Hong Kong also tumbled 17.9 percent. Overall the number of visitors to Japan fell 4.9 percent to 3,597,165 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 has not ruled out force to annex it, was furious. Beijing summoned Tokyo's ambassador and on November it warned Chinese citizens against visiting Japan, citing "significant risks to the personal safety and lives of Chinese citizens." The number of Chinese visitors to Japan already tumbled 45 percent in December to 320,000. In December, J-15 jets from China's Liaoning aircraft carrier twice locked radar on Japanese aircraft in international waters near Okinawa, according to Japan. China also tightened controls on exports to Japan for items with potential military uses, fueling worries that Beijing may choke exports of vital research materials. Japan's last two pandemics were caused by visitors from China, and Takaichi, who was seen as a China 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. Takaichi said after her election win that Tokyo would bolster its defenses and "steadfastly defend" its territory. She also said she "open to various dialogues with China." But China's foreign ministry said "serious 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 were 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 gasoline and diesel as the country grants large Western players wider access and reduces imports of Russian fuel, three trading sources told Reuters. Libya is in the process of overhauling its oil sector 15 years after the fall of leader Muammar Gaddafi 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 grow 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 reported, Vitol won the rights to supply 2-10 gasoline cargoes a month and some diesel volumes, three traders familiar with the results said. Trafigura and TotalEnergies also won the right to supply fuel, two of the three traders said. Reuters 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 56,000 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 Shaikat, 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 conference at RCCI today, Shaikat said 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. "Diplomatic warmth without concrete economic liberalization is a missed opportunity," he remarked, stressing that both countries are presently aligned for deeper engagement. Pakistan and the US maintain bilateral trade exceeding USD10.0 billion with textiles forming the backbone of exports. However, Shaikat said this figure is far 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 meetings with the US-Pakistan Business Council 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. "Diverse industrial sectors including pharma, IT, medical equipments, textile etc were discussed in details at 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 Shaikat, US interlocutors highlighted the reforms necessary for Libya contract enforcement, dispute resolution, delays, policy inconsistency and cost of doing business. He noted that mid-tier investors and SMEs require predictable legal safeguards and internationally credible arbitration mechanisms. He requested that discussions identify models adopted by other countries where specialized arbitration frameworks involving international judges and neutral dispute resolution systems significantly boosted foreign direct investment. "Strong American interest was expressed in collaboration across mining and minerals, information technology, data infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, medical devices, construction materials and SME development," he said. A US\$500 USD 500.0 million investment fund focused on data centres has shown 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

Almaty to host one of world's largest IT exhibitions

ASTANA: Global tech giant GITEK is expanding into Central Asia with a new flagship event in the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan. News Agency reports Almaty Akim (Mayor) Darikhan Satybaldy met with Trade Representative and Rupert Adam, representatives of ind — the global organizer of GITEK, the world's largest technology exhibition that has been shaping global trends since 1981. At the meeting held on Tuesday, the parties discussed organizing the GITEK Al Central Asia & Caucasus Kazakhstan exhibition in Almaty and specific preparation steps. As the head of the city emphasized, Almaty will become the hand's entry point into Central Asia, opening new opportunities for developing international cooperation, attracting investment, and promoting tech startups. "The city has already proved to be the region's leading IT hub, home to a high concentration of technology companies, international centers, and a vibrant startup ecosystem. Hosting the GITEK forum will give us the opportunity to showcase these achievements on the international stage and attract new partners and investors to the city," said Darikhan Satybaldy. He noted that particular attention has been paid to the infrastructure readiness, upgrading the Akhmet Business Cooperation Center venue, organizing logistics, and coordinating all involved services. The Akim of Almaty tasked the relevant departments, jointly with the organizers, to draft and execute a detailed action plan for the event's preparation. Trade Representative, CEO of ind (GITEK's global organizer), highlighted that Almaty is rapidly becoming one of the vital innovation bridges between Europe and Asia — a city where Kazakhstan's digital and AI ambitions are transforming into real economic infrastructure. She noted that GITEK arrives at a key moment to accentuate this dynamic, strengthening the region's technological potential, investment attractiveness, and global connectivity. This positions the region as a serious participant in the emerging AI economy, said Le-Mirmand. According to her, for over 45 years, GITEK has built a solid international reputation, having earned the trust of governments, corporations, startups, investors, and key ecosystem players. Moreover, it has become the world's largest brand for technology events. As of today, GITEK is represented in 11 cities and countries, including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kemp, Monaco, Nigeria, Serbia, Singapore, Turkey, and Vietnam. GITEK Al Central Asia & Caucasus Kazakhstan will take place in Almaty on May 4-6, 2026, bringing together participants from around the world. These include startups, investors, and representatives of government agencies. It is noted that hosting the event will be a landmark milestone for the city and the entire region, expected to boost the tech industry, international cooperation, and an innovation-driven economy. In 2026, the exhibition will focus on three priority sectors: artificial intelligence (integration of technologies into the urban environment and business), GenTech (presentation of Kazakhstan's achievements in digital government services), and cybersecurity (solutions in data protection and cloud computing), as well as the economic impact on the city (real estate, currency, and investment). As Kazakhstan previously reported, Almaty has become Kazakhstan's unstoppable tourism magnet.—APP

Paris HQ evacuated after 'bomb threat'

PARIS: France's hard-left France Unbowed 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 LU have just been evacuated following a bomb threat. Police services are on site. All employees and activists are safe," the party's coordinator Manuel Bonpoint said on X.—APP

Jazz sets regional benchmark in network evolution

ISLAMABAD: Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator from JazzWot, has completed a Proof of Concept (PoC) for a fully converged Single Voice Core (SVC), validating the technical and operational feasibility of unifying multi-generation 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 objective was 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 Technology Officer at JazzWot, 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 architecture while future-proofing it for next-generation technologies. This enables better service quality today and a more agile platform for future innovation."—APP

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 Rs1,082 on Wednesday, compared to its sale at Rs1,078,782 on the previous trading day. At the Pakistan Sunfa Gems and Jewellers Association report. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold went up by Rs1,021 to Rs4,055,283 from Rs4,044,262. The price of per tola silver increased by Rs52 to Rs4,044,262. The price of 10 grams silver rose by Rs28 to Rs4,898 from Rs4,870. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$12 to \$4,433 from \$4,529, whereas that of silver rose by \$0.32 to \$57.62 from 75.30, the Association report.—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 Ramadan 1447 AH, and 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 courtyards and expansion areas were prepared and carpeted to accommodate large numbers, with Zamzam water and other supporting services provided. The authorities also provided the best possible services to visitors and worshippers, enabling them to perform their prayers in ease, comfort, and tranquility. Qatadah 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 and Prime Minister, have provided two generous donations amounting to SAR10 million through the Jood Akef platform. This aligns with the leadership's commitment to supporting all national efforts.—APP

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 numerous cases, leading to extrajudicial killings. The report, titled 'Staged Encounters in Punjab', was released on February 18, 2026. 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 has documented at least 570 CCD encounters over the course of eight months in 2025, resulting in the death of 824 suspects, with only two police officers killed during the period. The extreme casualty imbalance - averaging more than two fatal encounters 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 these deaths. 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 Tarique names cabinet

DNA

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has named a five-member cabinet to steer the country's troubled economy and keep the defence portfolio for himself as he formed his first cabinet. Rahman 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 uprising that toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina. The 50-member cabinet announced in a gesture of notification issued late Tuesday includes Amir Khurshid Mahmud Chowdhury, 75, a businessman and veteran lawmaker who has now 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 Rahman's late mother, three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia, but was forced to resign in 2004.

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 and violating the Judicial Magistrate Hamid Rahman Nasir conducted the trial, which involved testimony from several witnesses, including the victim and police investigators. The incident took place on April 2, 2025, when a dispute erupted at the man's residence in the jurisdiction of the Shafiqabad 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 airport press conference in Lahore where captain Ahmad Shabaz Butt and several players publicly lambasted the team's management and 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 Sydney airport without proper arrangements for onward travel or meals, followed by the cancellation of their hotel bookings in Canberra due to unpaid bills by the PHF. They described substandard accommodation, 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 Ahmad Shabaz Butt declared that the players categorically refuse to work with the current team management, coaching staff, manager, administrative personnel, video analyst, or any related officials until a full, transparent, and independent investigation addresses the allegations. He emphasized that trust in the existing setup has completely broken down, rejecting any claims of external pressure and insisting the grievances stem from real mistreatment and lies told to the squad.

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 Islamabad, 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

spots for the 2026 FIH Hockey World Cup, making stability and player confidence essential in the coming weeks.

The episode has drawn widespread condemnation from hockey legends and fans alike, who describe the treatment as shameful and painful for a nation once dominant in the sport. Calls for immediate reforms continue, including the imposition of an ad-hoc committee on the PHF, formation of an impartial inquiry committee, a comprehensive audit of tour funds and expenditures, accountability for those responsible through legal action, and the establishment of a transparent system for managing future international tours to prevent such humiliations. Pakistan hockey, a historic source of national pride, now stands at a crossroads where urgent changes are needed to restore dignity to the players and revive the sport's global standing.

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 with 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 moving 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 benchmarks agreed 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 investor interest with expectations of oversubscription 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 reportedly begun refinancing within the ongoing fiscal year. Pakistan is also engaged in negotiations with international commercial banks to secure an additional \$250 million in fresh financing during the current fiscal cycle.

Israeli police arrest Al-Aqsa Mosque imam

TEL AVIV: Israeli police have arrested the imam of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Mohamed al-Ahabsi, from inside the mosque's courtyard in occupied Jerusalem. The Palestinian news agency Wafa, citing local sources, reported that "Israeli forces detained Sheikh al-Ahabsi 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 mosque's leadership, including restrictions on imams, preachers, and worshippers' stationing there, limitations on the entry of worshippers, and intensifying incursions carried out by settlers under heavy protection from Israeli police". Hamas condemned the arrest of al-Ahabsi 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. Janine 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 under way in Pakistan (following local moon-sighting confirmations, with the first day of fasting observed today or immminently), His Excellency Timothy O'Neil, Australia's High Commissioner to Pakistan, has issued warm Ramadan greetings to the people of Pakistan. In his message, High Commissioner O'Neil expressed: "As the holy month of Ramadan begins, I extend my warm wishes to the people of Pakistan. Islam is proud to be one of the world's most multicultural societies, where more than 800,000 Muslims contribute richly to our national life. The Pakistani-Australian community, now over 140,000 strong, plays an important role in strengthening ties between our countries. Ramadan Mubarak - may this 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 vibrant Pakistani diaspora in Australia. 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 O'Neil, 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 even cricket diplomacy - uses this 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 Shadab Khan chipping in with three important dismissals

SPORTS DESK

COLOMBO: Saibzada 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 on Wednesday, securing the Green Shirts' place 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 Leanne Steenkamp and Jan Pry-linck put together a 32-run partnership. Prylinck contributed 9 of 11 balls, including a boundary off Salman Mirza, before being clean bowled. Namibia's troubles intensified when Jan Nicol Loftis-Eaton was run out for fire in the final over of the powerplay, leaving the visitors at 39/2 in 5.2 overs. The slide continued as Steenkamp fell for 23 off 22 balls, hitting three fours and a six before Mohammad Nawaz dismissed him. Skipper Gerhard Erasmus managed only seven before Shadab Khan took his wicket. Alexander Bosingwisch tried to stabilise the innings with 20 off 26 deliveries but was soon trapped by Shadab, who claimed his second wicket. Namibia were reduced to 79/5 in 12.3 overs. Usman Tariq further tightened Pakistan's grip, dismissing JJ Smit for nine and Ruben Trampelmann for a duck, leaving Namibia at 83/7 in 12.3 overs. Shadab then claimed his third, removing Zane Green (7), while Tariq picked up two more wickets, dismissing Bernard Scholtz (1) and Willem Mnyabathi (8) to complete a comprehensive Pakistan bowling performance.

Armenia offers Visa-Free Entry to Pakistanis

ARMENIA: Countries, including Pakistan, a move to enhance tourism, business ties, and international connectivity, the Republic of Armenia has implemented a temporary visa exemption effective from January 1 to July 1, 2026. This policy applies to nationals of 113 countries, including Pakistan, who hold a valid residence permit issued by the United States of America, European Union Member States, Schengen Area States, or select Gulf countries: United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, or Sultanate of Oman. Eligible travellers 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, diaspora communities, business professionals, and tourists from these nations who reside in the qualifying jurisdictions, making spontaneous or extended visits much easier during the six-month window. For travellers 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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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. In his remarks, Ambassador Khorev emphasized that, despite challenges in international relations, ties between Moscow and Islamabad 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 Guddu 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 increasingly dynamic, with growing momentum 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 Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine, framing these actions as essential for safeguarding security and cultural identity. The lecture drew keen interest from students of international relations, political science, and regional studies, 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 Ahmed H.M., Rector of Bahria University. The sides explored avenues for expanding academic 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 support on regional issues. Analysts view such 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.