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CDF Asim Munir asks Taliban to renounce support to TTP

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Pak, Netherlands cooperation to grow: Fin Minister

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Punjab gives seed kits to all farmers

Detailed News On Page-02



Briefs

No fuel shortage in Pakistan

FAISL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday cautioned over oil stocks amid global uncertainty due to the US-Israel and Iran war, but said that there was no emergency-like situation in Pakistan. Briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, the minister suggested conserving fuel as a preventive measure.

"We are not going for rationing of fuel as there is no fuel shortage in the country, but things could become serious if the war drags on," Aurangzeb said in response to the query by Saleem Mandviwala, the chairman of the committee. The committee was informed that there were petrol and diesel stocks for 28 days, crude oil stocks for 10 days, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) for 15 days. "But some cargoes have been stuck in Qatar and to offset this short supply, the output from local gas fields was being enhanced," he added.

ME airspace shutdown leaves thousands stranded

DNA

DUBAI: Dozens of repatriation flights were due to depart from the Middle East on Wednesday as governments hurried to bring tens of thousands of stranded citizens home in the midst of an intensifying US and Israeli conflict with Iran. Skies over most of the Middle East remained empty of commercial planes on Wednesday, with major Gulf hubs, including the world's busiest international airport in Dubai, largely shut for a fifth day, in the biggest travel disruption since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first repatriation flights were due to leave for Britain and France on Wednesday, and the United Arab Emirates opened special corridors to allow some citizens to return home. Normally, thousands of commercial flights would take off from the region daily. Marooned tourists and some expatriates have also tried to find their own way out.

Ishaq Dar, Turkish FM discuss ME, Afghanistan

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation this evening with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan amid sharply escalating tensions across the Middle East. The two top diplomats exchanged views on the rapidly deteriorating regional situation, expressing grave concern over ongoing attacks and provocations—including a recent ballistic missile launch from Iran that was intercepted by NATO air defenses as it approached Turkish airspace after traversing Iraq and Syria. This incident, confirmed by Turkish defense authorities on March 4, 2026, marked a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. Both leaders underscored the urgent imperative for immediate de-escalation, restraint by all parties.

Consulate attack

US gov't orders non-emergency consular staff to leave Pakistan

US State Department says there is no change to status of its embassy in Islamabad

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The US State Department on Wednesday said it had ordered non-emergency personnel and their families from US consulates in Karachi and Lahore to leave Pakistan due to security concerns.

"The Department of State ordered non-emergency US government employees and the family members of US government personnel from US Consulates Lahore and Karachi to leave Pakistan due to safety risks," the US embassy in Pakistan said in a statement. It said there was no change to the status of its embassy in Islamabad. The development comes amid ongoing Israel and United States war against Iran, with Tel Aviv attacking Iran and Tehran firing missiles and drones at the "US interests and bases" across the Gulf states.

A number of Iranian senior leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, embraced martyrdom in the "unprovoked and unwarranted" airstrikes by Israel and the United States. Meanwhile, six of US army personnel were also killed during the war. Iranian officials warned that Khamenei's martyrdom would mark a turning point, with the Revolutionary Guard vowing retaliation and declaring that "this great crime will not go unpunished". Following the martyrdom of Ayatollah Khamenei, protests erupted worldwide, including in Pakistan, with demonstrators carrying black flags and chanting "Down with America!" and anti-Israel slogans.

Pakistan UAE embassy stops in-person services

NEWS DESK

ABU DHABI: The Pakistan Embassy in the United Arab Emirates (USE) announced the temporary suspension of its in-person consular services "until further notice" on Wednesday in view of the evolving regional situation. A circular issued by the embassy referred to an advisory by the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization recommending remote work for the private sector, discouraging workers from remaining in open areas. The embassy termed the measure "precautionary", saying it had been taken "in the interest of the safety and well-being of community members and embassy staff alike".

In Karachi, the demonstrators breached the outer wall of the US consulate's compound and vandalised the property. Meanwhile, firing during the incident claimed the lives of at least 11 people. A day earlier, Reuters reported that US Marines opened

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To end war

Iran intelligence signalled openness to talks with CIA

Officials in Washington are sceptical as to whether Iran or the Trump administration is really ready for an "off-ramp", at least in the short term, the report added

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Operatives from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence signalled openness to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to talks on ending the war, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing officials briefed on the matter. The offer was made through an unnamed country's spy agency, the NYT said, citing Middle Eastern officials and officials from a Western nation who spoke on condition of anonymity. The White House and the CIA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Officials in Washington are sceptical as to whether Iran or the Trump administration is really ready for an "off-ramp", at least in the short term, the report added. Iran's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva on

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Sri Lanka rescues 32 Iranian sailors

DNA

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka rescued 32 "critically wounded" sailors aboard the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, which sank Wednesday just outside the island's territorial waters, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath said. No information was immediately available on the cause of the explosion that sank the vessel, but Herath told parliament that the injured sailors were taken to a hospital in the island's south. The 180-crew frigate had issued a distress call at dawn.

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United States Congress mulls clipping Trump powers

"The Constitution says we're not supposed to be at war without a vote of Congress," Kaine said. "The lives of our troops are at risk. We ought to come back to Washington right away and vote on this"

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The US Congress meets this week to consider a Senate war powers resolution and two competing measures in the House of Representatives aimed at limiting President Donald Trump's authority to expand US military operations against Iran without explicit congressional approval. The Senate resolution, led by Senator Tim Kaine (Democrat-Virginia), invokes the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which was enacted during the Vietnam War to check presidential war-making authority. If adopted, it would require the termination of the US armed forces' involvement in hostilities against Iran unless Congress authorises their continuation. "The Constitution says we're not supposed to be at war without a vote of Congress," Kaine said. "The lives of our troops are at risk. We ought to come back to Washington right away and vote on this." In the House, Rep. Ro Khanna (Democrat-California) and Rep. Thomas Massie (Republican-Kentucky) have introduced a bipartisan resolution directing the president to remove US forces from hostilities

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President Trump threatens to cut off all trade with Spain

Experts note that implementing a full trade cutoff with an EU member state would face significant legal and practical hurdles, as US-EU trade is governed by broader agreements

DNA

MADRID: In a heated Oval Office meeting on March 3, 2026, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, U.S. President Donald Trump sharply criticized Spain, calling it a "terrible" and "uncooperative" ally. The outburst stemmed from Spain's refusal to permit U.S. forces to use jointly operated military bases—such as those at Rota and Morón—for operations related to ongoing U.S. and Israeli strikes against Iran. Trump declared: "We're going to cut off all trade with Spain. We don't want anything to do with Spain."

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CHINESE MEDIATION



KABUL: The Chinese Ambassador, in a meeting with Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, described the current Pakistan-Afghanistan regional situation as concerning and stressed that China firmly believes stability in the region serves the interests of all countries. The envoy emphasized that differences can only be bridged through dialogue and diplomatic channels, adding that peace remains the top priority. – DNA

Middle East, Afghanistan

Shehbaz Sharif briefs MPs about security situation

While the ruling PML-N had extended the olive branch to the PTI and invited it to sit together for the sake of external and internal security threats to Pakistan, the PTI decided not to attend any meeting

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: The leaders of parliamentary parties, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, were on Wednesday given an in-camera briefing on the regional situation. PM Shehbaz had invited parliamentary leaders and party heads to "sit down and develop a course of action so we can move forward", Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said on Tuesday while addressing the National Assembly. The briefing began shortly after 11:30am and concluded after more than two hours. It mainly discussed the ongoing 'Operation Ghazab il-Haq' against terrorist hideouts and the Middle East conflict. "The meeting was given an in-camera briefing regarding the Pakistan-Afghanistan situation,

Continued on Page 06

Pakistan targets Afghanistan's Bagram Air Base

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani military successfully targeted Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, satellite images obtained by The New York Times showed, during its ongoing operation against the Afghan Taliban. According to the report, four residents in Bagram said they had heard at least two explosions at the base shortly after 6am. Three of them also heard the sounds of at least one jet.

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Govt reassures public of adequate fuel stocks

ISLAMABAD: To ensure the uninterrupted availability of petroleum products and to discourage hoarding during periods of extreme price volatility, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) may temporarily regulate supplies to retail outlets based on their historical sales patterns. This measure is a standard supply management practice aimed at maintaining stability in the distribution system. The public is reassured that the country currently holds adequate stocks of petrol and diesel, well within the required limits. There is no shortage of petroleum products. Citizens are advised not to pay attention to rumors and to rely only on information issued through official channels.—APP

KP govt launches women empowerment policy

PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), in collaboration with the KP Commission on the Status of Women and United Nations (UN) Women Pakistan on Wednesday officially launched the KP Women Empowerment Policy (2026-2030), marking a significant milestone toward gender equality and inclusive development in the province. The policy was unveiled at a ceremony in Peshawar, attended by government officials, development partners, civil society representatives, and women representatives. Speaking on the occasion, Aftab Alam, Minister for Law, said the Women Empowerment Policy (2026-2030) is not merely a policy document but a firm commitment of the provincial government to safeguard women's rights, dignity, and equal opportunities. He emphasized that the government is determined to strengthen legislation and ensure effective institutional coordination to translate the policy into tangible outcomes. He added that empowering women is crucial for sustainable development and social progress, and the government would take all necessary measures to create a safe, inclusive, and enabling environment for women across all sectors. Chairperson KP Commission on the Status of Women, Dr. Sumera Shams, highlighted that effective implementation, institutional alignment, and continuous monitoring are critical to the success of the policy. She said the framework reflects the vision of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for an inclusive society where women are equal partners in development. She noted that the policy sets clear priorities and actionable measures to address gender disparities, promote women's participation in decision-making, and ensure access to education, health, justice, and economic opportunities.—APP

Dr Tariq Fazal terms business community backbone of economy

Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari reaffirmed that the business community would continue to play its full role, in cooperation with the government, to strengthen the national economy, promote investment, and ensure stability in business activities across the country



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry has said that the business community is the backbone of Pakistan's economic development and reaffirmed the government's commitment to promoting

a business-friendly environment across the country. He expressed these views while addressing an Iftar dinner hosted in his honor by Secretary General of United Business Group Zafar Bakhtawari, along with Ahsan Bakhtawari and Waqar Bakhtawari, in Islamabad. The minister stated that the government is taking practical steps to promote business-friendly policies,

encourage investment, and ensure economic stability. He emphasized that sustainable economic growth is only possible through close coordination between the government and the private sector. On the occasion, President of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry Atif Ikram Sheikh attended as the guest of honor. Among other notable attendees were Senator

General Abdul Qayyum, MPA Malik Ifkhar, and several council members and representatives of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry. A large number of prominent figures from the business community and various walks of life were also present, reflecting strong engagement between policymakers and entrepreneurs. In his address, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said that

such gatherings play an important role in strengthening mutual relations and promoting national unity. He appreciated the hospitality of the Bakhtawari family and termed their efforts commendable. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman of the Clean and Green Islamabad Movement Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari thanked the distinguished guests for their participation. He noted that

the holy month of Ramadan teaches unity, brotherhood, and service to humanity, and prayed for Pakistan's continued progress, prosperity, and stability. He reaffirmed that the business community would continue to play its full role, in cooperation with the government, to strengthen the national economy, promote investment, and ensure stability in business activities across the country.

Punjab distributes seed kits to promote kitchen gardening

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government is encouraging kitchen gardening by providing certified vegetable seeds to the citizens at affordable rates. These seeds can be cultivated in pots, plastic bags, crates, boxes, open spaces, or on rooftops. Currently, the government is distributing seed kits for eight summer vegetables through the Agriculture Extension Department's network across various districts of the province. "Summer vegetable seed kits are available for sale throughout the province. These vegetables can be grown successfully to obtain inexpensive and pesticide-free produce," Shahid Ashraf, In-Charge of the Kitchen Gardening Scheme at the Punjab Agriculture Department, told Wealth Pakistan. The initiative aims to promote self-sufficiency, improve household nutrition, and encourage sustainable food practices by making fresh, homegrown produce accessible to both urban and rural families. Each kitchen gardening kit contains seeds for at least eight seasonal vegetables. The summer packs currently include okra, bitter melon, sponge gourd, cucumber, tomato, tinda, and chilies. Shahid Ashraf said the public response to kitchen gardening has been

very encouraging, with many households successfully growing vegetables at home. Vegetable seed kits are available at district offices of the Agriculture Extension Department in Attock, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Bhakkar, Chakwal, Chiniot, D.G. Khan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Jhang, Jhelum, Kasur, Mianwali, Rawalpindi, Sahiwal, Sargodha, and Vehari, in addition to the department's head office in Lahore. A large number of Lahoreites have adopted kitchen gardening not only to avoid purchasing expensive vegetables from the market but also as a productive pastime. "I have been growing various summer and winter vegetables on the rooftop of my home. When the seeds sprout and the plants start bearing vegetables, it gives me immense pleasure," said Ashfaq Hussain Mughal, a resident of Manga Mandi on the outskirts of Lahore. He added that cultivating vegetables at home is a rewarding way to spend time productively. The Vegetable Research Institute (VRI), Faisalabad, has also been playing a pivotal role in promoting kitchen gardening across Punjab, to enhance household nutrition and reduce food expenses. "The institute has de-

veloped and distributed more than 200,000 kitchen gardening seed kits for both summer and winter seasons this year," said Dr. Ghazanfar Hamad, Principal Scientist at VRI. He explained that each kit contains seeds for eight seasonal vegetables—sufficient for a five-marla household—along with informative pamphlets outlining kitchen gardening guidelines and best practices. The kits are available at a nominal price of Rs 200 per pack, covering only production costs, making them affordable for low- and middle-income families. Dr. Hamad said optimal vegetable growth requires temperatures between 20°C and 35°C, adding that the current weather conditions in Punjab are favorable for cultivation till March 31. In addition to the ongoing distribution, VRI also produced 200,000 winter vegetable seed kits in 2025 for free distribution in flood-affected areas, with sponsorship from the Fertilizer Manufacturers Association of Pakistan. "This initiative aims to support vulnerable communities in restoring household food supplies and improving nutritional security," he said.—DNA

Karachiites condemn India's move to hold IWT in abeyance

KARACHI: Citizens in Karachi on Wednesday strongly criticised India's decision to place the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in abeyance, terming the move unjustified and against the spirit of bilateral agreements. In conversations with APP, residents from different walks of life expressed concern over what they described as an attempt to politicise a vital lifeline shared by millions. Hafeez, a school teacher, said water was a basic necessity and should never be used as a tool of pressure. He maintained that agreements between countries must be honoured in both letter and spirit, adding that unilateral decisions only deepen mistrust in the region. Sadia

Rahman, a homemaker residing in Clifton, said ordinary people suffer the most when tensions rise between states. She remarked that rivers were a blessing of nature and could not be "switched on and off" at will, urging restraint and dialogue instead of confrontation. A screenplay writer over what they described as an attempt to politicise a vital lifeline shared by millions. Hafeez, a school teacher, said water was a basic necessity and should never be used as a tool of pressure. He maintained that agreements between countries must be honoured in both letter and spirit, adding that unilateral decisions only deepen mistrust in the region. Sadia

upheavals in the past. He added that undermining longstanding agreements sent a negative message about regional stability. Ali Gul, a retired government officer said the move reflected a disregard for mutual respect between neighbouring countries. He expressed confidence that Pakistan would respond through diplomatic and legal channels while safeguarding national interests. The residents collectively stressed that rivers connected people across borders and should serve as a source of cooperation rather than conflict. They called for adherence to international commitments and peaceful engagement to ensure regional harmony and stability.—APP



KARACHI: A legend Business Community leader, founder and the Chairman Mr. Arif Habib - Group with Daily "Islamabad Post" Bureau Chief Karachi Nazir Siyal in an event at local hotel Karachi. DNA

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12/Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
- March 25/Greece National Day
- March 26/Bangladesh National Day
- March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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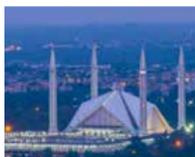
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- Shifa International 4603666



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Islamabad Metropolitan

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- Potohar Town.....9209224
- Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Women's Ramadan Sahulat Bazar opened in G-11

During his visit, Randhawa inspected various sections of the bazar and reviewed the items available at different stalls. He also interacted with women vendors and customers, inquiring about any issues faced by them

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman and Chief Commissioner Islamabad Muhammad Ali Randhawa inaugurated a special Ramadan Sahulat Bazar for women in Sector G-11, established in collaboration with the Islamabad Women's Chamber of Commerce. The ceremony was attended by the chief officer of the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), representatives of the Women's Chamber of Commerce and a large number of consumers, according to officials, around 48 stalls have been allocated to women vendors at the G-11 Ramadan Sahulat Bazar. The stalls will remain operational until Chand Raat. During his visit, Randhawa inspected various sections of the bazar and reviewed the items available at different stalls. He also interacted with women vendors and customers, inquiring about any issues faced by them.

Officials briefed the chairman that the special bazar has been organised for women ahead of Eidul Fitr, featuring stalls offering bangles, mehndi, ready-made garments and other festive items. Daily-use commodities and food items are also being sold at officially notified rates. The chairman was informed that security, sanitation and monitoring arrangements had been put in place at the bazar. Officials said that price control magistrates were conducting inspections and taking action on complaints related to overcharging or quality issues. The briefing added that strict implementation of official price lists was being ensured across all Ramadan Sahulat Bazars in the capital, with continuous monitoring to prevent overpricing. The CDA and district administration



were said to be working to provide relief to citizens during the holy month, while action was being taken against profiteers and hoarders. Officials also informed the meeting that, in line with the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Federal Interior

Minister Mohsin Naqvi, a cashless payment system had been introduced at the Ramadan Sahulat Bazar. Randhawa directed officers to ensure the quality of food items and strict adherence to official price lists. He emphasised that officials should remain present at the bazar and

address public complaints promptly. He warned that strict action would be taken against those found overcharging or involved in profiteering, stating that the objective of the initiative was to facilitate residents of the federal capital during Ramadan.

PSF launches National Contest for need-based technologies

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) has announced the launch of its First National Contest for Need-Based Technologies 2026, opening doors for young students and researchers across the country to present innovative solutions to real-world problems PSF, which has long been committed to promoting science and creativity among school and university students, says the contest is designed to encourage applied science and technology that directly addresses local and national needs. The foundation is inviting projects and innovations from young researchers and students that are original, practically presented, and capable

of making a meaningful difference in everyday life. According to an official source, the interested participants are expected to present their innovation in the form of working models or physical products. The contest is divided into two categories. The first category is aimed at students from Grade 7 to Grade 12, covering secondary and higher secondary school levels. Students in this category may participate individually or in groups of up to three, with a registration fee of Rs. 2,000 per individual or group. The second category is open to university students enrolled at the BS or MS level in any public or private government-recognized institution in

Pakistan. Like the first category, participation can be individual or in a group of up to three students, though the registration fee is higher at Rs. 5,000 per individual or group. The cash prizes are on offer for top performers in both categories. In the school-level category, the first prize stands at Rs. 200,000, the second at Rs. 150,000, and the third at Rs. 100,000. University-level participants compete for more substantial rewards, with the first prize set at Rs. 500,000, the second at Rs. 300,000, and the third at Rs. 100,000. PSF has made clear that prizes will only be awarded to projects that are original, clearly presented, and practically viable.—DNA

Over 400 skilled youth secure Saudi jobs

ISLAMABAD: Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme underscored the centrality of structured, demand driven skills development to Pakistan's overseas employment strategy as more than 400 trained youth were awarded work visas for placement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the Prime Minister's Overseas Employment Programme. Mr Khan was speaking at the Overseas Employment Visa Award Ceremony organised by the Hazza Institute of Technology

in collaboration with the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission at NAVTTC's Centre of Excellence in Islamabad, where travel documents were handed over to successful trainees. Addressing the gathering as chief guest, the PMYP chairman said the Prime Minister's youth vision placed skills, employability and global competitiveness at its core. He praised NAVTTC and partner institutions for aligning technical training with international labour market requirements and for ensuring transparent skill verification, immigration and

placement processes. Mr Khan said the trainees carried a shared national responsibility, noting that their performance abroad would project Pakistan's image on the global stage. He described them as ambassadors of the country whose professionalism and conduct would help build trust in Pakistani manpower. The ceremony marked the overseas placement of more than 400 youth following completion of international benchmarked technical training and assessment, aimed at meeting employer demand in Saudi Arabia. NAVTTC Chairperson Gulmina Bilal Ahmad said the commission was committed to transforming Pakistan's technical and vocational education system through quality assurance, international accreditation and strong industry linkages. She said the Prime Minister's Overseas Employment Programme reflected a shift from conventional training models to market oriented, placement linked skills development.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassadors of SAARC and ASEAN countries gather to finalise arrangements for upcoming Vesak event, at the Embassy of Nepal. The Ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan Rita Dhital hosted the event. DNA

3 NAB Grade-20 officers promoted

ISLAMABAD :The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has promoted three senior officers from Grade-20 to Grade-21 as Director General (DG), following the recommendations of the Selection Committee and approval of the Chairman of NAB Muhammad Amir Butt has been elevated to Grade-21 and will continue serving as Director General NAB (Sukkur). Muhammad Tahir, earlier Director NAB (Headquarters), has been promoted to Grade-21 and posted as Director General NAB (Headquarters). Ghulam Safdar Shah, serving as DG (PACA), has also been promoted to Grade-21 and will continue his responsibilities as Director General PACA. Earlier, The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has promoted 48 Assistant Directors (BPS-17) to the rank of Deputy Director (BPS-18), marking a significant step in strengthening its operational hierarchy. The promotions, recommended by the Departmental Promotion Committee-1 (DPC-1) and approved by the Chairman NAB, were formally notified by the Bureau's Headquarters on Tuesday. According to the notification, the officers have been promoted on a regular basis with immediate effect and will continue to serve at their current postings. The newly elevated Deputy Directors are spread across NAB's regional bureaus and headquarters. Meanwhile, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has promoted four Deputy Directors (BPS-18) to the rank of Additional Director (BPS-19).—APP

ANF seizes 142 kg hashish worth Rs 16m

RAWALPINDI :The Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) arrested two suspects, including a woman, and seized 142.45 kilograms of hashish worth over Rs16 million in four separate operations carried out around educational institutions and in various cities— In an operation near a college in Haripur, the ANF team recovered 450 grams of hashish from an accused, a spokesman said on Wednesday. The accused later confessed during initial interrogation his involvement of selling drugs to students. In another raid conducted near a shopping mall in Hyderabad, six kilograms of hashish was recovered from a woman, who was taken into custody. Separately, the ANF seized 124 kilograms of hashish in Shakas area of the Khyber District. In a fourth operation, 12 kilograms of hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near the Motorway Toll Plaza in Sheikhpura. The spokesman said cases had been registered under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act and further investigation was under way.—APP

5 Afghans among 60 suspects detained

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police checked 1,007 individuals during grand combing and search operations across various areas of the federal capital, detaining 60 suspects, including five Afghan nationals, during the crackdown launched against criminal elements and illegal residents An official told APP on Wednesday that search operations were conducted in the jurisdictions of Sahala, Sangjani, Aabpara, Shalimar, Sabzi Mandi, and Khanna police stations under the supervision of the respective zonal SPs. He said lady police officials also participated in the operations to ensure thorough checking and verification. During the operations, police teams checked 1,007 individuals and 268 households, while 22 shops and 33 hotels were also inspected. He said 275 motorcycles and 146 vehicles were examined during the search operations The official added that 60 suspicious individuals, including five Afghan nationals, along with 30 motorcycles, were shifted to the relevant police stations for further verification. Police also recovered illegal weapons with ammunition, 1,120 grams of heroin and 146 grams of ice during the operations.—APP

Hindu community celebrate Holi with simplicity

ISLAMABAD: The Hindu community residing in Attock Cantonment celebrated the festival of Holi in a simple and dignified manner at the Valmiki Mandir, opting for modest religious observances instead of the customary large-scale and colourful festivities According to community representatives, the decision was taken after consultations led by Pandit Sarwan Kumar, who serves at the temple. In view of the prevailing situation in the country, it was unanimously agreed that this year's celebrations would be marked with restraint and solemnity. Pandit Sarwan Kumar told APP that while Holi is traditionally celebrated with vibrant ceremonies and enthusiasm, the community had chosen simplicity this year.—APP

Mukhtar calls for urgent national action

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Malik called for urgent and coordinated national action to tackle the growing obesity crisis, posing serious health and economic challenges for the country. He made these remarks, while chairing a joint event as Chief Guest on World Obesity Day 2026, organized by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MONHSRC) in collaboration with Novo Nordisk, to highlight the urgent need for coordinated national action against obesity in Pakistan. Addressing participants, the Minister noted that nearly 38 million Pakistanis, approximately one in three individuals, are living with obesity, terming the situation alarming. He observed that women and urban populations are disproportionately affected, while childhood obesity is steadily increasing. Malik emphasized that obesity is a major modifiable risk factor for non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers, placing growing pressure on the country's health system. Stressing prevention, he underscored the need to improve lifestyles, promote balanced diets, discourage excessive fast food consumption, and increase physical activity. He reiterated that obesity prevention has been integrated into national health planning, including under the Prime Minister's Programme for Prevention and Control of Diabetes Mellitus (2024-2029), aimed at addressing the obesity, diabetes continuum through awareness, behaviour change, and early screening. Secretary MONHSRC, Hamed Yaqoob, stated that obesity is a complex, chronic disease influenced by biological, environmental, and social factors, reaffirming the Ministry's commitment to improving understanding, reducing stigma, and expanding access to person-centred care.—APP

Briefs

Ahsan visits Energy China Pakistan HQs, reviews CPEC energy projects

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday visited the headquarters of Energy China Pakistan, where he was warmly received by the company's leadership and project teams.

During the visit, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening strategic partnership and deepening cooperation under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

"During the visit, I toured the Exhibition Hall and reviewed key energy milestones achieved under CPEC," the minister wrote in a post on X.

He was briefed on ongoing initiatives, progress on various projects, and future strategies aimed at enhancing energy security and promoting sustainable development.

Later, a meeting was held with the leadership of China Energy Engineering Corporation (CEEC) and project teams, where detailed discussions were held on the progress of major hydropower projects, including the Suki Kinari Hydropower Project, Dasu Hydropower Project, Mohmand Dam and Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Plant.

The meeting observed that these projects were playing a pivotal role in accelerating hydropower development, strengthening energy security and advancing green growth objectives under the second phase of CPEC.

Participants stressed that the timely completion of these projects would significantly contribute to achieving sustainable and environmentally friendly development targets.

Ahsan Iqbal reiterated the government's firm commitment to policy continuity, investment protection and transparent implementation of development projects. He said the government was focusing on promoting industrial cooperation, green energy and regional connectivity under CPEC's second phase to further boost investor confidence.—APP

Supportive parenting shapes children's mental well-being

ISLAMABAD: Psychologist Wednesday emphasized that parents should build a close and friendly relationship with their children while maintaining clear boundaries and spending quality time together as a family, noting that this approach supports healthy mental well-being, reduces emotional distance, limits excessive use of digital apps and avoids imposing overly strict rules on children.

While speaking to PTV News channel, Psychiatrist Wajeeha Zafar stressed the importance of building strong parent-child relationships, adding, parents should maintain a balance of warmth and clear boundaries to ensure children feel supported while understanding limits.

She added that spending quality time together as a family helps reduce emotional distance and fosters healthy mental well-being, adding, overly strict rules or excessive reliance on digital devices can negatively impact children's mental health.

Zafar highlighted that a nurturing and structured approach not only promotes emotional stability but also strengthens family bonds, creating an environment where children can grow confidently and develop healthy coping skills. Expert highlighted that during Ramzan, families have the opportunity to come together around iftar tables, which not only strengthen family bonds but also promote healthy eating habits. She noted that such gatherings create a nurturing environment where children can grow confidently and develop positive habits. She advised parents not to scold their children in front of others, as this can harm their self-esteem and create emotional distance.—APP

Various helmet stalls set up on GT road, Murree expressway

The main objective of this initiative is not to punish citizens but to protect their lives. Research has proven that head injuries are a major cause of death and disability in traffic accidents, while the use of quality helmets significantly reduces the risk of fatal injuries

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Highways and Motorway Police, prioritizing the safety of motorcyclists, has formally launched a special awareness campaign "Challan Nahi, Helmet". The aim of this campaign is to promote responsible behavior among citizens and strengthen road safety culture along with law enforcement. Under this campaign, launched to ensure the use of helmets among motorcyclists, persons who are found traveling without

helmets are advised to buy helmets at the first opportunity instead of immediately issuing a challan. In this regard, helmet stalls have been set up at various toll plazas on GT road and Murree expressway. Officers educate motorcyclists about the importance of helmets, possible dangers and the fatal consequences of head injuries in the event of accidents. According to the campaign procedure, if a motorcyclist buys and wears a helmet on the spot, no challan action is taken against him. However, legal action is taken against repeat violators to main-

tain law and order. The main objective of this initiative is not to punish citizens but to protect their lives. Research has proven that head injuries are a major cause of death and disability in traffic accidents, while the use of quality helmets significantly reduces the risk of fatal injuries. Awareness sessions, distribution of pamphlets, installation of banners and awareness-raising activities through the media are also underway at various locations during the "Challan Nahi, Helmet" campaign. Motorway police officers are convinc-

ing citizens that helmets are not only a means of obeying the law but also a guarantee of their own safety and that of their families. This positive step is being highly appreciated by the public and citizens are calling this campaign an effective and humanitarian step. The National Highways and Motorway Police appeals to all motorcyclists to always ensure the use of quality helmets to protect their lives and the lives of their loved ones and consider it their responsibility to implement road safety laws.



ISLAMABAD: Secretary Senate, Syed Hasnain Haider meeting with officials of Forum of Federation Phillip Gonzalez, Senior Director Asia & Pacific Ms. Saman Ahmad Rizvi, program officer Pakistan office at the Parliament House.

China-trained cohort of 885 agri experts return

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan announced that 885 Pakistani agricultural professionals have completed intensive advanced training at leading Chinese universities and returned home as "master trainers" to help modernize the country's farming sector, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. Selected through a competitive and rigorous process, the cohort underwent specialized training in areas ranging from artificial intelligence-driven agriculture and drone technology to advanced seed production and water management systems. "We are proud to share that 885 Pakistani agricultural professionals have successfully completed intensive, advanced training at leading Chinese universities," HEC said in a statement issued following a ceremony held in honor of the returning participants. "Selected through a rigorous process, this cohort is returning home as 'master trainers' ready to revolutionise our local farming landscape. From AI-driven farming and drone technology to advanced seed production and water management, these professionals are equipped with the cutting-edge expertise needed to boost productivity and food security nationwide," the statement added. The initiative was executed by HEC under the prime minister's capacity-building program, aimed at strengthening human resource development in critical sectors of the economy. According to HEC, the program is designed not only to upgrade technical skills but also to establish long-term academic and research linkages between Pakistani and Chinese institutions. "This landmark initiative, executed by HEC under the PM's capacity-building programme, strengthens the bond between Pakistan and China while paving the way for sustainable economic growth in our rural sectors," the commission said. Agriculture is a cornerstone of the 2025-2029 Action Plan to Foster an Even Closer China-Pakistan Community with a Shared Future in the New Era, agreed between China and Pakistan during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China at the invitation of President Xi Jinping. The plan prioritizes cooperation in crop cultivation, animal husbandry, plant and animal disease prevention and control, aquaculture, agro-processing, mechanization, seed technology and drip irrigation, as well as agricultural research and expert exchanges under the CPEC framework. It also emphasizes capacity building, stating: "Continue to build on the landmark project of training 1,000 young Pakistani agricultural professionals in China.—DNA

AIOU launches spring tree plantation campaign 2026

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has announced the launch of a nationwide tree plantation campaign through its regional offices under the "Green Pakistan Initiative." The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood formally inaugurated the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign 2026 on the other day. The inauguration ceremony was held in the parking area near Gate No. 1 of the university. The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Director Administration and Coordination, Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Aamir Shah, Registrar, Raja Umar Younis, Director General Regional Services, Dr. Malik Tauqeer Ahmed Khan, Director International Office, Dr. Zahid Majeed, Additional Director IT, Arshad Manzoor, Controller of Examinations, Muhammad Zahid Akhtar Khaki along with other faculty members and principal officers planted saplings to formally commence the 2026 plantation campaign. Speaking at the

event, the Vice Chancellor emphasized that planting trees is essential for national development and environmental protection and the university is taking all possible measures to achieve this goal. He further stated that Pakistan is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change and the youth of Pakistan can play a vital role in safeguarding the country from this threat by actively participating in plantation drives.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Vice Chancellor and other participants offered prayers for the safety and progress of the country. Earlier, Horticulture Officer Wajeeh-ul-Hasan briefed the Vice Chancellor about the 2026 plantation campaign, stating that 200 saplings are planted annually during both planting seasons at the main campus. This year, in addition to shade trees, flowering plants are also being planted to further enhance the beauty of the campus.—DNA

China's strategic bet on constrained frontier

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Five years post-spinal injury, a patient is back on his feet. The NeuCyber Matrix BMI System (Beinao-1) made it possible. Through brain-controlled rehabilitation, the patient graduated from total paraplegia to walking with crutches, reports China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday. Once confined to laboratories, BCIs are now entering clinical and commercial pathways. For countries with aging populations and significant neurological healthcare burdens, BCIs represent a medical technology opportunity grounded in real healthcare demand, core technological challenges, and long industrial cycles. In China, they have also

become a clearly defined future industry, embedded in long-term national planning and backed by an expanding ecosystem of hospitals, startups, manufacturers, and regulators. Why BCIs? China's interest in Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) is driven by a triad of strategic imperatives, namely, technological sovereignty in key supply chains, large clinical demand from neurological disease and disability, and new economic growth opportunities. As a field that integrates advanced materials, semiconductor chips, AI decoding algorithms, and clinical systems, BCIs are now considered vital to future neurotech competitiveness. To secure this competitive edge, the Chinese government has officially designated BCIs as a strategic "future industry."

According to a set of guidelines released by seven central government bodies on July 23, 2025, Beijing's multi-department roadmap seeks to achieve key technological breakthroughs in the industry by 2027, alongside the establishment of advanced technology, industry, and standards systems. This policy push reflects mounting pressure from an ageing population and a healthcare system facing a surge in neurological disease. According to the China Neurological Disorders Report 2024 released in November 2025, neurological disorders—including cerebrovascular disease, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—

impose a heavy burden on China's national healthcare system, which are linked to reduced rates of economic involvement and significant costs to society, not to mention it is a challenge intensified by rapid population ageing. Rising rates of neurological and neurodevelopmental disorders, combined with growing demand from patients and healthcare providers for functional recovery, are expanding the market for brain-computer interface technologies. Beyond their clinical value, BCIs are beginning to attract investor attention by linking healthcare demand with advances in chips and AI, drawing capital into what is increasingly seen as a long-cycle medical technology market.

China-Pakistan coop expands

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China-Pakistan technological cooperation is expanding beyond energy and infrastructure into sustainable urban development, as Islamabad authorities initiated discussions with Chinese investors on electric vehicle charging networks and advanced construction technologies aimed at transforming the federal capital into a model green city. The Capital Development Authority (CDA) hosted a high-level meeting with a Chinese investor delegation to explore collaboration on electric mobility infrastructure, innovative housing solutions, and environmentally sustainable urban technologies, reflecting Pakistan's growing alignment with China's green development expertise, Gwadar Pro reported. At the center of discussions was the development of a citywide electric vehicle (EV) charging ecosystem designed to support Islamabad's transition toward cleaner transportation. Officials highlighted newly introduced regulatory frameworks intended to accelerate private investment while ensuring long-term operational viability. Randhawa said that Islamabad offers significant investment potential for Chinese companies specializing in EV infrastructure, noting that the CDA has already established regulatory guidelines and enforcement mechanisms to facilitate deployment. The initiative aligns with Pakistan's broader climate commitments and reflects increasing adoption of Chinese clean-mobility technologies worldwide. Dr. Khalid Hafiz explained that updated building regulations now require commercial developments to allocate at least three percent of their space for EV charging facilities, integrating electric mobility planning directly into urban design standards. Additionally, charging infrastructure will become mandatory across nearly all 138 fuel stations in the capital, with existing stations required to install at least one charging point and new stations obligated to establish two. According to Gwadar Pro, the Authorities also outlined plans to develop dedicated EV charging hubs at strategic locations throughout Islamabad, aiming to reduce range anxiety and encourage public adoption of electric transport solutions. The Chinese delegation expressed strong interest in participating in Pakistan's emerging EV market and presented technological solutions covering charging systems and smart infrastructure integration. Discussions emphasized potential collaboration models that combine investment with technology transfer and local capacity development. Beyond mobility, talks expanded into innovative housing technologies, particularly 3D-printed construction methods that promise faster, more cost-efficient, and environmentally sustainable housing delivery. Chinese representatives briefed officials on global applications of the technology, highlighting reduced construction waste, lower costs, and accelerated project timelines. Chairman Randhawa emphasized that future urban expansion must incorporate modern construction solutions capable of addressing housing demand while minimizing environmental impact. Technology transfer and local skill development were identified as key objectives of potential cooperation.

Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan to build 14 towns in phases

GWADAR: Under the Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan 2026, Gwadar Development Authority GDA has finalized the planning framework that consists of 14 neighborhoods (towns), which will be developed in phases, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. GDA officials have revealed this planning framework in an important meeting on micro-planning and land use for the Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan 2026. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Moin ur Rehman Khan, Director General of the Gwadar Development Authority on March 3, and attended by the Chief Engineer GDA, Haji Syed Muhammad, and the Director Town Planning, Shahid Ali. GDA official told Gwadar Pro that five implementation models for executing the Master Plan were presented in the meeting, including land acquisition and compensation, land pooling and sharing, land-provider partnerships, land development collaboration, and a private schemes framework. Meanwhile, he said that new planning framework allocates designated land for residential, commercial, mixed-use areas, roads, and public facilities. The Director General stated that private-sector participation would be encouraged to ensure effective implementation of micro-planning.—APP

Country's stability cannot be compromised for politics

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Adviser Rana Sanaullah on Wednesday urged the opposition to rise above personal and political differences for the sake of national stability, emphasizing that the country's peace and progress must come before partisan interests.

While exclusively speaking to a private news channel, Rana Sanaullah urged the opposition to set aside political rivalries and prioritize national interest, stressing that unity is essential to ensure stability and peace in the country. He said the current situation demands collective wisdom and responsible politics rather than confrontation, especially at a time when the country faces serious security challenges.

He revealed that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has invited opposition leaders to attend an in-camera security briefing to take them into confidence on key national security matters.—APP

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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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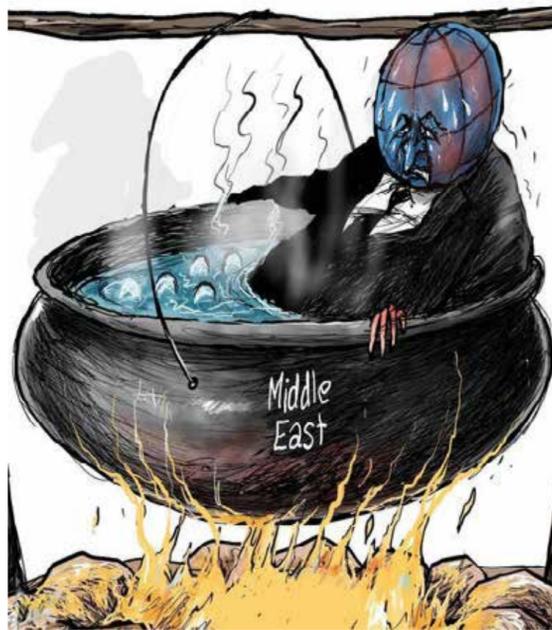
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Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad

Let us prepare for a new reality

EYAD ABU SHAKRA

THE new war on Iran did not take anyone by surprise. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had openly laid the ground for it. While Netanyahu's previous regional wars were justified under the banner of the "right to self-defense," he was more explicit this time, invoking both the "preemptive" and "preventive" intentions. It is worth remembering here that, for many years, he tirelessly repeated his claim that Iran was "only a few months away" from producing a nuclear bomb. In fact, the Israeli right has enjoyed striking confidence in recent years, reinforced by its growing trust in a crucial shift in Washington's approach to developments in the region. While the Democrats' priorities toward the Middle East, during the presidencies of Barack Obama and Joe Biden, were founded on familiar and unconditional strategic support for Israel, they also took a less hostile approach toward Tehran. The justification lay in the existence, or rather the creation, of the phenomenon known as Daesh. Daesh was a "desired" phenomenon used to inflame Sunni-Shiite sensitivities and perpetuate divisions in the Islamic world. Then the push toward divisive, fragmentary and deadly tensions among the region's major ethnic groups — above all, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Kurds, Balochis and others. Once this "script" was enacted, the next stage would begin: the partition of existing entities, regardless of their size, alliances or frame of reference. Iran convinced itself that it could shield its expansionism, its project of exporting the revolution, while keeping its cities safe. The Iranian regime, which is defending its very existence as we speak, is of course the gravitational pole of the Shiite side in this division, facing Daesh and other factions with a similar ideology. It has likely understood the price of its ambitions and appetites for quite some time. It was also well aware of the rules of the game, as well as the weight of the US after it assumed sole leadership of the world. Many of the regime's politicians graduated from American universities and deeply understood the organic relationship between the US and Israel. They also knew that this relationship was inextricably tied to Britain, the old colonial power that shaped the "construction" of Middle Eastern entities and drew their borders, and which maintains military bases and political memory that defines its posture and maneuvers. When the administration of George W. Bush presented Iraq to the Iranian regime on a silver platter in 2003, and when neither that administration nor



subsequent ones showed any real concern about Tehran's expanding influence into Bashar Assad's Syria and Hezbollah's Lebanon, the regime was reassured. America would turn a blind eye. Accordingly, it convinced itself that it could shield its expansionism, its project of exporting the revolution, while keeping Iranian cities safe from American and Israeli retaliation. It assumed it could confront the US and Israel militarily in the cities and countryside of occupied Palestine, Lebanon and Syria if necessary, or even Iraq and Yemen, and spare Iranian territory. Meanwhile, as Arab polities in the region were being torn apart from within amid disputes, grudges and manufactured hostilities, Tehran steadily built up its combat capabilities and intensified its blatant intervention in the affairs of the Arab world. The Israeli far right, the expansionist wing included, was preparing to liquidate what remained of the Palestinian cause by erasing Palestine, the Palestinian people and Palestinian memory. The window was opened by the catastrophic aggravation of intra-Palestinian divisions and the deepening split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In parallel, Netanyahu's personal scandals multiplied. He sought to evade them by every possible means, exploiting settler groups in the Knesset and forging tactical, deceptive alliances with parliamentary and military figures to buy time and wear down his rivals, thereby maintaining power and evading the sword of judicial accountability. Israel stands to be the ultimate beneficiary of the Tehran regime's collapse and the fragmentation of the region's polities. Over time, as his opponents' weakness became apparent. As the extremism of the ultra-Orthodox and settler radicals (backed by financial and political support from American biblical and evangelical hard-line circles) grew, Donald Trump returned. His base includes segments of those same circles and he gave Netanyahu free rein to complete his plan ... and even go further. Here, Tehran found itself in an uncomfortable position it had not anticipated, even though the writing had been on the wall before the Oct. 7, 2023, operation in the Gaza envelope. Today, any response on its part will be far too little and too late. It cannot avert change or chaos, either in Iran or across the region. Israel, as has been said several times, stands to be the ultimate beneficiary of the Tehran regime's collapse and the fragmentation of the region's polities. In other words, if the objectives of the current war are achieved in the coming days, we will not merely be facing a different regional reality; we will also be witnessing a comprehensive reconstruction of the region's future: its notions, loyalties, economies and societies. Indeed, I personally expect that Israel, along with its backers, will not be satisfied with reshaping the future alone. I believe they may soon begin revisiting the past. Yes: revisiting history, rewriting it, erasing elements deemed undesirable, removing existing identities and inventing alternatives. This prospect has become far more likely with Netanyahu preparing for a future war against other regional actors, such as Türkiye and perhaps even Pakistan, after building a new strategic alliance with Narendra Modi's India.

Iran's Strategy: Stretch the War

Qamar Bashir



That emotional surge intensified dramatically after a tragedy that has come to symbolize the human cost of the conflict. In the southern Iranian city of Minab, a girls' school was struck during the early days of the Israel-USA air campaign, killing more than 150 students and staff. The incident was independently confirmed by International media including Al-Jazeera and BBC. This deplorable and cruel act of Israel and the USA immediately became a powerful political and humanitarian symbol. Images broadcast by Iranian media and reported by Al Jazeera showed thousands of mourners gathering in Minab's central square...

WHEN President Donald Trump authorized direct military confrontation with Iran alongside Israel, many strategic planners expected a short and decisive military campaign. Precision strikes, intelligence dominance, and coordinated airpower were believed capable of crippling Iranian command centers and missile infrastructure within days. Yet what was envisioned as a swift operation is increasingly evolving into a prolonged conflict with humanitarian, geopolitical, and economic consequences extending far beyond the Middle East. For decades, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had warned that confrontation with Iran was inevitable. Several U.S. administrations resisted being drawn into a full-scale war, wary of escalation and long-term entanglement in another Middle Eastern conflict. President Trump himself had previously pledged that his presidency would avoid new wars and focus on ending the long cycle of military interventions. However, the launch of coordinated strikes against Iran marked a historic shift, transforming strategic rivalry into direct confrontation. The early assumption that Iran would collapse under aerial bombardment has not materialized. Instead, Tehran has adopted a measured and calculated strategy. Rather than unleashing its entire missile arsenal in dramatic retaliation, it has responded gradually, sustaining pressure while preserving strategic capabilities. Instead of triggering regime instability, the conflict appears to have consolidated national sentiment—particularly after the reported killing of Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader during the opening phase of the war. Within Iran, the death of a religious authority of such stature was expected by some analysts to create political fragmentation. Instead, it triggered widespread mobilization. In Shiite tradition, martyrdom carries profound historical and spiritual significance rooted in the memory of Karbala and the sacrifice of Imam Hussain. Mass mourning ceremonies, public processions, and national demonstrations reflected a collective resolve rather than internal collapse. That emotional surge intensified dramatically after a tragedy that has come to symbolize the human cost of the conflict. In the southern Iranian city of Minab, a girls' school was struck during the early days of the Israel-USA air campaign, killing more than 150 students and staff. The incident was independently confirmed by International media including Al-Jazeera and BBC. This deplorable and cruel act of Israel and the USA immediately became a powerful political and humanitarian symbol. Images broadcast by Iranian media and reported by Al Jazeera showed thousands of mourners gathering in Minab's central square for a mass funeral ceremony. Families held photographs of young victims while crowds chanted slogans condemning the United States and Israel. The reaction from international institutions was swift.

The United Nations human rights office called for a prompt and impartial investigation into the incident. Officials emphasized that schools, hospitals, and humanitarian facilities are protected under international humanitarian law and must not be targeted during armed conflict. The Minab tragedy quickly resonated across the international media landscape. Major European outlets such as The Guardian, Le Monde, and Der Spiegel published editorials raising concerns about the humanitarian consequences of the escalating war. Commentaries in several European newspapers questioned whether the air campaign risked repeating the mistakes of previous conflicts in which civilian casualties undermined strategic objectives. Public reaction extended beyond the media. Demonstrations erupted in several regions of the world. In cities across the United States—Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—anti-war protesters gathered to demand congressional oversight and an immediate halt to escalation. Across parts of the Global South, governments including China, South Africa, Brazil, Turkey, Malaysia, and Pakistan voiced concern about the expanding conflict. In Pakistan and Iraq, protests outside U.S. diplomatic missions turned tense as demonstrators condemned the bombing campaign and expressed solidarity with Iranian civilians. Meanwhile, Iran's military strategy appears rooted in endurance rather than rapid escalation. Decades of sanctions and conflict have forced the country to develop hardened infrastructure, dispersed missile systems, and underground facilities designed to survive sustained bombardment. Iranian officials and analysts sympathetic to Tehran argue that the missiles and drones seen in the early days of the war represent largely older or less sophisticated systems deliberately used in the opening phase. According to this narrative, Iran is pacing the conflict by gradually introducing more advanced and destructive missile capabilities only if the war escalates further. Such a strategy would allow Tehran to sustain pressure over time while reserving its most capable weapons for later stages, potentially targeting U.S. bases across the Middle East, Israeli infrastructure, and naval forces operating in the Persian Gulf and nearby waters. The vulnerability of American bases across the Middle East has become increasingly evident as the war expands. Countries hosting these bases now face complex political pressures, as retaliatory attacks threaten nearby infrastructure and civilian populations. Economically, the war carries enormous global implications. The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints for oil transportation. Even limited disruptions in this narrow corridor can trigger spikes in global energy prices and destabilize international markets. Yet perhaps the most consequential development emerging from Washington is the possibility that the war could escalate beyond aerial

bombing. In recent remarks, President Trump did not rule out deploying American troops on Iranian soil if military objectives cannot be achieved through air power alone. U.S. defense officials have similarly acknowledged that ground forces remain an option should the conflict expand or if key strategic targets require physical control. The implications of such a decision would be profound. Iran is a vast country of nearly ninety million people with rugged terrain, dense urban centers, and deeply entrenched military structures. Any attempt to place foreign troops on Iranian soil would almost certainly transform the current air campaign into a full-scale regional war. Strategic history offers sobering lessons. In Afghanistan, overwhelming aerial superiority failed to produce durable political outcomes. Military dominance on the battlefield did not translate into long-term stability, and ultimately the conflict ended with a negotiated withdrawal after two decades. A ground war in Iran could prove even more complex. Iran possesses a much larger population, stronger state institutions, and extensive missile capabilities capable of striking across the Middle East. Military analysts warn that any foreign troop deployment could trigger prolonged insurgency, regional retaliation, and widespread disruption of global energy markets. Iran appears to be pursuing a strategy of strategic patience. By absorbing attacks while maintaining steady retaliation, it places increasing economic and political pressure on its adversaries. Time, rather than immediate battlefield victories, becomes the decisive factor. The tragedy in Minab illustrates how quickly humanitarian events can reshape global perceptions of a war. Images of mourning families and schoolchildren's funerals resonate far beyond military calculations. They influence public opinion, diplomatic relationships, and the political legitimacy of those conducting the war. What was initially framed as a short military operation has increasingly taken the shape of a war of endurance. Iran appears prepared for a prolonged confrontation built on resilience, geography, and ideological mobilization. The United States and Israel still maintain overwhelming technological and military superiority, yet superiority alone does not guarantee swift submission. Wars that begin with expectations of rapid victory often conclude in negotiations after extended human suffering. Whether this conflict ultimately follows that path will depend not only on military strength but on political wisdom. If diplomacy re-enters the equation, escalation may still be contained. If not, the region—and perhaps the wider international system—may face months of instability with consequences reaching far beyond the battlefield.

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

Strategic Designs and the Uncertain Future of the Gulf

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The Qur'an further instructs: "O you who believe, if a wicked person brings you news, verify it, lest you harm a people in ignorance and afterward become regretful" (49:6). In an era of instantaneous communication and psychological warfare, this command assumes strategic as well as moral significance. Decisions taken in haste, under...

THE Middle East today stands engulfed in a climate of extraordinary tension, where political calculation and military preparedness coexist uneasily with fear, suspicion, and the ever-present possibility of sudden war. What may outwardly appear as a confrontation primarily between Israel and Iran, backed decisively by the United States, has in reality expanded into a crisis whose tremors are felt across the entire Gulf region. The geography of conflict is no longer confined to rhetoric or limited engagement; it now encompasses alliances, military installations, sacred spaces, energy corridors, and the collective conscience of the Muslim world. The presence of American military bases across the Gulf states, long justified as instruments of deterrence and regional stability, has introduced a dangerous layer of complexity. These installations, embedded within sovereign Muslim lands, are simultaneously symbols of partnership and potential liabilities. Tehran has made it clear that any use of these bases for hostile operations against Iran would render them legitimate targets, and by extension, implicate Washington directly in any escalation. Yet Iran has also publicly conveyed that it harbours no intention of targeting civilian populations or oil infrastructure of neighbouring Muslim states. This distinction, though diplomatically significant, does little to dispel anxiety in a region where misinterpretation can prove catastrophic. In such an atmosphere, the Qur'anic warning that "fitnah is worse than killing" (2:191) acquires profound relevance. Fitnah—discord, engineered provocation, or deliberate destabilisation—can ignite wars that neither side initially intended. The peril lies not merely in declared hostilities but in the possibility of covert operations, false-flag incidents, or acts of sabotage designed to inflame tensions. Reports in certain quarters have spoken of clandestine activities and intelligence networks operating within Gulf territories, allegedly plotting attacks that could be attributed to Iran. Whether these claims are substantiated or exaggerated, their circulation alone heightens suspicion and erodes trust among regional actors. The Qur'an further instructs: "O you who believe, if a wicked person brings you news, verify it, lest you harm a people in

ignorance and afterward become regretful" (49:6). In an era of instantaneous communication and psychological warfare, this command assumes strategic as well as moral significance. Decisions taken in haste, under the influence of incomplete or manipulated intelligence, may plunge entire nations into prolonged conflict. Prudence, verification, and restraint are not signs of weakness; they are hallmarks of statesmanship. Beyond the immediate military calculus lies a broader strategic narrative that commands serious reflection. Many analysts say that Israel and its patrons are pursuing an agenda conceived years ago, the fulfillment of which is to transform the current Israel into a Greater Israel. References in recent days by the American ambassador in Tel Aviv to the notion of "Greater Israel" have been interpreted in some quarters as an articulation of long-standing ideological ambitions. Whether such statements are official policy or rhetorical flourish, they have revived apprehensions that the present crisis forms part of a continuum rather than an isolated episode. In this climate of suspicion, nothing is perceived as distant or unattainable; every development is weighed against the possibility of far-reaching geopolitical transformation. Particularly alarming is the vulnerability of sacred and symbolic sites. The city of Jerusalem remains a spiritual epicenter for Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. Within it stands Al-Aqsa Mosque, revered as Islam's first Qibla and a trust of immeasurable sanctity. The Qur'an condemns those "who prevent the name of Allah from being mentioned in His mosques and strive for their ruin" (2:114). In moments of extreme crisis, fears arise that provocations involving such sacred sites could be used to justify broader military escalation. Some apprehend even darker scenarios: that destruction or grave damage to the mosque could be engineered and blame assigned elsewhere—perhaps through allegations of missile fire from Iran—thereby igniting a conflagration of incalculable magnitude. Whether such fears are realistic or speculative, their very plausibility underscores how combustible the present environment has become. The Gulf monarchies occupy a uniquely delicate position. Bound by strategic partnerships with Washington yet sharing cultural, economic, and geographical proximity with Iran, they must balance deterrence with diplomacy.

Their oil installations, critical not only to regional prosperity but to global economic stability, are prime targets in any widening conflict. A strike upon these facilities would reverberate through international markets, disrupt supply chains, and deepen global uncertainty. Thus, what unfolds in the Gulf cannot be regarded as a localised contest; it is an issue of worldwide consequence. The Qur'anic injunction to "hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided" (3:103) is not merely spiritual counsel; it is a blueprint for collective resilience. If the Muslim Ummah fails to close its ranks against sedition and manipulation, it is difficult to imagine that any single state will remain insulated from the repercussions of a widening war. For the Muslim world, therefore, the present crisis constitutes a defining test. If rivalries, sectarian narratives, and narrow geopolitical calculations override the imperative of unity, the region risks descending into a war whose consequences would spare no capital, no economy, and no sacred trust. Conversely, a coordinated diplomatic effort grounded in mutual respect, transparency, and regional ownership of security arrangements may yet prevent catastrophe. Dialogue among Muslim states, balanced engagement with global powers, and a firm rejection of provocation are indispensable. History bears witness that wars, once ignited, seldom remain confined to their architects' designs. Proxies become principals; limited strikes escalate into sustained campaigns; and civilians invariably shoulder the gravest burdens. The Middle East has endured decades of devastation—from invasions to civil wars—and its societies are weary of perpetual instability. The cost of another conflagration would not be measured solely in military losses but in shattered economies, displaced populations, and generations marked by trauma. At this volatile juncture, restraint must triumph over impulse, verification over rumour, and unity over division. The stakes extend beyond national pride or strategic advantage; they concern the preservation of lives, the protection of sacred trusts, and accountability before history and before Almighty Allah. In a region where a single miscalculation may redraw the map of alliances and animosities, wisdom remains the most powerful defence.

Briefs

US govt orders non-emergency...

FROM PAGE 01
fire on demonstrators during the storming of the Karachi consulate over the weekend. Citing initial information, the two US officials said it was unclear whether rounds fired by Marines struck or killed anyone. They also did not know whether shots were also fired by others protecting the mission, including private security guards and local police. Separately, the US Embassy in Islamabad and the Consulate General in Lahore and Karachi cancelled all visas and American Citizen Services (ACS) following violent protests across the country. Initially, the US Mission cancelled all US visa and ACS appointments scheduled for March 2 at its facilities in Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore, and later extended the cancellations for all visa appointments through Friday, March 6. In a notice issued to applicants, the US Mission stated that routine visa services would remain suspended during this period.

US Congress mulls...

FROM PAGE 01
against Iran without congressional approval. At the same time, a separate and more cautious House approach has been backed by Rep. Josh Gottheimer (Democrat-New Jersey) and other centrists, who have stopped short of demanding an immediate halt but called for compliance with existing law and congressional consultation. Gottheimer said he expects the president to "comply with the War Powers Act." The votes follow coordinated US and Israeli strikes on Iranian military and political targets, an escalation that has reportedly resulted in American casualties and raised fears of a broader regional conflict.

President Trump...

FROM PAGE 01
He directly instructed Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to "cut off all dealings" with the country, framing the decision as a response to Spain's stance on the Iran conflict and its failure to meet higher NATO defense spending targets (Trump has pushed for levels beyond the standard 2% of GDP, even suggesting 5%). The comments were made during a press interaction in the Oval Office alongside Merz, where Trump praised Germany and NATO leadership but lambasted Spain and also took shots at the UK for similar "uncooperative" behavior.

Shehbaz Sharif briefs MPs...

FROM PAGE 01
the hostilities in Iran, Middle East and the Gulf, and Pakistan's diplomatic efforts," read a statement from the PM Office (PMO). It added that the parliamentary leaders of the participating political parties "freely expressed their views". "The participants underscored the need for national unity, consensus and unanimity in the current circumstances," the PMO statement said. It noted that the attendees hailed Pakistan's diplomatic efforts for peace, stressed the need to intensify them and made recommendations for the future plan of action. "All participants reiterated their firm commitment for the eradication of terrorism from the country," PMO stated, adding that the leaders also hailed PM Shehbaz's "move to take the entire political leadership into confidence". While the ruling PML-N had extended the olive branch to the PTI and invited it to sit together for the sake of external and internal security threats to Pakistan, the PTI decided not to attend any meeting unless a meeting with its founder, Imran Khan, was arranged.

Babar, Saim dropped as 15-member squad for Bangladesh announced

Six uncapped players selected for the three-match ODI series, announces PCB

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board on Wednesday announced a 15-member squad for the three-match ODI series against Bangladesh, with star batter Babar Azam and all-rounder Saim Ayub left out of the selection. All three ODIs will be played at the Shere Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka from 11 to 15 March, according to a statement issued by the cricket board. Left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi will continue to lead the ODI side, with six uncapped players included in the squad. The uncapped players are Abdul Samad, Maaz Sadaqat, Muhammad Ghazi Ghori, Saad Masood, Sahibzada Farhan and Shamyul Hussain. — Pakistan Cricket Board.

Among them, Abdul Samad, Maaz Sadaqat, Saad Masood and Shamyul Hussain were part of the Pakistan Shaheens squad that played against England Lions in Abu Dhabi recently. Notably, former



ODI captain Babar and all-rounder Saim have been omitted from the squad.

For the unversed, Pakistan last played an ODI series in November last year, when they hosted Sri Lanka and completed a 3-0 clean sweep. The series marked the second ODI assignment for captain Shaheen Shah Afridi, whose maiden stint in charge came in a home series against South Africa, which Pakistan won 2-1.

15-member squad:

Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Faisal Akram, Haris Rauf, Hussain Talat, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Muhammad Ghazi Ghori (wk), Saad Masood, Sahibzada Farhan, Salman Ali Agha and Shamyul Hussain

Series schedule:

March 11 – First ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka
March 13 – Second ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka
March 15 – Third ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka

FG Polo Edge BN in Sudden-Death Thriller

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: FG Polo secured a thrilling 7-6 victory over BN Polo through a sudden-death goal in extra time in the

63rd Allied Bank National Open Polo Championship for the Quaid-e-Azam Gold Cup on Wednesday. The nail-biting clash kept spectators on the edge of their seats, culminating in a decisive goal in the sixth

chukker during extra time. FG Polo's Argentine star Raul Laplacette emerged as the standout performer, scoring six magnificent goals to lead his side to victory. He was ably supported by Ahmed Ali Tiwana, who contributed one crucial goal to complete FG Polo's tally of seven.

On the opposing side, BN Polo delivered a spirited performance, with Tito Ruiz Guinazu putting up an impressive display by scoring five impressive goals. His teammate Lao Abelenda added one goal, but their efforts ultimately fell just short in the sudden-death finish. The match proved to be a showcase of top-tier polo, featuring fast-paced action, tactical brilliance, and exceptional horsemanship. Both teams fought fiercely throughout the regulation chukkers, with neither side willing to concede dominance. The closely contested encounter reflected the high competitive standards that define the National Open Polo Championship. Senior officials from title sponsor Allied Bank Limited were present to witness the thrilling contest. Also in attendance were President of Lahore Polo Club Malik Azam Hayat Noon, executive committee members, prominent polo lovers, Secretary Maj Amjad Ghafoor (Retd), and several leading polo players.



Pak-China friendship Cup basketball Championship Tips Off Today

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Pak-China Friendship Cup All Pakistan 3x3 Basketball Championship will commence from today (Thursday) at the Liaquat Gymnasium, Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad, in celebration of 75 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China. According to Ouj-e-Zahoor, Secretary of the Federal Basketball Association (FBA), the event is being organized to reflect the deep-rooted and time-tested friendship between the two nations.

"The championship is being held under the auspices of the Federal Basketball Association, in collaboration with the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), and under the supervision of the Pakistan Basketball Federation (PBBF)," he said. He added that the event will feature competitions in three major categories – Women's, Club, and Departmental – with significant participation from across the country. He said that in the Women's Category, 28 teams will compete, including strong departmental sides such as Pakistan Army and WAPDA. The Club Category will witness participation from 48 teams representing Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, and other cities, highlighting the growing popularity of the 3x3 format nationwide. In the Departmental Category, 13 teams will take part, including Pakistan Army, WAPDA, Pakistan Police, Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Ordnance Factories, and Pakistan Navy. Ouj-e-Zahoor further said that as part of the celebrations, a special exhibition match between a Chinese team and a local Pakistani club will be held on March 7, symbolizing sports diplomacy and further strengthening bilateral ties through basketball.

Sarfaraz Ahmed 'set to become' Pakistan Test head coach

LAHORE: Former captain Sarfaraz Ahmed is all set to become the new head coach of the Pakistan Test cricket team, sources said on Wednesday, with a formal announcement expected shortly. According to sources, Sarfaraz – who was a mentor of the Asia Cup-winning U19 team – will begin his responsibilities during Pakistan's upcoming Test series against the Bangladesh national cricket team in May. The position of Pakistan Test team head coach had been vacant since October 2025. Azhar Mahmood served as interim head coach during the recent series against South Africa. Pakistan are scheduled to play a two-match Test series against Bangladesh in May. The series forms part of the ICC World Test Championship 2027 cycle. The first Test between Pakistan and Bangladesh will begin on May 8, while the second Test is set to start from May 16. Formal announcement expected soon as former captain prepares to take charge in upcoming World Test Championship fixtures. Sarfaraz is currently working with Pakistan Shaheens, who are facing the England Lions in the United Arab Emirates in a T20 and one-day series. The wicketkeeper-batter has had an extensive international career, playing 54 Tests, scoring 3,031 runs, including four centuries and 21 fifties. – Agencies

Liverpool rocked by last-gasp defeat at Wolves

Andre's Stoppage-Time Strike Hands Wolves Dramatic 2-1 Victory Over Liverpool at Molineux, Dealing Fresh Blow to Arne Slot's Champions League Qualification Hopes in Premier League Clas

LONDON: Liverpool suffered an embarrassing 2-1 defeat at Wolves as Andre's stoppage-time strike sealed a dramatic victory for the Premier League's bottom club on Tuesday. Arne Slot's side fell behind to Rodrigo Gomes' strike in the closing stages at Molineux. Mohamed Salah hauled Liverpool level with his first goal in 11 top-flight games dating back to November. But Andre's first goal for Wolves inflicted the latest humbling loss in a chastening season for Liverpool. It was the first time the Premier League's bottom club had beaten the reigning champions since Crystal Palace defeated Chelsea in 2017. Liverpool have conceded 14 goals in the last 15 minutes of the second half, with only Newcastle shipping more in the same period in the Premier League. The Reds remain fifth but their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League have been hurt by a defeat that means sixth-placed Chelsea will go above

them if they beat Aston Villa on Wednesday. Liverpool's first defeat in five games in all competitions will raise fresh questions about Slot's Anfield future. This was the first of Liverpool's two trips to Molineux in the space of four days, with an immediate chance for revenge in the FA Cup fifth round on Friday. Slot this week said he no longer finds Premier League matches a "joy to watch" due to the rise in set-piece goals, and Liverpool supporters took no pleasure from this dismal performance. Wolves and Liverpool fans joined in a sustained round of applause on 18 minutes in memory of Diogo Jota, who wore that shirt number during his time at Molineux before joining the Reds. Portugal forward Jota died in a car crash in Spain last year. That emotional tribute seemed to suck the energy from both teams in a scrappy first half. – Agencies

The Power to Give, the Strength to Gain!
Mani Kohli: A symbol of excellence, perseverance & generosity

ERUM MASOOD

ON March 8 each year, the world comes together to celebrate the incredible women who inspire, uplift and transform lives across communities and continents. International Women's Day not only highlights women's achievements but also acknowledges their struggles and the lasting impact of their resilience, leadership and compassion on future generations. Over the years, I have had the privilege of supporting and working alongside women in Pakistan, Morocco and the United Kingdom—women who are celebrated not merely for their backgrounds, but for their strength, vision and determination. On this special day, I wish to pay tribute to a truly remarkable South Asian woman, Mani Kohli MBE, whose journey reflects excellence, perseverance and generosity of spirit. With deep roots in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, Mani Kohli's story is a powerful reminder of our shared heritage and the importance of women uplifting one another, regardless of geography. As a respected figure in

the fashion industry, she has styled prominent personalities across the UK, Asia and the United States. Yet beyond glamour and success, what truly defines her work is her belief that beauty begins within. She empowers women to embrace confidence, authenticity and self-worth—qualities that no fabric or trend alone can create. Her contributions extend far beyond fashion. Passionate about philanthropy and community development, she actively raises funds for charitable causes and mentors aspiring women entrepreneurs and small business owners. Through her work, she encourages others to give with sincerity and enthusiasm, reinforcing the idea that true success is measured by the lives we uplift along the way. Meeting her through the British Asian Fashion Network was a transformative moment in my own journey. She has since become not only a mentor in fashion but a role model in leadership and humility. I was honoured to celebrate her MBE recognition alongside her children and inspiring women from around the world—each representing strength, talent and compassion in

their own unique ways. The People's Incubation New Enterprise (PINE) Global Community recognizes women such as Ghinaa Khan, Sana Kardar, Rabia Amir, Musarrat Jabeen, Misha Irshad, Maham Masood, Fakhira Fatima, Vinessa Phoebe and Ramsha Khokar, who consistently support and empower one another. Their collective spirit reflects the true essence of International Women's Day—unity, encouragement and shared growth. As we celebrate Mani Kohli MBE and countless other extraordinary women, let us honour them not only for their professional accomplishments but for the roles they cherish as mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. Their strength lies not only in what they achieve, but in how they nurture, inspire and give of themselves. Women's giving is not about gaining recognition; it is about sharing time, compassion and purpose to create a kinder and brighter world. — The writer is a communication specialist, strategist, entrepreneur, and consultant based in Pakistan and the UK



MANI KOHLI

Iran intelligence signalled...

FROM PAGE 01
Tuesday ruled out for now any negotiations with the United States, days after the US and Israel launched joint strikes on his country. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Tehran wanted to talk but it was too late, as the United States continued its military operation against Iran.

Pakistan targets...

FROM PAGE 01
The Pakistan Army continued to carry out operations against Afghan Taliban and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), security sources said. According to security sources, the Pakistan Army has destroyed 50 hideouts belonging to Afghan Taliban, Fitna-al-Khawarij and Fitna-al-Hindustan during the ongoing operation. The sources said the forces conducted heavy-weapon strikes during the night between March 3 and March 4. Effective operations were carried out in the Qilla Saifullah, Chaman, Sambaza, Ghadwana, Jani and Ghaznali sectors, the sources added.

Sri Lanka rescues...

FROM PAGE 01
Sri Lanka's defence ministry said it was searching for the other crew of the IRIS Dena, which went down about 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of the island. "We are keeping up a search, but we don't know yet what happened to the rest of the crew," an official told AFP, dimming prospects for finding any more survivors. Herath said two Sri Lankan navy vessels and an aircraft were deployed for the rescue operation, but did not say what caused the Iranian warship to sink.

Asim Munir urges...

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Afghan Taliban renounced their support for terrorism and terrorist organisations," the statement said. It said that CDF Munir laid a floral wreath at the martyrs' monument to pay homage to those who had rendered supreme sacrifices in defence of the motherland. "He offered fateha and reaffirmed that the sacrifices of shuhada remain the cornerstone of Pakistan's security and resilience," it added. During the visit, CDF Munir was given a comprehensive briefing on the security environment, ongoing intelligence-based operations and measures in place for border management, it said.

Hockey WC qualifiers...

FROM PAGE 01
but the dominant win stands confirmed). This victory capped a perfect group stage run, following earlier triumphs: a thrilling 5-4 win over China and a resilient 5-3 comeback against Malaysia. The Green Shirts showcased strong teamwork, clinical finishing, and tactical discipline throughout the campaign. With three straight victories, Pakistan topped their pool and advanced directly to the semi-finals, where they will face a tough opponent (likely Egypt or Japan, based on Pool A standings).

NZ Qualify for T20...

FROM PAGE 01
between centurion Finn Allen and Tim Seifert. The opening pair laid a solid foundation for the pursuit by putting together 117 runs in nine overs before Kagiso Rabada cleaned up Seifert, who made a 33-ball 58 with the help of seven fours and two sixes. Allen, on the other hand, stood his ground firm and eventually steered New Zealand over the line by smashing Marco Jansen for a four on the penultimate delivery of the 13th over, which also helped him bring up his third T20I century.

Briefs

Rupee gains 03 paise against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 03 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.42 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.45.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279 and Rs 280.50, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee decreased by Rs 1.07 to close at Rs 324.29 from the previous day's close of Rs 325.36, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged at Rs 1.77, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed an increase of Rs 0.59 and closed at Rs 373.11 compared to the previous day's Rs 372.52. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal came down 01 and 04 paise to close at Rs 76.07 and Rs 74.42, respectively.—APP

Children must not be 'collateral damage' in Mideast war: UN

GENEVA: The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child insisted Wednesday that children must be protected during the war in the Middle East, highlighting an alleged air strike on an Iranian school. Iran has blamed Israel and the United States for the strike on the school in the Iranian city of Minab on the first day of the war on Saturday, giving a toll of more than 150 dead. Neither the United States nor Israel have confirmed the attack, and AFP has been unable to independently verify the toll or visit the site. "The committee is alarmed by reports of strikes on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, which have injured and traumatized children, and claimed many young lives," it said. "This is a reminder that children are among the most vulnerable in armed conflicts, and must never be treated as collateral damage." According to state media, Iran on Tuesday held funerals for at least 165 people, including students, killed in the alleged strike. State television carried images showing a large crowd of mourners in Minab weeping over what appeared to be bodies wrapped in white shrouds.—APP

Canadian PM calls Iran war example of rupturing world order

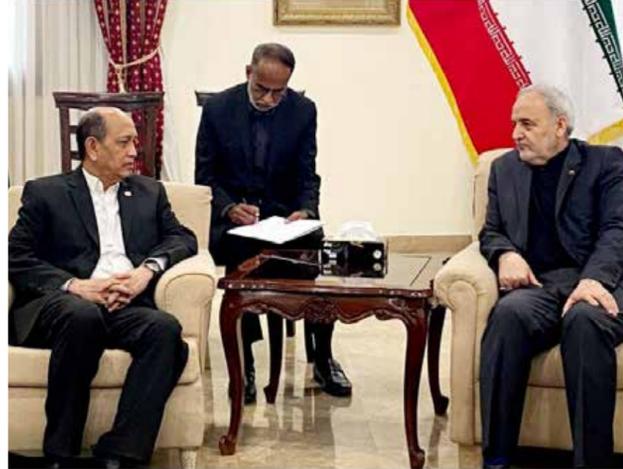
MELBOURNE: Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Wednesday he regretted the Iran war was an extreme example of a rupturing world order in which countries increasingly act without respect for international norms and laws. Carney was speaking at the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, during the Australian leg of a trade-focused, three-nation visit that began in India. He will address the Australian Parliament on Thursday before flying to Japan on Friday. "Geo-strategically, hegemony is increasingly acting without constraint or respect for international norms or laws while others bear the consequences. Now the extremes of this disruption are being played out in real time in the Middle East," Carney said. Carney built on themes that he laid out at the World Economic Forum in January in Davos, Switzerland, in a speech that garnered widespread attention. He argued the world order was undergoing a rupture and the old norms of the rules-based order were being eroded. Canada supported efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and from threatening international peace and security, Carney said. "We are actively taking on the world as it is, not passively waiting for a world we wish to be. But we also take this position with some regret because the current conflict is another example of the failure of the international order," he said. Despite decades of UN efforts, "Iran's nuclear threat remains and now the United States and Israel have acted without engaging the UN or consulting with allies including Canada," he added.—APP

Malaysian High Commissioner signs condolence book on Iran's supreme leader demise

He expressed hope that calm and stability would prevail across the Middle East during this sensitive transition period, noting that developments in Iran carry broader implications to peace and security of the region and beyond

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan, signed the Book of Condolence at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad following the passing of Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ambassador Azhar conveyed Malaysia's deepest condolences and sympathies to the Government and people of Iran during this solemn moment of national mourning. He acknowledged the significant role played by the late Supreme Leader in shaping Iran's political direction and regional posture over several decades. In light of the current regional climate, the High Commissioner also underscored Malaysia's con-



sistent position in advocating restraint, dialogue and peaceful resolution of dis-

putes. He expressed hope that calm and stability would prevail across the

Middle East during this sensitive transition period, noting that develop-



ments in Iran carry broader implications to peace and security of the region and beyond. Malaysia remains

committed to constructive engagement with Iran and the international community, guided by the principles of

mutual respect and non-interference, while respecting nations' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Petroleum stock, supply chains across country reviewed

DNA

Islamabad: The Committee to Monitor Petrol Prices in the Wake of the Emerging Situation in the Region, constituted by the Prime Minister, met again under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division. The Committee continued its deliberations on the evolving regional and global energy situation and undertook a detailed review of petroleum stock levels and supply chains across the country. Participants were briefed on country stock levels of crude oil and refined petroleum products, including petrol, diesel, aviation fuels and LPG, along with their respective days of cover and daily consumption patterns. The meeting was also briefed on global oil market developments, including movements in international benchmark prices, freight and insurance costs, shipping route dynamics, and evolving conditions in key maritime corridors. The Committee noted that the international energy environment remains fluid, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz and its implications for global energy trade. Participants reviewed developments in LNG and LPG markets as well. The Committee was informed that while LNG imports under long-term arrangements remain an important component of

Pakistan's energy supply mix, disruptions in regional shipping routes could affect global LNG logistics. LPG inflows through cross-border channels are also being closely monitored to ensure uninterrupted domestic availability. The Committee discussed a range of contingency measures to strengthen supply security, including engagement with international partners and exploration of alternative sourcing routes. In this regard, members were informed of ongoing diplomatic and commercial engagement with friendly countries and suppliers in the region to secure additional crude and petroleum supplies where necessary. The Committee also noted efforts underway to diversify procurement options through regional energy hubs, including potential arrangements through ports in the Red Sea and the Gulf region, in order to maintain the continuity of refinery operations and ensure supply resilience. Members further reviewed energy conservation measures as part of broader contingency planning aimed at managing demand efficiently while maintaining orderly market conditions. The Committee emphasized that while supply conditions remain stable, prudent energy use and conservation at all levels would help strengthen national preparedness should international uncertainties persist. The Finance Minister emphasized that ensuring uninterrupted availability of petroleum

products remains the Government's foremost priority and will continue to guide all policy decisions. He reiterated that the Committee is monitoring developments on a daily basis and is prepared to take timely and coordinated measures to safeguard national energy security and maintain stability in domestic markets. The Committee also stressed the importance of preventing hoarding, diversion, or smuggling of petroleum products, particularly in times of international volatility. Relevant authorities have been directed to maintain heightened vigilance and strengthen coordination with provincial governments to ensure that domestic supplies remain protected. It was further decided that the Chief Secretaries of all provinces will participate in the Committee's meeting tomorrow to deliberate on the final summary and proposed national action plan. The Committee will continue its deliberations to finalize a comprehensive strategy to be implemented at the national level with the cooperation of all stakeholders. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Petroleum Mr. Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Mr. Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Power Mr. Sardar Awaiz Ahmad Khan Leghari, Minister of State for Finance Mr. Bilal Azhar Kayani, along with federal secretaries and senior officials from the concerned ministries, divisions, and regulatory bodies.

CCP approves REIT restructuring

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) on Wednesday approved the proposed restructuring and transfer of designated real estate assets of ISE Towers REIT Management Company Limited to its subsidiary, ISE Realty Company Limited, following a Phase-1 review. The CCP received a pre-merger application on January 23, 2026, jointly filed by ISE Towers REIT Management Company Limited and ISE Realty Company Limited. The transaction is being carried out pursuant to a scheme of compromise, arrangement, and reconstruction on November 17, 2025, said a news release. ISE Towers REIT Management Company Limited, formerly Islamabad Stock Exchange (Guarantee) Limited, is a licensed Non-banking Finance Company (NBFC). ISE Realty Company Limited, incorporated in October 2025, is a public limited company engaged in real estate development and marketing, including commercial and mixed-use projects. Under the approved Scheme, designated real estate assets and liabilities of ISE Towers REIT will be transferred to ISE Realty Company Limited, followed by a reorganization of shareholders through the issuance of shares to the existing shareholders of ISE Towers REIT. Following the restructuring, ISE Towers REIT will function as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to facilitate the launch and management of a REIT Scheme. The CCP's review noted that ISE Realty Company Limited has been incorporated specifically to implement the restructuring scheme and is not currently operational in the relevant market. The assessment further determined that the transaction involves internal restructuring and transfer of assets within related entities. CCP concluded that the proposed transaction is unlikely to create or strengthen a dominant position in the relevant market, substantially lessen competition, or create barriers to entry. The assessment also found that the transaction would not adversely affect market dynamics. Accordingly, the Commission has authorized the transaction. The restructuring aims to facilitate the launch of a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) structure in Pakistan. Such initiatives can contribute to the formalization and development of Pakistan's real estate sector by promoting institutional investment, enhancing transparency.—APP

First charter jet brings French nationals home from ME

PARIS: A first charter flight carrying French nationals stranded in the Middle East since the start of the war with Iran landed at Charles de Gaulle airport near Paris early Wednesday. Governments and airlines have been scrambling to repatriate tens of thousands of travelers stranded after the eruption of a regional conflict sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran. France is among the most affected Western nations, with an estimated 400,000 nationals present in around 15 countries touched by the conflict. The aircraft chartered by Air France left Muscat, the capital of Oman, Tuesday evening and landed in France shortly before 3:00 am Wednesday. "We never thought this would happen," said passenger Emmy Couteiller, 18. When the first strikes hit Dubai, she was in the hotel swimming pool with her boyfriend. After hugging her sister, who had come to meet her at the airport, a still-shaken Couteiller recounted her experience. "An alarm sounded in the middle of the night telling us not to stay near the windows," she said. "We went down to the basement," she added. When Couteiller boarded the repatriation flight, she said she felt as if she were "fleeing danger, even though it's a relatively safe country."

The plane carried staff of the airline as well as many families, young children, and pregnant women, government minister Eleonore Caroit told reporters at the airport. "It was a complex process, with constant uncertainty because we are in a very fluid situation, with airspace opening and closing and the situation changing from hour to hour," Caroit added.—APP

Stranded in paradise: Middle East war traps thousands in Bali

DENPASAR, LONDON, BERLIN: Passengers stranded on the Indonesian resort island of Bali clamored for flight news on Tuesday as the outbreak of war in the Middle East grounded planes and turned a tropical holiday dream into an ordeal for many. Hundreds were crowded at Ngurah Rai International Airport, many dressed in shorts, flip-flops and summer dresses, their expressions dour. Many sat on the floor, exhausted, and one man repeatedly hit a wall in frustration. "I just kind of want to see my family... right now it's a bit stressful," British tourist Adam Woo, transiting through Bali after holidaying on the neighboring island of Lombok, said. The 23-year-old student said he saw the missiles start flying on the news "and I was a bit worried about my flight" — especially after Dubai airport was hit in Iran's response to a US-Israeli attack. "Obviously, everyone around the world at the moment is kind of stuck," said Woo. "All the travel agencies are swamped with people calling in. So, it's literally impossible to even get on the phone with someone.—APP

Indonesia: Discussions with Board of Peace on hold

JAKARTA: Indonesia's foreign minister said talks on US President Donald Trump's Gaza "Board of Peace," of which the Southeast Asian nation is a key troop-contributing member, were on hold due to the Middle East war. The US and Israeli air war against Iran has killed scores of civilians, thrown global air transport into chaos and sent oil prices surging after the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. "All BoP discussions are on hold as all attention has shifted to the situation in Iran," Minister Sugiono, who goes by one name, said late on Tuesday in response to a question on calls for Indonesia to exit the peace board in the aftermath of the fresh conflict in the Middle East. "We will also consult with our friends and colleagues in the Gulf because they are also under attack," Sugiono told reporters after attending an event alongside President Prabowo Subianto. Indonesia's participation on the board has drawn criticism from experts and Muslim groups at home, who say it compromises the world's largest Muslim-majority nation's longstanding support for the Palestinian cause. Indonesia backs a two-state solution. The Indonesian Ulama Council, a leading clerical body, said on March 1 that Indonesia should leave the board, citing Trump's attack on Iran as rendering the initiative ineffective. Meanwhile, Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, said Jakarta should use its position to press Israel and the United States to halt the violence. Trump first proposed the board in September when he unveiled a plan to end Israel's war in Gaza, later expanding its remit to address other global conflicts typically handled by the United Nations. Sugiono also said Prabowo is willing to be a mediator in the Iran war in a bid "to cool down and de-escalate the situation in the region." Indonesia is readying 1,000 troops for potential deployment in Gaza by early April as part of a proposed multinational peacekeeping force, its army said, as part of the UN-mandated International Stabilization Force.—APP

Govt to launch SMEs training in AJK after Eid: SAPM

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday announced that the government will launch technical skills programmes in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) after Eid, along with introducing a home-stay model to empower women and boost small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for economic growth. He made these remarks while chairing a high-level meeting with the Chief Secretary of AJK to discuss measures aimed at promoting economic growth and strengthening the SME sector in the region, said a news release. The meeting was attended by Additional Secretary, Ministry of Industries and Production, Asad Islam Mahni; representatives of the Mirpur Chamber of Commerce; and Chief Executive Officer of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Nadia J Seth. The special assistant said that the prime minister has placed special focus on the development of AJK, particularly on uplifting the SME sector to accelerate economic progress. He announced that after Eid, SMEDA will initiate technical and skills development training programmes in AJK, with special emphasis on women's empowerment. A home-stay model will also be introduced in the region to create sustainable income opportunities and strengthen women's economic position, Haroon added. Highlighting the government's priorities, the SAPM said that improving SMEs' access to credit and financial facilities is a key focus area. He assured that special measures will be taken to facilitate SMEs in AJK. Officials of the State Bank raised concerns regarding the documentation of SMEs. In response, SMEDA will provide targeted training to encourage proper documentation and formalization of businesses, enabling them to better access financial services. He emphasized that value addition to products from AJK will enhance exports and contribute significantly to economic development in the region. Representatives from AJK demanded the establishment of Expo Centers and a dry port to promote trade and business activities. Haroon said that in line with the prime minister's vision, priority would be given to formalizing sectors, followed by the phased establishment of Expo Centers and dry ports in AJK. The special assistant directed the State Bank to facilitate SMEs in financing and credit provision. To ensure effective implementation and monitoring, working groups and a follow-up mechanism have been established to track progress in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.—DNA

Business community concerned over Iran-Israel conflict: Usman

RCCI President said that the ongoing war has created widespread uncertainty in global markets. International oil prices have surged sharply, increase in logistic cost, posing a serious threat of high inflation for Pakistan's already fragile economy

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Usman Shaukat has expressed grave concern over the escalating conflict between Iran and Israel, urging the Government of Pakistan to immediately utilize diplomatic channels to help de-escalate tensions and restore peace in the region. "The business community strongly urges immediate diplomatic efforts to restore stability. Prolonged conflict will have devastating consequences not only for the region but also for Pakistan's trade, economy, and overseas workforce." In a statement issued here on behalf of the business community, the RCCI President said that the ongoing war has created widespread uncertainty in global markets. International oil prices have surged sharply, increase in logistic cost, posing a serious threat of high inflation

for Pakistan's already fragile economy. He warned that continued hostilities in the Middle East would severely hamper Pakistan's trade with the region. Both exports and critical imports have been disrupted due to the cancellation of flights and suspension of shipping operations. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) remains Pakistan's second-largest trading partner, while the country relies heavily on oil imports from the Middle East and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar. Usman Shaukat further highlighted concerns regarding the Strait of Hormuz, recalling earlier warnings by Iran that its closure in the event of war could disrupt global oil supplies. Such a development would not only destabilize oil-producing economies but also severely impact energy-importing countries like Pakistan. The RCCI President also expressed serious concern for overseas Pakistanis working in the Middle East, numbering in the millions. Hundreds of thousands

are reportedly stranded due to suspended flights, while many Pakistanis currently in Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah require urgent arrangements for safe return. The uncertainty has created anxiety among workers whose remittances are a backbone of Pakistan's economy. The business community is in shock, as exports to the Middle East are likely to remain suspended until the conflict subsides. Pakistan's export sector is already facing stagnation despite the government's ambitious plan to boost exports to \$60 billion within three years. The current regional war not only jeopardizes this target but also threatens to significantly undermine overall export performance. Usman Shaukat emphasized that peace and stability in the Middle East are crucial for Pakistan's economic survival and growth. He called upon the international community to intervene urgently and pursue dialogue, restraint, and diplomatic engagement to prevent further escalation.

Briefs

Nepra clears three-month tariff hike

National power regulator approves Rs0.35 per unit increase in electricity price

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has approved a Rs0.35 per unit hike in electricity tariffs for three months, allowing power distribution companies and K-Electric to recover Rs8.67 billion from consumers between March and May under quarterly adjustments for the second quarter of FY25-26. In a determination issued Tuesday Nepra authorised a uniform positive adjustment of Rs0.3504 per kilowatt-hour for all consumer categories, except lifeline users, consumers billed under the incremental consumption package and prepaid customers. The increase will also apply to KE consumers. The regulator said the adjustment stems from variations in capacity charges, variable operations and maintenance (O&M), use of system charges, market operator fee, impact of fuel cost adjustments on transmission and distribution losses and recovery of prior-period payables on incremental units during October-December. Ex-Wapda distribution companies (XWdiscos) had sought approval to recover Rs10.83 billion for the quarter. While they claimed Rs24.24 billion in capacity charges, the impact was partially offset by Rs13.41 billion in negative adjustments related to O&M, system charges, market operator fees, T&D losses and incremental consumption package. After netting out those factors, Nepra trimmed the recovery to Rs8.67 billion.

KSE-100 plummets over 1,300 points

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan's benchmark KSE-100 index was trading in the red, down 1,354.88 points by the close of the session on Wednesday, taking back the recovery seen earlier in the day. In early trade on Wednesday, the index briefly slipped more than 2,300 points around 9:20am, touching an intraday low of 154,790.73 before regaining ground by 10:30am, trading 381.98 points higher. This volatility suggests that investor confidence still remains cautious, following a turbulent start to the week. On Tuesday, the market staged a sharp rebound of 5,159.10 points to close at 157,132.09, recovering a significant portion of Monday's record 16,000-plus point plunge, the largest single-session decline in the history of the Pakistan Stock Exchange. The turbulence reflects broader global uncertainty. Escalating US-Israeli clashes with Iran have pushed oil prices to a 19-month high and weighed on international equities, as investors grapple with the risk of a prolonged conflict in the Middle East.

Fin. Minister reaffirms Pak, Netherlands economic co-op

The Dutch Ambassador thanked the finance minister for the opportunity to engage and reaffirmed the Netherlands' commitment to further expanding bilateral economic ties



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb met H.E. Mr. Robert Jan Siegert, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan, who called on him along with a delegation from Engro Corporation and Engro Vopak Terminal Limited (EVTL). The delegation included Mr. Ahsan Zafar Syed, President Engro Corporation; Mr. Ammar Shah, CEO EVTL; and Mr. Yasir Ali, Vice President & Chief Government Relations Officer, Engro Corporation.

Welcoming the delegation, the Finance Minister underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to strengthening economic cooperation with the Netherlands. He noted that long-standing partnerships with reputable international investors contribute positively to Pakistan's economic development, facilitate trade and investment, and reinforce confidence within the global business community. The Dutch Ambassador thanked the Finance Minister for the opportunity to engage and reaffirmed the Netherlands' commitment to further expanding bilateral economic ties. He highlighted

the presence of Dutch enterprises in Pakistan and emphasized that successful partnerships between Pakistani and Dutch companies demonstrate the potential for deeper economic collaboration between the two countries. During the meeting, the Engro team briefed the Finance Minister on the operations of Engro Vopak Terminal Limited, a joint venture between Royal Vopak of the Netherlands and Engro Corporation. The delegation noted that the terminal has been operating at Port Qasim since 1996 and plays an important role in Pakistan's industrial and energy supply

chains by handling key chemical imports used by downstream industries, as well as a significant share of marine LPG supporting household energy needs. The delegation also shared perspectives regarding the future operating arrangements of the terminal and the importance of maintaining continuity in specialized infrastructure that supports industrial production and supply-chain stability. They highlighted the longstanding collaboration between the partners and the broader contribution of such investments to Pakistan's economic landscape. The Finance Minister appreciated the delegation's briefing and acknowledged the importance of ensuring that investments contributing to Pakistan's industrial ecosystem continue to operate within a transparent and efficient framework. He reaffirmed the Government's commitment to facilitating a supportive environment for credible foreign investment and assured the delegation of the Government's cooperation in addressing matters relating to ongoing economic partnerships. The meeting also included an exchange of views on the evolving regional situation and its potential implications for energy markets and supply chains. The Finance Minister noted that the Government is closely monitoring developments and remains engaged with relevant stakeholders to ensure adequate availability of petroleum products and to manage potential supply challenges. The delegation shared general industry perspectives on logistics and supply considerations amid international market volatility.

PM for efforts to promote interfaith dialogue

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday greeting the Hindu community celebrating their religious festival Holi, stressed the need for national-level efforts to promote interfaith dialogue, protection of worship places, and fostering of mutual respect in the society. "Let us renew our national resolve today to continue our joint efforts for a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous future, upholding the values of tolerance, empathy, and unity," the prime minister said in his message on Holi being celebrated today (Wednesday). He said the Holi festival reflected social harmony through the a blend of vibrant colors, besides manifesting the Pakistan's cultural diversity. The prime minister said Pakistan's Hindu community was a valuable part of the society, playing a positive role in social harmony, economic development and prosperity, as well as peaceful coexistence.

Britain to bar study visas for four nations

DNA

LONDON: Britain said on Tuesday it would block study visas for nationals from four countries and halt work visas for Afghans, using what it called an "emergency brake" to curb rising asylum claims from people entering through legal routes. Immigration remains one of Britain's most politically sensitive issues, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government has sought to show it is tightening the system as the populist Reform UK party gains ground in opinion polls. The interior ministry, which is set to block study visas for nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan, said asylum applications by students from these countries had jumped more than fivefold between 2021 and 2025. It also said claims by Afghans on work visas were now outstripping the number of visas issued.

Pakistan requests KSA for alternate oil supply route

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday formally requested that Saudi Arabia provide an alternative oil supply route through Yanbu to maintain its fuel supply chain in the wake of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz following the United States-Israeli attack on Iran. The request was made by Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik to the Saudi ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki during a meeting. The Saudi ambassador assured full support in this regard, according to a statement by the petroleum division. During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of mutual interest and bilateral cooperation. The minister apprised the ambassador about the current situation and the implications of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz on global energy markets. He stated that Pakistan is closely monitoring the evolving situation on a daily basis, as the majority of Pakistan's energy supplies transit through the strait. The minister emphasised that Pakistan's government was actively endeavouring to ensure continuity of the energy supply chain for its people. He noted that the support of brotherly

countries like Saudi Arabia meant a lot to Pakistan during challenging times. Malik further highlighted that Saudi Arabian sources had assured security of supplies through the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea, which could help meet energy requirements. He also expressed gratitude for the continued support of Saudi Arabia and stated that the kingdom was already assisting Pakistan. He added that one vessel had been assured dispatch from Pakistan to the port of Yanbu to lift crude oil for Pakistan. The minister further expressed hope that supplies of oil from Yanbu would be prioritised for Pakistan. The ambassador stated that the kingdom was fully aware of the evolving situation and reaffirmed that Saudi Arabia will stand firmly with Pakistan to meet any emergency requirements. He emphasised that Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are brotherly countries and will continue to stand together, especially in these testing times. While monitoring supplies and exploring alternative import routes, the government on Monday decided to continue passing on the impact of rising global oil prices to consumers under the existing fortnightly adjustment mechanism to avoid a fiscal burden.

Pakistan, IMF begin virtual talks

Washington-based lender questions FBR's plan to bridge widening gap between projections and revised targets

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and IMF on Tuesday began virtual technical discussions focusing on external financing arrangements and the Federal Board of Revenue's ability to meet its revised tax collection targets for the remainder of the current fiscal year. The FBR team briefed the IMF at a technical level that they will be able to meet the tax collection target of close to Rs13,500 billion, against the revised target of Rs13,979 billion, in the current fiscal year. However, the Washington-based lender raised questions and inquired how the FBR would achieve tax collection beyond Rs13,000 billion. The FBR made all-out efforts to convince the IMF it would inch closer to Rs13,500 billion by the end of June 2026. The IMF has already revised downward FBR's tax collection target from Rs14,130 billion approved by the parliament on the eve of the budget, but it was slashed to Rs13,979 billion. Now the FBR has pitched before the IMF that the tax collection would be touching Rs13,500 billion but it seems quite hard to convince the IMF on

another revision in the current fiscal year because the IMF is projecting that the FBR's collection could go up in the range of Rs13,000 to Rs13,200 billion maximum asking the question how this yawning gap will be bridged. The Ministry of Finance, in such an emerging situation, will be left with no other option but to slash down its expenditures to stick to the target of fiscal deficit, especially the envisaged target of primary balance of 2.4% of GDP for the end of June 2026. The FBR has envisaged a tax collection target of Rs1,366 billion for the ongoing month, and the tax machinery will have to struggle hard to cross the Rs1,300 billion mark by the end of March 2026. The FBR's tax collection will prove a hard nut to crack with the passing of months, and the last quarter target will become more difficult to achieve, given the sluggish economic activities. The FBR team, in its initial technical briefing, apprised the IMF that the tax machinery faced a shortfall of Rs428 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year and, in total, it is all set to touch the revenue collection mark of Rs13,500 billion in the remaining four-month period till the end of June 30, 2026.

Modi's India hands over ports to US; stabs Iran in the back

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Former United States (US) Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor, who served as a senior advisor to the Secretary of Defense, claimed that the US Navy was increasingly relying on Indian ports for docking and unloading operations due to escalating tensions with Iran. Macgregor's statements, in a recent interview on One America News, have ignited discussions on social media, particularly in South Asia, highlighting potential shifts in US military logistics away from traditional Persian Gulf bases, according to a media report. Macgregor viewed that the threats to US installations in the Gulf have prompted this pivot toward Indian facilities and that the move was part of broader American operations potentially tied to conflicts involving Iran.

Official US-India defense cooperation, deepened through frameworks like the Quadilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), focuses on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific rather than direct involvement in Middle East conflicts. Examples of such cooperation include visits by US Navy vessels, such as the USNS Charles Drew in 2022 and 2023 to facilities near Chennai, and the USS Frank Cable's port call in August 2025. These are conducted under Master Ship Repair Agreements with Indian companies like Larsen & Toubro, enabling routine maintenance and overhaul. Both governments describe these as measures to build confidence and enhance interoperability, with an emphasis on mutual benefits in joint exercises and information-sharing. India's foreign policy maintains strategic autonomy, balancing relations with the US, Russia, and Iran.

Trump, Rubio offer conflicting reasons for US entry into Iran war

Trump rejects suggestions that Israel pushed US into conflict, as his administration gives varying accounts



DNA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he ordered US forces to join Israel's attack on Iran because he believed Iran was about to strike first, contradicting the rationale offered a day earlier by his secretary of state for how the war began. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters on Monday that the US launched the attack because of fears that Iran would retaliate in response to

planned Israeli action against Tehran. "We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action; we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn't preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties," Rubio said. Trump rejected suggestions that Israel pushed the US into the conflict, as his administration gave varying accounts and faced criticism from some supporters and Democrats who accused him of launching a "war of choice." "I might have forced their (Israel's) hand," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office as he met with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. "We were having negotiations with these lunatics, and it was my opinion that they were going to attack first. If we didn't do it, they were going to attack first. I felt strongly about that." Iran has said the US assault was unprovoked. Several prominent conservative commentators ratcheted up their criticism of the Iran attacks, arguing Rubio's comments indicated that Israel, not the Trump administration, was calling the shots. "So he's flat out telling us that we're in a war with Iran because Israel forced our hand," conservative podcaster Matt Walsh wrote of Rubio to his 4 million followers on X. "This is basically the worst possible thing he could have said."



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