



# Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**EU needs to project its power assertively: Ursula von der Leyen**

Detailed News On Page-08

**IMF warns ME conflict could fuel global inflation**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Panjab govt announces austerity steps**

Detailed News On Page-02



## Austerity measures announced

# No immunity for elites in tough times, says PM

For the next two months, the fuel provided to vehicles of government departments will be reduced by 50%," 60% of vehicles in all government departments would remain off the roads for two months to help conserve fuel; two weeks holidays announced for all schools

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced a wide-ranging austerity and savings plan, saying the measures were necessary to deal with the prevailing global fuel crisis triggered by the ongoing US-Israeli conflict. Addressing the nation, the premier said the entire region had been gripped by conflict and stressed that Pakistan was pursuing diplomatic efforts to help defuse the crisis. "The entire region is currently in a state of war," the PM said, adding that Pakistan was making every effort through diplomatic channels to help resolve the situation. The prime minister also highlighted the security challenges faced by Pakistan on its western borders, saying the country continued to confront terrorism. "Pakistan is also facing terrorism on its western borders, and our armed forces are dealing with the situation effectively," he said, adding that the military was responding under the leadership of Chief of Defence Staff (CDF) Field Marshal Asim Munir. The PM also condemned the attacks on Iran, which he said resulted in the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. At the same time, he also condemned the retaliatory attacks on friendly Gulf countries. The prime minister said he had spoken with leaders of friendly countries to discuss the evolving situation. "I have held detailed discussions with the leaders of brotherly countries and conveyed that Pakistan stands shoulder to shoulder with them in

Continued on Page 06

## KP govt announces Rs2,200 subsidy for motorcyclists

Under relief package, each eligible motorcyclist will receive Rs2,200 in two instalments

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi announced a petrol subsidy package for up to 1.6 million motorcycle users in the province, saying the move is aimed at easing the burden on citizens after the federal government's recent fuel price hike. The News reported on Monday. Addressing a press conference alongside Finance Minister Muzammil Aslam and Special Assistant on Information Shafiqullah Jan, the provincial chief executive strongly criticised the recent increase in petroleum prices by the federal government, terming

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding austerity measures across the country in wake of current regional situation. - DNA

## Middle East tensions

# China opposes targeting of new Iranian leader

China's foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told reporters on Monday that Iran's decision to appoint the younger Khamenei was "based on its constitution

DNA

BEIJING: China said Monday that Iran's decision to name Mojtaba Khamenei as its new supreme leader following the killing of his father was a domestic matter, and it opposed any attempt to target him. Israel's military has threatened to target any successor to former supreme leader Ali Khamenei, who was killed over a week ago in a first wave of US and Israeli strikes on Iran. China's foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told reporters on Monday that Iran's decision to appoint the younger Khamenei was "based on its constitution." "China opposes interference in other countries' internal affairs under any pretext, and Iran's sovereignty,

Continued on Page 06

## Putin offers full support to Mojtaba

NEWS DESK

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday pledged "unwavering support" to Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, appointed after his father and predecessor was killed in US-Israeli strikes. "I would like to reaffirm our unwavering support for Tehran and solidarity with

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

**Punjab closes education institutions**

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Punjab government on Monday announced the closure of all educational institutions as the provincial authorities moves to address economic pressures caused by the conflict in the Middle East. The announcement comes as part of measures by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, following a sharp rise in petroleum prices amid global supply disruptions from the ongoing Middle East conflict. Under the new rules, all schools, colleges, and universities will remain closed from March 10 to March 31. Educational institutions may continue online classes, while examinations will go ahead as scheduled. The measures come as Pakistan, similar to other global economies, is facing fuel supply constraints due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for the movement of fuel supplies around the world.

**Polluted winds from Iran can affect Pak**

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has warned that winds carrying pollutants from Iran could deteriorate air quality in the western parts of Pakistan following strikes on Iranian oil reserves. In a statement, the Met Office said the recent bombing of oil storage facilities in Iran by Israel and the United States could lead to significant environmental consequences in the region. The United States and Israel hit five oil facilities with overnight strikes in and near the Iranian capital, an official told state TV on Sunday. According to meteorologists, Iran may face serious environmental damage as a result of the attacks.

## \$5bn oil facility

# Pakistan seeks Saudi Arabia's 5bn deposit rollover

Pakistan and the KSA were already negotiating a comprehensive economic cooperation package, and the recent escalation has given impetus to the ongoing parleys, whereby at the highest level, Pakistan asked for the required support to tackle the arising challenges

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has made eight requests to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) under long-term economic cooperation, including conversion of short-term existing deposits of \$5 billion into a long-term facility of 10 years, enhancing oil facility on deferred payment from \$1.2 billion to \$5 billion with increased tenure, securitisation of Pakistani diaspora's remittances of \$10 billion and others. Top official sources confirmed that Pakistan's economic woes were multiplying in the aftermath of ongoing geopolitical tension amid the ongoing US-Israeli-led war against Iran. On the other hand, Pakistan is negotiating with the IMF for completion of the third review under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Pakistan and the KSA were already negotiating a comprehensive economic cooperation package, and the recent escalation has given impetus to the ongoing parleys, whereby at the highest level, Pakistan asked for the required support to tackle the arising challenges. Pakistan has requested the conversion of existing KSA deposits of \$5 billion lying with the SBP into a long-term facility. This request has been made to convert a short-term deposit of \$5 billion into a long-term facility of 10 years with favourable pricing. The second request is to jack up the oil facility on deferred payment under which the KSA is being asked to enhance the facility of \$1.2 billion to \$5 billion. The tenor period for repayment may also be increased from one year to three years, whereby repayment of every tranche is made after three years. The third request has been made to the KSA for

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## SBP maintains interest rate at 10.5%

Key policy rate to remain unchanged for next two months

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Monday maintained its key interest rate at 10.5%. "The Monetary Policy Committee has decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 10.5%," the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said on its website, adding that a detailed statement would be released soon. The SBP has cut the key rate by a cumulative 1,150 basis points since mid-2024, from a record 22% in 2023, as inflation cooled sharply from multi-decade highs. Escalating tensions in the Middle East have raised concerns about disruption to shipping through the Strait of

Continued on Page 06

## Pak Army destroys ammunition depots

APP

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Army has continued its retaliatory operations against the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khwarizj and completely destroyed ammunition depots at Shaheen Base in Paktika. Security sources said the Pakistan Army carried out a timely operation targeting an Afghan Taliban post adjacent to Shawal in South Waziristan. As a result of the action, Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khwarizj terrorists were forced to flee. The Afghan Taliban post was destroyed by using explosive materials.

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## To Safeguard Maritime Trade

# Pakistan Navy launches operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr

With nearly 90% of Pakistan's trade conducted via sea, the initiative underscores the importance of safeguarding maritime routes



DNA

ISLAMABAD: In response to evolving regional maritime security chal-

enges and potential disruptions to critical sea lanes, the Pakistan Navy has launched Operation Muhafiz-ul-Bahr to protect national shipping and ensure the uninterrupted flow

of energy supplies. The operation focuses on securing Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), with escort missions being conducted in close coordination with the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC). Navy officials confirmed that merchant vessel movements are being actively monitored and controlled to guarantee safe transit. With nearly 90% of Pakistan's trade conducted via sea, the initiative underscores the importance of safeguarding maritime routes. At present, Pakistan Navy ships are escorting two merchant vessels, one of which is scheduled to arrive in Karachi today. Authorities emphasized that the Navy remains fully prepared to counter multidimensional threats and is committed to ensuring both national shipping safety and regional maritime stability.

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Actions speak louder than words

## Punjab CM transforms Punjab into developed province

She said that modern wastewater treatment plants are being established in various cities of Punjab, and added that transformation of villages into model villages will bring a positive change in the lives of rural population

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has transformed Punjab into a development and construction site, as from cities to villages in Punjab, state-of-the-art infrastructure is being built. She noted that where there were deprivations once, development will be seen now. She added that villages of Punjab are beginning to transform into model villages, as the largest network of facilities is being established there. She highlighted that Punjab Development Programme, with the development projects worth Rs 517 billion, will

open a new chapter of equitable development in the province. Chief Minister Punjab noted that drowning of cities in rain will become a thing of the past, as 380 water storage tanks will be constructed across Punjab; besides a historic upgrade of sewerage system, as HDPE pipes, with a lifespan of 100 years, will be laid in the province. She said that modern wastewater treatment plants are being established in various cities of Punjab, and added that transformation of villages into model villages will bring a positive change in the lives of rural population. She underscored that a record sav-

ing of Rs 13 billion has been made through transparent e-tendering in Punjab Development Programme, under which over 6,000 kilometers of sewerage lines and 189 kilometers of robust water drains will be constructed. She flashed that 83 disposal stations and 09 underground water storage tanks will also be built under Punjab Development Programme (PDP). Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said that building underground storage tanks will also make it possible to conserve rainwater. She highlighted that a promise of better life for every city, every village, and every area of Punjab is being fulfilled.



HYDERABAD: Women busy purchasing artificial jewelry for preparation of upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr at Resham Bazaar.

### Hanging wires removal plan reviewed

LAHORE: Lahore Divisional Commissioner Marryam Khan conducted a surprise visit to Queens Road on Monday to review the implementation of the citywide plan for the removal of hanging and loose wires.

Deputy Commissioner Lahore Ali Ejaz accompanied her during the visit. The operation, currently underway in five areas, prioritizes the elimination of dangling cables of LESCO, PTCL, and private companies.

Before the field visit, Commissioner Marryam Khan chaired a meeting with officials from Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO), Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL), Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency (PHATA), and the district administration to finalize the operational strategy. She directed that joint teams execute the cleanup plan without delay and in strict compliance with government instructions. On the occasion, the Commissioner said that disorganized and swinging wires not only compromise public safety but also detract from the city's overall appearance. She instructed that cables be properly organized in trays, clamped securely, and, where feasible, relocated underground by registered telecom companies. Commissioner Marryam Khan emphasized that the operation would be transparent, uninterrupted, and comprehensive, leaving no room for exceptions.—APP

## Digital economy opening new opportunities for youth: Tahir

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has said that the rapidly growing digital economy is creating new avenues of employment, entrepreneurship and innovation for the youth of Pakistan. He emphasized that with the right policies and supportive ecosystem, the country's young 64% population can play a transformative role in strengthening the national economy. He added that Pakistan possesses immense potential in the fields of information technology, e-commerce, freelancing and digital services. By equipping young people with modern digital skills, the country can sig-

nificantly enhance its exports of IT-enabled services and integrate more effectively with the global digital marketplace. Talking to young entrepreneurs here at the Chamber House on Monday, Sardar Tahir Mehmood stressed that the government should further facilitate the IT sector by improving internet infrastructure, ensuring affordable digital connectivity and introducing incentives for startups and technology-based businesses. He added that encouraging innovation and supporting young entrepreneurs would help generate employment and promote sustainable economic growth. He also highlighted that

the business community is keen to collaborate with educational institutions and technology firms to promote skill development programs, enabling youth to benefit from emerging opportunities in the digital economy. The ICCI President urged policymakers to prioritize digital transformation and create a business-friendly environment that empowers young professionals and entrepreneurs to contribute actively to Pakistan's economic progress. He reaffirmed that the business community would continue to support initiatives aimed at promoting innovation, technology adoption and youth empowerment.—APP

### SECP launches digital UBO Registry

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has launched a digital Ultimate Beneficial Ownership (UBO) Registry to strengthen transparency in the corporate sector and improve regulatory oversight. According to a press release issued by the SECP here on Monday, the UBO Registry will also help to prevent the misuse of companies for illegal activities.

Under the new system, companies will be required to disclose information about their Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBOs), the natural persons who ultimately own or control a company, at the time of incorporation and update this information annually to ensure accuracy. The registry has been introduced through amendments notified via S.R.O. 1355(I)/2025 under the Companies Regulations, 2024. These amendments require companies to identify and verify their Ultimate Beneficial Owners in accordance with Section 123A of the Companies Act, 2017. The initiative aims to strengthen Pakistan's corporate governance framework by increasing transparency in ownership structures and enabling regulators to identify the individuals who ultimately control corporate entities. It will also help curb the misuse of companies for unlawful activities and support effective regulatory supervision. The SECP said the digital registry will enhance corporate accountability, reinforce Pakistan's anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing (AML/CFT) framework, and contribute to building a more transparent and reliable business environment. The Commission reiterated its commitment to introducing progressive regulatory reforms and digital solutions to improve transparency, facilitate compliance, and strengthen confidence in Pakistan's corporate sector.—APP

## Puppet Shows dispel myths in KP low performing areas

PESHAWAR: In an effort to improve immunization coverage, Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programme (CHIP), a non-governmental organization, is arranging puppet shows to raise vaccination awareness in low-performing areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These interactive sessions engage communities, address misconceptions and encourage parents to ensure their children receive routine immunization. "The initiative has been launched a few months earlier with focus on those districts especially in Southern region of KP where vaccination coverage is low due to different issues," informed Durre Shahwar Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) CHIP. CHIP is playing its role in strengthening vaccination coverage and outreach in collaboration with Expanded Programme for Immunization (EPI) and through the support of GAVI Vaccine Alliance and Mannion & Daniel, a global health and social development consultancy. The objective of the initiative is to overcome vaccine hesitancy, dispel myths and educate children and parents in high-risk, low-performing union councils of Peshawar and surrounding districts through spreading awareness about importance of immunization, she told APP. The puppet shows are held in districts including Peshawar, Lakki Marwat, Bannu and D.I.Khan in local Pashto language for coverage of the message among maximum number of people in effective manner. "The significance of vaccine efficacy in safeguarding minors from lifelong disabilities is conveyed to the public through engaging and entertaining forms of communication," Durre Shahwar remarked. She said busting

myths through amusement is a very powerful approach and is showing positive results in convincing people in hard areas of the region where maximum number of polio cases are reported in the country. In the year 2025, 31 cases of polio were registered in Pakistan out of which 17 were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with main concentration in its Southern region. In puppet shows, children are invited along with their parents and the performers while spreading laughter among audience also focus on demystifying myths mostly reported among people regarding immunization especially polio drops. Durre Shahwar said that around 25 shows have been conducted over the past few months under the initiative, adding that an assessment will be carried out to evaluate its impact, particularly in terms of increased immunization coverage, reduction in the number of refusals and decrease in zero-dose children in the targeted districts. The feedback response needs time, research and study which is also part of the initiative and will be carried out soon, she continued. She added that each show engages around 500 to 600 participants, most of whom are children and the activity plays an important role in raising awareness and dispelling misconceptions about immunization within the community. The last show was held in Peshawar at Tehkal area a day before starting of Ramzan while the activity will continue in other districts after passage of the holy month. About other activities of CHIP in improving public health, she said the organization focuses on social mobilization, governance, health, immunization.—APP

## Kundi calls for solid steps to curb gas theft

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday was given separate departmental briefings at the Governor House regarding gas supply infrastructure in the province and the performance of the provincial women ombudsman office. Officials of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) briefed the Governor about gas production, domestic and industrial consumption capacity and the overall gas supply infrastructure in the province. General Manager SNGPL Waqar Ullah Khan informed the Governor about 272 cases of gas theft reported in Peshawar and other parts of the province. The briefing also covered the provision of new gas connections, improvement in gas pressure and a project for replacement of old and worn-out gas pipelines in Peshawar. Officials said that 29 projects worth Rs555 million were currently underway to upgrade the outdated gas network. The Governor was further informed that new gas pipelines stretching over 256 kilometres were being laid in Peshawar and Charsadda, along with plans to provide around 35,000 domestic gas connections. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Kundi said that ensuring better gas supply to the public was among the government's priorities. He directed officials to bring forward new projects to ensure uninterrupted gas supply with improved pressure, particularly in remote districts including Dera Ismail Khan. He also stressed the need for effective measures to curb gas theft and further improve the gas network across the province. Similarly, Governor Kundi was also given a briefing by the office of the provincial women ombudsman. Provincial Women Ombudsman Rubab Mehdi informed the Governor about the mandate and overall performance of the institution. She said that from July to December, the office heard 8,250 complaints related to women's property issues, out of which decisions had been announced in 105 cases. The Governor was also informed that the ombudsman office organized open courts in Malakand, Mardan and Hazara divisions to facilitate women in lodging complaints. The briefing also proposed holding a joint webinar involving the Governor, the ombudsman and vice chancellors to address harassment issues faced by female employees in universities, along with a proposed memorandum of understanding between the provincial and national assemblies. Governor Kundi appreciated the performance of the ombudsman office in ensuring timely redressal of complaints and provision of justice to women.—DNA

## KP govt okays 32 uplift projects

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Development Working Party of the Planning and Development Department in its meeting held on Monday approved 32 development projects worth more than Rs 52 billion in various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On the special directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Khan Afridi important projects in the education sector were approved. Several key education projects were approved to improve access to quality education in the province. Approval was granted for the establishment of a degree college

for boys in Nowshera city which will improve access to higher education in the area. Government Primary School and Government Girls Primary School will be established in Mehr Khail district Mardan. Approval was also granted for the construction of boundary walls for six schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The PDWP also approved a 26 km link road from Lakki Marwat to Halka at a cost of Rs 6163 million. The project will provide improved transportation facilities create job opportunities and usher in a new era of development. The meeting was chaired by Additional Chief Secretary Planning

and Development Department Islam Zeb. Meanwhile, In view of the prevailing international situation and rising economic challenges, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government here Monday approved a comprehensive Fuel conservation and responsible governance initiative aimed at reducing fuel consumption and promoting austerity in official expenditures. Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Information and Public Relations, Shafi Jan in a statement here said the decision was taken during a meeting of the provincial cabinet on the directives of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. He said

the fuel conservation measures would initially remain in force for two months, after which their continuation would be reviewed based on the prevailing situation and policy analysis. Under the new initiative, all government departments will conduct 100 percent of their meetings virtually (online) to reduce fuel usage and official travel. The cabinet also approved a 25 percent reduction in fuel allowances for government vehicles. With this latest decision, the overall reduction in fuel allowances has reached 50 percent, as a 25 percent cut had already been in place since the COVID-19 pandemic

precautionary measures. However, police, rescue services and other law enforcement agencies will remain exempt from the fuel cuts due to the nature of their duties. Shafi Jan further said the government has also decided to introduce a 50 percent work-from-home policy in government offices to minimize commuting and fuel consumption. The cabinet also decided to significantly reduce the unnecessary use of VIP protocol vehicles and helicopters. Additionally, austerity measures have been introduced to curb official spending, including a ban on unnecessary ceremonies and official dinners.—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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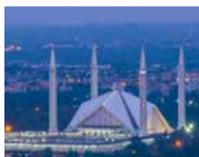
### Hospitals

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- Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
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- RGH.....9290301-7
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- PIMS.....9261170-79
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### Islamabad Metropolitan

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

### Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# CCP calls for civil aviation sector's structural reset

The study calls for a National Civil Aviation Roadmap and a long-term phased Reform & Stabilization Plan to build a resilient, investment-ready ecosystem, integrating air travel, tourism, financing, and commercial services, while ensuring regulatory clarity, competitive neutrality, financial sustainability, and strategic policy coordination

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) here on Monday released the draft of the report titled "Competition in the Skies: Pakistan's Civil Aviation Market Assessment," an evidence-based, comprehensive competition assessment study of Pakistan's civil aviation sector, which evaluates nearly two decades of data (2006-2025) along with stakeholder consultation. Over the review period, Pakistan's civil aviation sector served nearly 340 million passengers, with annual traffic rising from 12.8 million in 2006-07 to 24.3 million in 2024-25—an 89% increase. This translates into a moderate overall CAGR of approximately 3.42% over 19 years. However, this growth was driven almost entirely by the international segment (CAGR 5.46%), while domestic traffic remained nearly stagnant (CAGR 0.19%). Overall, while passenger volumes have expanded, the sector's structural depth and competitive strength have not kept pace, particu-

larly when measured against Pakistan's population growth and long-term economic potential, according to the study. The report concludes that Pakistan has lacked a unified national aviation vision, treating civil aviation as a strategic economic sector rather than an administrative function. The CCP states clearly: "Civil aviation cannot be governed in silos." The study highlights structural gaps, including the absence of an integrated national aviation strategy, fragmented governance and policy inconsistency across regulatory, fiscal, and financial institutions, domestic market stagnation relative to international growth, frequent airline exits and financial fragility among local carriers, weak aviation-specific financing frameworks, underutilization of airports, increasing reliance on Gulf-based carriers, and competitive asymmetry arising from differences in regional macroeconomic factors as well as domestic and foreign state-backed players. The report

stresses that civil aviation is critical for economic connectivity, trade, and mobility, yet regional tensions and restricted airspace in the country and nearby hubs highlight Pakistan's vulnerability. This further underscores the need for a strategically strong and self-reliant domestic civil aviation sector rather than overdependence on foreign carriers. The study calls for a National Civil Aviation Roadmap and a long-term phased Reform & Stabilization Plan to build a resilient, investment-ready ecosystem, integrating air travel, tourism, financing, and commercial services, while ensuring regulatory clarity, competitive neutrality, financial sustainability, and strategic policy coordination. Key priorities include modernization of Karachi and Lahore terminals, secondary airports (Skardu, Gilgit), e-gates, digital slot allocation, a unified aviation data hub, and real-time IBMS reconciliation, guided by demand-based, fiscally prudent planning. The report also recom-

mends aviation- and tourism-specific financing and insurance, predictable FX and fee policies, tax rationalization, self-sustaining airport commercial operations with strategic private participation, evidence-based bilateral engagement, domestic capacity building, low-cost carrier promotion, SME participation, ancillary services, and local MRO development to restore competitive balance and strengthen the domestic aviation ecosystem. The report emphasizes that competitive neutrality is essential, historical privileges should be reassessed, market entry must remain open, and strategic oversight of critical aviation assets must be retained. Collectively, these measures aim to transition Pakistan's aviation sector from volume growth to structurally resilient, competition-driven development. The draft report is available on the CCP website for stakeholder comments for a limited period, and the final report will be published following the consultation process.—DNA

## ICT police arrest two dacoits

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police arrested two members of the Wasai gang involved in robbery and snatching incidents during an operation in the jurisdiction of Bani Gala police station. A police official told APP on Monday that the Bani Gala police team conducted the operation and apprehended two accused belonging to the Wasai gang, involved in multiple robbery incidents in the area. He said the police recovered snatched motorcycles worth millions of rupees, cash and valuable mobile phones from their possession. The official said weapons along with ammunition used in the crimes were also recovered from the accused. During initial investigation, the accused confessed to their involvement in multiple incidents of snatching motorcycles, cash and other valuables at gunpoint. Deputy Inspector General of Police, Muhammad Jawad Tariq said all legal requirements would be fulfilled to ensure strict punishment for the arrested suspects. He said indiscriminate action would continue against criminals. The DIG added that Islamabad Police were carrying out large-scale operations against organised and active gangs to ensure the protection of citizens and maintain law and order in the federal capital.—APP

## Zia Shah new PNRA Chairman

ISLAMABAD: The government has officially appointed Zia Hussain Shah as Chairman of the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority (PNRA) for a term of four years, with effect from February 16. Zia Hussain Shah brings over three decades of distinguished experience in nuclear safety, radiation protection, and regulatory affairs. Prior to his appointment as Chairman, he served as Member (Executive) of PNRA, where he played a pivotal role in strengthening Pakistan's nuclear safety standards and regulatory oversight. Throughout his career, Shah has held key technical and leadership positions, making significant contributions to the development of Pakistan's nuclear regulatory framework. He possesses extensive international experience, with particular expertise in providing regulatory support to countries embarking on nuclear power programs and leading international peer review missions aimed at advancing effective regulatory infrastructure.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Tailors are busy stitching clothes for customers at KhanaPul in connection with upcoming Eidul Fitr.

## CDA announces Eid bonus for Muslim staff

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) administration has approved one basic salary as an Eid bonus allowance for all Muslim employees and officers and one basic salary as an Easter allowance for Christian employees under an agreement reached with the CDA Mazdoor Union (CBA). A formal notification has been issued in this regard. Ac-

ording to the notification, Muslim employees will receive the Eid bonus on March 17, while Christian employees will be paid the Easter allowance on March 24. Contract, daily-wage and muster roll employees working in the organization will be given the allowance in accordance with the regular pay scales. The announcement sparked celebrations among CDA employees, with many gathering outside the union office. Speaking on the occasion, CDA Mazdoor Union (CBA) General Secretary Chaudhry Mu-

hammad Yasin thanked CDA Chairman Chaudhry Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Member Administration Talat Mahmood, Member Finance Tahir Naem Akhtar and the CDA administration for approving the allowances. He said the decision would help lower-paid employees celebrate their religious festivals in a better way amid rising inflation. He also urged the CDA chairman to hold talks with the CBA Union to resolve employees' demands on a priority basis and address workers' concerns.

## Jane Marriott visits NEOC at NDMA HQs

ISLAMABAD: United Kingdom High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, visited the National Emergencies Operation Center (NEOC) at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Headquarters, where she was received by Chairman NDMA, Lt Gen Inam Haider Malik. The visit focused on an overview of Pakistan's disaster preparedness architecture, early warning mechanisms, and the technological capabilities of NEOC for monitoring and response coordination. During the visit, the High Commissioner was briefed on NDMA's Disaster Early Warning and Technology Ecosystem, including digital portals and operational dashboards functioning at the NEOC. Chairman NDMA, Lt Gen Inam Haider Malik, highlighted NDMA's role as the lead national coordinating body for disaster management, emphasizing preparedness, anticipatory actions, and whole-of-government coordination to address evolving disaster risks. The delegation was also briefed on Lens Pakistan 2026, outlining seasonal hazard patterns and preparedness priorities, followed by insights into the Global Disaster Lens 2026 and the Global Disaster Calendar. NDMA's Global Disaster App and key national initiatives for early warning dissemination, risk communication, academic collaboration, Global and Regional Collaborations and technology-driven disaster management were also presented. Jane Marriott appreciated the integrated and technology-enabled approach adopted by NDMA to strengthen disaster risk reduction and national preparedness. She commended the Authority's focus on innovation, inter-agency coordination, and evidence-based planning to mitigate the impacts of disasters in an era of increasing climate risks.—APP

## Kidnapping case of government employee case

# Bail cancellation plea withdrawn

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Monday heard a case regarding the cancellation of bail granted to an accused in a kidnapping case involving a government employee who was allegedly abducted after refusing to pay extortion. The court dismissed the bail cancellation plea after it was withdrawn and directed the trial court to decide the case within two months. A two-member bench, headed by Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, heard the case. The court observed that if the ac-

cused misuses the concession of bail, the complainant may approach the court again for cancellation of bail. During the hearing, counsel for the complainant argued that the accused, Bangul Khan, is also nominated in eight other kidnapping cases. He stated that the government vehicle of the abducted employee had been recovered from the accused's house. The lawyer further informed the court that the accused was arrested after a five-hour police encounter and that grenades were also recovered from his residence. At this point, Justice Hashim Khan Kakar questioned how the accused managed

to survive if firing had continued for five hours. During the proceedings, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim also addressed the accused, stating "What do you think of this country? You have started kidnapping government employees." The complainant's counsel further submitted that the accused is an influential person with political connections and is accused of kidnapping a government employee in District Qila Saifullah. Later, the court dismissed the bail cancellation plea on the basis that it had been withdrawn and directed the trial court to conclude the proceedings within two months.

## AIOU VC emphasizes reciting Quran with comprehension

ISLAMABAD: Prof. Dr Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has emphasized the importance of reciting the Quran with comprehension and thoughtful reflection rather than merely reading it aloud. He shared these remarks during the closing ceremony of a 20-day "Translation and Tajweed of the Qur'an Course", organized specifically for university staff. The program conducted under the auspices of the Department of Quran and Tafseer, witnessed a strong turnout of teachers, administrators and course participants, highlighting the university's commitment to promoting a deeper understanding of the Quran among its academic community. Addressing the ceremony, Prof. Dr Nasir Mahmood said reciting the Holy Quran with deliberation helps in better understanding its meanings and message which could then be applied in practical life. Appreciating the efforts of the Department of Quran and Tafseer, he noted that such training courses provide employees with a valuable opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Quran while also enhancing their religious and moral development. He further approved the continuation of this course on a regular basis in the future. Dean of the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Prof. Dr Mohyuddin Hashmi said that while reciting the Holy Quran brought virtue and blessings, understanding its meaning was equally essential to truly grasp the message of the Creator. He added that education alone was not enough, moral training was also crucial as the Quran's teachings laid the foundation for a beautiful and ethical society. Chairman, Department of Quran and Tafseer, Dr Sanaullah Hussain explained that the course was aimed to provide employees with the opportunity to learn the Quran with correct pronunciation, Tajweed rules and translation. Participants were taught the basic rules of Tajweed, correct articulation of letters (Makharij), principles of proper recitation and translation of selected Quranic portions, enabling them to understand and apply its message in their lives. Dr Hafiz Muhammad Arshad Iqbal reported that 40 male and 20 female participants completed the course with instructors contributing their services voluntarily. The ceremony concluded with the distribution of certificates among participants who successfully completed the course.—DNA

## Pakistan to hold 5G spectrum auction today

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will hold its long-awaited auction for Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS), including 5G spectrum, on Tuesday. The auction will offer spectrum in six frequency bands, with a total of 597.2 MHz available. Four of these bands are being introduced for the first time to support the rollout of 5G services in the country. As part of preparations, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) recently held a mock auction session to test the bidding system and ensure a smooth process. Representatives of telecom operators Jazz, Zong and Ufone joined the session online and tested the specialised auction software. All three operators have already submitted \$15 million each as pre-bid earnest money, bringing the total amount to \$45 million. The government expects to generate more than \$634 million from the auction, depending on the level of competition and the final spectrum prices.—APP

## Hybrid-electric Bus service launched in Turbat

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Balochistan has formally launched the Green People's Bus Service in Turbat, marking a major step toward improving public transport facilities in the Makran region. The hybrid-electric buses, imported from China, are environmentally friendly low-emission vehicles designed to reduce air pollution and promote sustainable urban transport, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Monday.

Equipped with modern technology and fuel-efficient systems, the buses aim to provide a cleaner and more reliable public transport option for commuters. Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfaraz Bugti inaugurated the modern transport service by driving one of the buses himself during a ceremony held at Circuit House Turbat. According to an official statement, the newly launched bus service is expected to provide safe, comfortable and affordable transportation to more than 4,500 passengers daily in Turbat and across Kech district. The initiative will significantly improve urban mobility and provide residents with a reliable public transport system. Initially, four modern buses have been allocated for the city. The buses will operate on a nearly 19-kilometre route with 18 designated bus stations being established along the corridor. Each bus is equipped with modern facilities, including 37 seats and space to accommodate around 100 passengers in total. Special seats have been reserved for women, children and elderly passengers, while wheelchair access has also been provided for persons with disabilities. Safety features such as emergency exits and fire extinguishers have been installed, along with electronic screens displaying route information for passengers. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti said that the launch of the Green People's Bus Service will help provide the people of Turbat with quality and secure travel facilities. "If Allah wills, next year we will launch pink buses for our daughters, students and women of Turbat so they can commute in a dignified, safe and secure environment," said Sarfaraz Bugti. The launch of the service in Turbat follows the introduction of modern Chinese low-emission buses in Quetta. The provincial capital first received eight eco-friendly buses imported from China in July 2023, which initially operated on a single route linking Sariab Road with Airport Chowk. To expand the service, in December 2025, an additional 17 buses were added to the fleet, bringing the total number of Chinese buses operating in Quetta to 25, including four pink buses reserved for women passengers. The expanded fleet has enabled new routes across the city, improving public transport connectivity and reducing overcrowding.

## Briefs

## China's expanding digital services making travel easier

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Overseas journalists and content creators say China's expanding digital services - from mobile payments to translation tools - are making it easier for people from abroad to navigate daily life when they visit or work in the country, according to a report carried by China Economic Net (CEN) on Monday.

China recorded more than 150 million inbound visits in 2025, a year-on-year increase of over 17 percent, while spending by inbound travelers surpassed 130 billion U.S. dollars, Minister of Culture and Tourism Sun Yeli said at a press conference on the sidelines of the annual session of the national legislature on March 7. Visa-free entries exceeded 30 million last year, and spending by inbound tourists through mobile payment platforms reached about 80 billion yuan (11.59 billion U.S. dollars), according to the minister. For people who regularly travel to China, the changes are visible in everyday situations such as paying for taxis or buying train tickets. A Turkish journalist Muzafer Güsar said that when he first arrived in China in 2023, using international credit cards could be difficult in some places. "When I came first, we cannot use our credit cards... the only way to spend money was by WeChat or Alipay," he said, recalling his early experiences. "But now there are too many facilities, too many advantages for tourists." Muhammad Asghar, a Pakistani journalist who has lived in China for several years, said mobile apps now simplify much of daily life.

"I always get my ticket booked... for air traveling or train traveling," he said, explaining that transportation can often be arranged from home through mobile platforms. "Living in China is very easy because of different apps." He added that translation tools on smartphones help overcome language barriers, allowing visitors to communicate more easily with shopkeepers, drivers or officials. Other travelers point to practical details that shape the first impression of arriving in the country. Irfan Ashraf who has visited China four times said the entry process felt straightforward. "When I stepped out from the plane and proceeded for immigration, everything was very well organized," Ashraf, who is also a Pakistani think tank director, said. Visitors simply needed to fill out an arrival card and present their travel documents, he recalled. "If you have all the legal documents, then I think it's not a problem."



ISLAMABAD: A beautiful view of cherry blossoms flourishing and blooming along Murree Road, marking the arrival of spring in the Federal Capital.

## PMD forecast heavy rain, wind and thunderstorm

The federal capital and its surrounding areas are also not expected to be spared. Islamabad, the Pothohar region, Murree, Galliyat, and nearby areas are forecast to receive rain and thunderstorm activity from the night of March 9 through March 11, with occasional breaks in between

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Monday predicted heavy rain, wind, and thunderstorm in the upper parts of the country from March 9-12 due to the effect of a westerly wave. The westerly wave approaching from the west is likely to trigger widespread and potentially unsettled weather conditions across multiple regions. Under the influence of this weather system, the districts of Chitral, Dir, Swat, Kohistan, Shangla, Battagram, Buner, Malakand, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, along with Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir, are expected to bear

the brunt of the system. These areas are forecast to experience partly cloudy to fully overcast skies, accompanied by moderate rain, strong winds, and thunderstorm activity, with heavy downpours likely at times. This spell is expected to begin from Monday evening and last through March 12. Meanwhile, lighter rain and thunderstorm activity is also anticipated across a broader belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on March 10 and March 11. The districts of Khyber, Mohmand, Peshawar, Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Bajaur, Bannu, Waziristan, Orakzai, Kurram, Kohat, Hangu, and Mianwali are all expected to witness spells of light rain and gusty winds during this period. The federal capital and its

surrounding areas are also not expected to be spared. Islamabad, the Pothohar region, Murree, Galliyat, and nearby areas are forecast to receive rain and thunderstorm activity from the night of March 9 through March 11, with occasional breaks in between. Hailstorms at isolated places is additionally likely across Islamabad and the upper parts of the country during the forecast period. The Met Office has warned of several possible impacts associated with this weather system. Daytime temperatures across upper Pakistan are expected to drop by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius. There is also a risk of landslides in vulnerable mountainous areas of upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Kashmir,

and residents of these regions are urged to exercise caution. Tourists planning to visit northern areas are strongly advised to avoid unnecessary travel during this period and to remain alert to changing conditions. The farmers across the affected regions are encouraged to take appropriate measures to protect their crops in light of the forecast. The Met Office has flagged a concern regarding air quality. Owing to the prevailing situation in Iran, winds blowing into Pakistan may carry pollutants that could significantly deteriorate air quality, particularly in the western parts of the country. The authorities and the general public are urged to stay updated with the latest forecasts and take all necessary precautions for their safety.

## Govt backing boosts cotton production

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's cotton sector has shown signs of recovery this season, with final production reaching about 5.6 million bales, a modest increase over the previous year and encouraging for farmers and the textile industry alike. Business leader and former Islamabad Chamber of Commerce president Shahid Rasheed Butt welcomed the improvement, describing it as a positive signal for the country's agriculture and export-oriented textile sector. He said the gradual revival of cotton production demonstrates that government initiatives to support farmers and encourage early sowing are beginning to yield results. He said that Sindh emerged as the leading cotton-producing province this season, overtaking Punjab for the first time. Favourable weather conditions and timely sowing contributed to better output in the province. Shahid Rasheed Butt said the government's efforts to revive cotton cultivation, including awareness campaigns, incentives for early sowing, and coordination with provincial agriculture departments, have helped restore some confidence among growers. He noted that cotton remains a strategic crop for Pakistan because it supports millions of livelihoods across farming, ginning, and textile manufacturing. The improvement in production is an encouraging development for farmers and the textile sector, he said, adding that a stronger cotton crop can help reduce reliance on imported raw cotton and support value-added exports. The increase in production comes as farmers in Sindh and Punjab have already begun preparations for the next crop. Early sowing activity has started in several cotton-growing belts, reflecting cautious optimism among growers who hope for better yields in the coming season. —DNA

## SC disposes of appeal against Khadim

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Monday disposed of an appeal seeking cancellation of the bail of Khadim Hussain Rizvi after declaring it infructuous. A two-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi heard the case. During the hearing, Additional Advocate General Punjab Ahmad Raza Gilani informed the court that Khadim Hussain Rizvi had passed away and the trial in the case had also been completed. After hearing the arguments, the court observed that since the respondent had died and the trial had already concluded, the appeal had become ineffective. —APP

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## From Gaza to Minab

SADAF NOREEN AWAN

CHILDREN must never be targets of violence. Schools and hospitals must remain safe places even during conflict. United Nations American-Israeli attacks in Middle East in recent years have shown a deeply disturbing pattern: children and schools are increasingly becoming victims of their brutal violence. From the devastated neighborhoods of the Gaza Strip to the tragic air-strike on a school in Minab, the loss of young lives has raised serious concerns among humanitarian organizations, educators, and international institutions. The destruction of schools and the killing of children represent not only a humanitarian tragedy but also the destruction of a society's future. Reports from international and regional media, including Al Jazeera and other global outlets, indicate that Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip have had a devastating impact on civilians. Since the escalation of the war in October 2023, more than 18,000 Palestinian children have reportedly been killed, while the overall death toll has surpassed 90,000 lives. Tens of thousands more people have been injured, displaced from their homes, or separated from their families. Child-protection organizations warn that the number of children affected by trauma, hunger, and forced displacement is far greater, with many facing severe and long-term psychological consequences. Education infrastructure in Gaza has also

suffered catastrophic damage. Reports from educational authorities and humanitarian agencies suggest that more than 350 schools have been destroyed or severely damaged. A large majority of Gaza's educational facilities have been impacted by airstrikes or military operations. As a result, hundreds of thousands of children have been unable to continue their education. Many school buildings have been turned into emergency shelters for displaced families, while others have been reduced to rubble. Education experts warn that prolonged disruptions by Israel & America could lead to the emergence of a "lost generation" deprived of stable learning opportunities. International child-protection organizations, United Nations Charter, including UNICEF, have repeatedly emphasized that children must never be targets of violence. These organizations warn that armed conflicts expose children to severe risks, including death, injury, displacement, psychological trauma, and loss of education. According to humanitarian experts, the protection of children is a fundamental responsibility of all parties involved in conflict. Historically, Israeli and American strikes on children, schools, and hospitals are not new; they reflect a long and troubling pattern seen in multiple conflicts over decades. Numerous incidents have shown civilian facilities, including educational institutions and medical centers, being hit during US-Israeli military operations in Middle East, raising serious concerns among human

rights observers. The Minab incident reflects a broader historical pattern in which civilian institutions have been struck by US-Israeli attacks. On 8 April 1970, Israeli Phantom fighter jets bombed the Bahr al-Baqar elementary school in Egypt's Sharqia Governorate, killing 46 children out of about 130 students present in their classrooms. On 13 February 1991, during the Gulf War, the United States Air Force bombed the Amiriyah civilian shelter in Baghdad, killing at least 408 civilians, most of them women, children, and elderly people. On 18 April 1996, during the Qana massacre, Israeli artillery shelled a compound of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in Qana, southern Lebanon, where around 800 civilians had taken refuge, killing 106 people and injuring more than 116. Later, on 3 October 2015, an AC-130 gunship of the United States Air Force bombed a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 42 people including 24 patients and 14 staff members. In the Gaza Strip, attacks on educational facilities have reached unprecedented levels since October 2023. By early 2025, about 778 of Gaza's 815 schools, approximately 95.5 percent, had been partially or completely destroyed. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees reported that nearly one million displaced civilians sought shelter in its schools, yet by July 2025 at least 1,000 people had been killed and 2,527 wounded inside these school shelters. Journalistic

investigations further reported that Israeli forces established a "special strikes cell" that classified schools as strategic "centres of gravity." Together, these incidents from Egypt in 1970 to Iraq in 1991, Lebanon in 1996, Afghanistan in 2015, Gaza after 2023, and the recent tragedy in Minab, illustrate a recurring pattern in which civilian spaces such as schools and shelters become sites of devastation, raising serious concerns among humanitarian organizations about the protection of civilians and children during armed conflict. To conclude, attacks on schools are particularly alarming because they destroy more than buildings; they destroy hope and opportunity. Education institutions are meant to be places of safety where children can learn, grow, and build a better future. When schools become battlefields, the consequences extend far beyond the immediate casualties. Entire communities lose their chance for progress, stability, and peace. The tragedies witnessed in Gaza and Minab demonstrate the urgent need for stronger global action to protect children. Each lost child represents a future of generations, that will never be realized, and each destroyed classroom represents a step backward for humanity. Schools must remain sanctuaries, not battlefields, and the world must make it clear: harming children to achieve political or military aims is absolutely unacceptable and must stop now. The protection of children is not optional, it is humanity's highest duty.

## China, Pakistan to establish joint lab

DNA

ISLAMABAD: We are working on establishing a joint laboratory on smart and digital agriculture," Pakistan's Ambassador to China Khalil Hashmi told China Economic Net (CEN) when asked about Pakistan's plans to enhance agricultural artificial intelligence (AI) cooperation with China during the ongoing Two Sessions. Pakistan is looking forward to deploying AI in the agricultural sector, primarily to boost productivity in crops, livestock, fruits and vegetables, and even in improving cold chain logistics, according to the Ambassador.

In January 2026, the Pakistan-China B2B Agriculture Investment Conference resulted in nearly 80 MoUs and agreements worth \$4.5 billion between the two countries' companies, the Ambassador mentioned.

"We are working not only on the educational side, but also on the research and development side, as well as the commercialization and business side of agriculture," he noted.

## Ambassador Khan visits Ramadan Iftar tent

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Pakistan to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Shafiqat Ali Khan visited the Ramadan Iftar tent established by Vista Maritime Travel and Tourism at Port Rashid in Dubai.

The tent provides daily Iftar meals to hundreds of people throughout the holy month of Ramadan as part of its initiative aimed at serving the wider community. During his visit, Ambassador Shafiqat Ali Khan distributed food boxes among attendees and warmly interacted with visitors present at the tent, said a press release issued here on Monday.

The ambassador appreciated Dr. Zafar Tahir Rizvi Chief Executive Officer, and the management of Vista Maritime Travel and Tourism for the initiative, describing it as an excellent example of how Pakistani businesses in the UAE were contributing positively to society and supporting community welfare. He also expressed gratitude to the authorities of the Government of Dubai for their support in facilitating the establishment of the iftar tent. —APP

## The Gulf's strategic options in a time of regional escalation

DR. KHALID AL-JABER

DOHA: The Gulf states are treating the ongoing war between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other as a pivotal moment – not merely in terms of the scale of the direct military threat, but in terms of the profound transformations reshaping the region's architecture and the new maps of power and influence they may produce. This complexity deeply weaves together the political, economic, defense and social dimensions of the crisis, making the decision to "avoid being drawn into war" part of a broader vision for repositioning the Gulf within regional and international orders. Politically, the Gulf states have adopted an unambiguous stance: refusal to become embroiled in an all-out war despite the fact that their territories, military bases and critical installations now fall within the targeting range of Iranian missiles and drones at escalatory levels measured by the magnitude of the threat and its direct implications for sovereignty and national security. Handout satellite image shows damage at Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura refinery in the Eastern Province. (Photo by Satellite image ©2026 Vantor / AFP)

Several Gulf officials characterized this escalation as a crossing of red lines and a flagrant violation of sovereignty – signaling a rejection of any attempt to turn Gulf geography into an extension of the military conflict between external parties. Yet this position should not be understood as absolute neutrality; rather, it reflects a strategic awareness that the current war is fundamentally a US-Israeli confrontation with Iran, and that dragging the Gulf into the heart of this equation would not serve its interests but would instead expose it to prolonged security and economic attrition, constraining its ability to pursue its developmental priorities. In the same vein, the behavior of key states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar reveals a growing trend toward diversifying international partnerships and strengthening strategic decision-making autonomy, while simultaneously maintaining existing security relationships with the US.

The continuation of open channels of communication with Tehran – whether through the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement brokered by China or through the regional mediation efforts undertaken by Qatar and Oman – confirms that the Gulf states are not seeking to sever all bridges, but to manage the conflict within a diplomatic framework that mitigates risks and calibrates tensions. This political compass represents one of the most significant shifts of the current phase and is likely to deepen in the future as the Gulf's role expands as a balancing actor seeking equilibrium between deterrence and dialogue, rather than engaging in rigid alignments or direct confrontations. Gulf air defense systems have demonstrated an advanced level of effectiveness in countering Iranian missile

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and drone attacks, successfully intercepting and downing more than 90 percent of these threats. This performance reflects a high degree of operational readiness and integration between surveillance, early warning, and interception capabilities – limiting potential damage and reinforcing the Gulf states' ability to protect their airspace and critical infrastructure.

Nevertheless, these developments have revealed that possessing state-of-the-art air defense systems does not entirely eliminate the risks associated with low-cost, high-density missile and drone warfare. The attacks exposed coverage gaps in certain areas and confirmed that defense systems cannot remain confined to a narrow national framework but require an integrated regional approach and diversified international partnerships. In this context, there is growing discussion of accelerating the establishment of joint early warning systems, linking radar and air defense networks across the Gulf states, and updating defense doctrine so that it extends beyond the protection of military bases to encompass cities, economic infrastructure, and society as a whole.

Going forward, the Gulf states will move toward greater investment in multi-layered air defense, cyber warfare capabilities, and both defensive and offensive drone systems – while seeking to avoid appearing as an offensive party that invites broad-scale targeting. This pragmatic defense posture is part of a larger transition from complete reliance on the Western security umbrella to building growing indigenous capabilities, without reaching a rupture with traditional partners. Economically, strikes targeting facilities and areas near oil and gas infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and elsewhere have exposed a growing degree of fragility in what is considered "the heart of the global economy." The Gulf states supply approximately one-fifth of the world's oil, meaning any disruption to production or export is swiftly reflected in global energy prices and international financial markets.

Clear indicators of this impact have emerged, including the temporary suspension of gas production in Qatar and oil production in Kuwait under force majeure clauses in certain investment contracts, the temporary closure of some facilities, rising insurance costs for shipping, and the rerouting of maritime transport lanes. These developments signal a gradual transformation of the crisis from a regional security threat into an economic risk with repercussions extending across the global economic system. At the level of Gulf development models, the persistence of tensions threatens the image these states have sought to establish as stable, attractive hubs for investment, tourism, logistics, and financial services. The suspension of some flights, the postponement of international events and conferences, and the implementation of precautionary measures to protect civilians all raise the cost of doing business and deepen market uncertainty. This may compel Gulf governments to reassess their economic strategies – balancing the continuation of economic diversification with protecting gains already achieved, while enhancing supply chain resilience, reducing risk exposure, and expanding investment in energy security and defense technologies linked to the protection of critical economic infrastructure.

Socially, the recurring scenes of missiles, repeated alerts, and a state of "permanent mobilization" have produced a new social reality in Gulf societies. These communities, accustomed for decades to high levels of stability, prosperity, and relative insulation from regional conflicts, found themselves suddenly confronting direct manifestations of modern warfare.

# The Uncertain Endgame of the Iran War

Qamar Bashir



The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps continues to function as the backbone of Iran's defense system.

With hundreds of thousands of personnel and extensive logistical networks, it represents both a military force and a political institution deeply integrated into the country's governance. Even if several of its facilities have been damaged, the organization itself remains intact and committed to defending the state. Because of this resilience, the center of gravity in the war is gradually shifting away from purely military objectives toward economic pressure—particularly control over global energy...

THE war between the United States-Israel alliance and Iran has entered a complex phase where battlefield destruction has not translated into political collapse. The campaign began with clearly articulated objectives: dismantle Iran's nuclear capability, destroy its ballistic missile infrastructure, degrade its naval forces, and eliminate the networks through which Iran projects power across the Middle East. In the early stages of the conflict, large-scale aerial operations targeted missile depots, drone launch facilities, naval installations, command centers, and strategic infrastructure deep inside Iranian territory, including several high-value targets around Tehran. Weeks into the war, however, the central political objective—the collapse or surrender of the Iranian regime—has not occurred. Iran's military capacity has unquestionably been damaged. Missile sites, storage depots, air defense systems, and drone manufacturing facilities have been hit repeatedly. Thousands of targets have reportedly been struck, and casualties have included civilians, senior officials, and military commanders. Yet the Iranian state itself remains intact. The leadership vacuum created by early strikes has been quickly filled. Replacement commanders have taken control of military units, administrative institutions continue to function, and the constitutional process for confirming or selecting national leadership is underway. This rapid institutional continuity reflects a fundamental design feature of the Iranian political system: it was built to withstand external shocks. The result is a strategic paradox. Iran's military infrastructure has been degraded, but its governing system survives. Wars aimed primarily at destroying weapons systems can achieve impressive tactical results while failing to achieve strategic victory if the political structure directing those weapons remains functional. Iran's history over the past four decades illustrates this resilience. The country has endured sanctions, economic isolation, technological restrictions, and sustained geopolitical pressure. During that period, Iran invested heavily in domestic industrial capabilities, scientific research, and decentralized defense production. The destruction of physical facilities therefore does not eliminate the technical knowledge, engineering expertise, or human capital that produced them. As long as these capabilities remain embedded within the state's institutions, rebuilding remains possible. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps continues to function as the backbone of Iran's defense system. With hundreds of thousands of personnel and extensive logistical networks, it represents both a military force and a political institution deeply integrated into the country's governance. Even if several of its facilities have been damaged, the organization itself remains intact and committed to defending the state. Because of this resilience, the center of gravity in the war is gradually shifting away from purely military objectives toward economic pressure—particularly control over global energy routes. The Strait of Hormuz has become the most critical strategic flashpoint. This narrow waterway connects the Persian Gulf to global markets and carries a substantial share of the world's oil supply. Under normal circumstances, millions of barrels of crude oil move through the strait every day, fueling industries,

transportation systems, and national economies across multiple continents. Disruption in this corridor sends immediate shockwaves through global markets. Oil is the lifeblood of modern economies. Transportation networks, manufacturing industries, agricultural systems, and global logistics chains all depend on stable energy supplies. When oil flow is threatened, the consequences extend far beyond the battlefield. The current conflict has already produced visible economic effects. Oil prices have risen significantly across international markets, and the impact is being felt across the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Higher energy prices are increasing transportation costs, raising manufacturing expenses, and placing upward pressure on inflation. Even countries that produce their own oil cannot fully escape these effects. Modern economies are deeply interconnected. Rising shipping costs, higher insurance premiums for maritime transport, and disruptions in global supply chains raise the cost of goods and services almost everywhere. As fuel prices rise, the cost of living rises with them. Transportation becomes more expensive. Food prices increase because agriculture depends heavily on fuel for machinery and distribution. Industrial production costs rise. Consumers experience declining purchasing power. This economic pressure may ultimately become the most powerful force influencing the war's outcome. Democratic societies are especially sensitive to such economic shocks. In the United States and across Europe, populations are politically active and economically demanding. When citizens begin to experience sustained increases in living costs—whether through gasoline prices, heating bills, or inflation in essential goods—they inevitably question the policies responsible for those conditions. Public debate intensifies. Legislatures face scrutiny. Opposition movements gain momentum. Citizens begin asking whether the objectives of a war justify the economic hardship imposed upon them. If energy prices continue rising for a prolonged period, domestic pressure within Western societies could grow rapidly. Protest movements, political opposition, and electoral pressures may begin pushing governments toward negotiation or de-escalation. Energy-importing nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America may also demand stability in global markets. Many developing economies are extremely vulnerable to energy price spikes. Rising fuel costs strain national budgets, accelerate inflation, and threaten economic stability. These countries may therefore use diplomatic channels to push for an end to hostilities. Interestingly, Iran itself may be relatively better positioned to endure prolonged energy disruptions. As a major oil producer with experience surviving decades of sanctions, the country has developed economic coping mechanisms that wealthier societies rarely face. This does not mean Iran is immune to economic pain, but its population has historically endured hardship more frequently than populations in highly industrialized economies. In a prolonged conflict, this difference in economic tolerance may influence political dynamics. Another critical dimension of this war is unfolding beyond the immediate battlefield. Major global powers such as China and Russia are watching the conflict extremely closely.

While not directly involved in the fighting, both countries are observing every stage of the conflict with strategic interest. Modern wars serve not only as military confrontations but also as real-time laboratories of technological and strategic knowledge. China and Russia are likely analyzing every aspect of the conflict: the deployment of U.S. naval forces, the logistics of long-distance power projection, the performance of advanced missile defenses, the effectiveness of cyber warfare techniques, and the coordination between allied military forces. They are also observing the economic tools used in the conflict—sanctions, financial restrictions, and trade disruptions.

By studying these dynamics, both countries can refine their own strategic planning. Every weapon system used in the war provides valuable data. Every military maneuver reveals operational strengths and weaknesses. Every cyberattack or defensive response demonstrates new capabilities. In effect, the war provides China and Russia with a rare opportunity to observe the full spectrum of American and allied military power in real-world conditions. This information can then be incorporated into their own military development programs. Lessons drawn from the conflict may influence the design of future missile systems, air defense networks, naval strategies, and cyber warfare capabilities. In the long term, this means the conflict could unintentionally accelerate the military modernization of America's strategic competitors.

By revealing operational methods, logistical patterns, and technological performance under battlefield conditions, the war offers insights that might otherwise take decades to obtain. From this perspective, the geopolitical consequences of the conflict extend far beyond the Middle East. The war is simultaneously reshaping energy markets, testing political resilience within democratic societies, and providing valuable strategic intelligence to rival global powers. These multiple pressures may ultimately shape the war's conclusion. Military power alone rarely determines the final outcome of conflicts involving resilient states. Economic pressure, political legitimacy, and international strategic calculations often play equally decisive roles. Iran has absorbed significant military damage but remains politically intact. The United States and Israel possess overwhelming military capability but face increasing economic and geopolitical complications as the conflict continues. Meanwhile, global powers observing from the sidelines are quietly gathering knowledge that could reshape future strategic balances. In the end, the decisive factor may not be the destruction of missiles or military bases. The outcome may instead be determined by the economic strain of rising energy prices, the political pressure of public opinion, and the strategic calculations of global powers watching closely from afar. The war's endgame therefore remains uncertain. What began as a campaign to destroy military capabilities may ultimately evolve into a broader contest involving economics, diplomacy, and the shifting balance of global power.

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

## US Military Buildup in Persian Gulf

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Yet the pendulum swing carries its own risks. A world in which every state retreats behind its own walls is ill-equipped to manage problems that do not respect borders. Climate change, pandemics and financial contagion do not pause at customs checkpoints. When states act alone, the result can be duplication, rivalry and wasted effort

POWER shifts are never tidy affairs. History suggests they unfold in fits and starts, stirring anxieties among those who fear loss and raising hopes among those who sense opportunity. The shift now underway is not merely about which state holds more sway, but about how the world should be organized. At its heart lies a contest between two approaches to international order: one that places faith in global rules and institutions and another that insists the nation-state remains the final arbiter of authority and action. For three decades after the Cold War, the promise of a rules-based order carried moral weight. Multilateral bodies were expected to manage conflict, ease trade frictions and provide collective answers to shared problems. The idea was not simply that co-operation was desirable, but that it could tame power. In theory, common rules would restrain the strong and protect the weak. In practice, however, this promise has often fallen short. Institutions have struggled to keep pace with fast-moving crises, while their legitimacy has been questioned by states that feel under-represented or unfairly constrained. The growing disquiet is not hard to understand. Global forums tend to move slowly, bound by procedure and consensus. When wars erupt or financial shocks ripple through markets, the response can appear hesitant. The paralysis of the United Nations Security Council in the face of major conflicts has become a familiar lament. Vetoes block action; statements substitute for solutions. For countries caught in the crossfire, the gap between lofty declarations and lived reality is painfully clear. This has fed a renewed emphasis on the state as the main unit of decision-making. Governments facing pressure at home are less willing to outsource authority to distant institutions. Security concerns, supply

chain disruptions and economic uncertainty have reinforced the instinct to rely on national capacities. From border controls to industrial policy, the language of self-reliance has returned to the mainstream. In many capitals, sovereignty is no longer a defensive slogan but a practical guide to policy. Yet the pendulum swing carries its own risks. A world in which every state retreats behind its own walls is ill-equipped to manage problems that do not respect borders. Climate change, pandemics and financial contagion do not pause at customs checkpoints. When states act alone, the result can be duplication, rivalry and wasted effort. The Covid-19 crisis laid bare these tensions. Early hopes for co-ordinated responses through the World Health Organization were undermined by travel bans, vaccine hoarding and mutual suspicion. National reflexes trumped collective need, with predictable consequences for the most vulnerable. The economic realm tells a similar story. The institutions that once symbolised global integration – the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund – are under strain. Disputes over trade rules, subsidies and currency practices have stalled reform. Meanwhile, powerful economies increasingly prefer bilateral deals or ad hoc coalitions, where leverage is clearer and outcomes more easily shaped. The result is a patchwork of arrangements that reflects shifting power balances but offers little predictability to smaller states. For countries like Pakistan, the implications are sobering. A system tilted towards raw bargaining power leaves less room for smaller and middle-ranking states to shape outcomes. Multilateral forums, for all their flaws, at least offer a stage on which voices can be heard and norms invoked. When those forums weaken, diplomacy risks becoming a series of transac-

tions, where concessions are traded under pressure and long-term interests give way to short-term expedients. The danger is not only marginalisation, but volatility: alliances become fluid, commitments reversible and trust harder to sustain. At the same time, it would be naïve to pretend that the old order can be restored by wishful thinking. Many institutions were built for a different era, when power was more concentrated and lines of authority clearer. Today's landscape is more crowded and contested. Rising powers demand a greater say; established powers resist dilution. Reform is overdue, but reform is also hard. Without credible change, calls for multilateralism will ring hollow and the pull of unilateral action will grow stronger. What, then, lies between the two operating systems? The answer is unlikely to be a clean victory for either camp. States will remain central; no global body can replace the legitimacy of governments accountable to their citizens. But the problems confronting those governments will continue to spill across borders. The task is not to choose between the state and the system, but to recalibrate their relationship. Institutions must become more representative and responsive, while states must accept that co-operation is not a concession of weakness but a recognition of interdependence. Power shifts test not only who leads, but how leadership is exercised. The current moment calls for a measure of restraint from the strong and a measure of confidence from the weak: restraint in acknowledging that rules matter even when inconvenient and confidence in using the spaces that remain to press for fairer arrangements. The alternative is a world of louder voices and thinner agreements, where order is improvised from crisis to crisis. History suggests that such worlds are rarely stable and seldom kind to those without power to spare.

## Briefs

## No immunity for elites in tough times, says PM

FROM PAGE 01  
this difficult time," he said. He said the global oil market had reacted sharply to the conflict. "The price of crude oil in the international market has suddenly jumped from around \$60 to more than \$100 per barrel," he said, adding that daily life in Pakistan depended heavily on oil and gas supplies coming from the Gulf region. The prime minister said the government had taken difficult economic and administrative decisions to manage the situation and reduce the impact of the energy crisis. "We have taken difficult decisions to reduce the energy crisis and stabilise the economy despite challenging circumstances," he said. The premier acknowledged that the recent increase in fuel prices was a tough decision. "The increase in petroleum prices was a difficult decision taken with a heavy heart," he said. "My mind told me that there was no option but to increase fuel prices, while my heart worried that it could place a burden on the poor," the prime minister added.

## KP govt announces Rs2,200...

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the Rs55 per litre hike a "petrol atom bomb" on the public. He announced that the provincial government would provide a subsidy to motorcycle users in the province to offset the impact of the increase in petrol prices. According to him, there are currently between 1.4 million and 1.6 million registered motorcycles in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Under the relief package, each eligible motorcyclist would receive Rs2,200 in two instalments of Rs1,100 each to compensate for the Rs55 per litre increase in petrol prices. However, when asked about the mechanism for distributing the subsidy among registered motorcycle owners, the chief minister did not outline a clear implementation plan or verification process. Officials also did not specify the platform through which the payments would be made or the timeline for disbursement.

## Pakistan seeks Saudi Arabia's...

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the securitisation of diaspora's remittances. This kind of securitisation can boost forex reserves and reduce costly foreign borrowing. For the fourth request, the KSA may consider providing a guarantee for Pakistan's any new endeavours for international Sukuk issuance in order to allow the country to raise international capital at lower rates. Pakistan made the fifth request to the KSA for a concessional credit line to the EXIM Bank of Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has established a new EXIM Bank in order to achieve export-led growth under the IMF programme. Islamabad has also made a request to the KSA for the consideration of waiving off bank guarantee requirements for import-related transactions with Pakistan. The KSA has been asked to consider investment, especially in the Public Investment Fund (PIF), in order to explore investment opportunities in the country.

## China opposes...

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security, and territorial integrity should be respected," he said when asked about the threats against the new leader. Israel and the United States have continued in recent days to pound Iran, which has retaliated by launching waves of missile and drone attacks on Israel and Gulf neighbors hosting US forces. Israel's reaction: direct and aggressive. Israel, by contrast, has taken a markedly confrontational stance. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned that any new leader linked to Iran's ruling elite would be "an unequivocal target for elimination".

## Khawaja Junaid; others' services praised

## Pak hockey team accorded warm welcome at Islamabad Airport

President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation and Federal Secretary IPC, Mohyuddin Wani, praised the team's performance



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan hockey team returned home after participating in the World Cup Qualifying Round. Upon their arrival at Islamabad International Airport, the team management and players received a warm welcome. On this occasion, Kiran Naz Dar (Member of the National Assembly and

Parliamentary Secretary Ministry IPC), Deputy Director General of Pakistan Sports Board Shahid Islam, Hassan (Staff Officer, Inter-Provincial Coordination Ministry), President of Rising Stars Hockey Club Islamabad Mahmood Ahmed, international hockey umpire and Secretary General Rising Stars Hockey Club Sohail Akram Janjua, national hockey umpire Muhammad Azeem, and former national hockey player Khyber Ali were also present.



On this occasion, the guests met with the national team players and management and appreciated their efforts. They also expressed their best wishes for the improvement and development of Pakistan's national sport, hockey. Pakistan secured their place in the FIH Hockey World Cup after defeating Japan in the semifinal of the qualifying event. The national team has qualified for the World Cup after a gap of eight years, marking a significant milestone for

Pakistan hockey. President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation and Federal Secretary IPC, Mohyuddin Wani, praised the team's performance and determination, saying the players showed great commitment and resilience throughout the tournament. He added that the qualification for the FIH World Cup is a proud moment for the nation and expressed hope that the team will continue to work hard and deliver strong performances on the international stage.

## Future of AI in Japan's tourism industry starts with human ties

TOKYO: Although artificial intelligence has huge potential for Japan's tourism industry, industry leaders argue that the first step to laying the foundation is establishing stronger emotional connections with local businesses. Building the sufficient data infrastructure that is needed for the effective use of AI "requires collaboration between the public and private sectors," said Fumiaki Kobayashi, chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's economy, trade and industry division. Speaking during a session at the Inbound Summit held in Tokyo, Kobayashi noted that Japan's AI utilization rate remains low and encouraged businesses to "just start using it." Masanori Satake, a manager at the Fukui Prefectural Tourism Federation, said that building trust was the real challenge in gathering data for its tourism analysis system, not technology. Back in March 2022, the prefecture launched FTAS, the Fukui Tourism data Analyzing System, a comprehensive tool to promote "profitable" regional tourism through data-

ta-driven decision-making.

Satake pointed out, however, that his organization had to repeatedly persuade the local ryokan association in Awara Onsen to share their data. They had to "go back again and again" to address concerns before the association agreed. "There are many things that will become automated. But the creation of connections rooted in the local foundation of a region, those ties can only be created by the people who live there," Satake said.

FTAS allows users to visualize accommodation occupancy rates up to 90 days in advance by integrating diverse data sources, resulting in benefits such as improved pricing strategies for hotels and optimized inventory of products and promotions for local businesses. AI is currently being utilized to make data analysis more efficient and generate reports. Data includes everything from bookings for the Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum, to page views of the prefecture's

official tourism site.

With Japan's working-age population expected to shrink to around 80 percent of its current level by 2040, the LDP's Kobayashi stressed that boosting productivity and using AI to add value to experiences is vital to tourism policy. "Until recently, the focus was on volume - aiming for 40 or 50 million visitors. Now, the policy emphasis is shifting toward quality," said Kobayashi, who added that AI could help generate suggestions to guide travelers toward regional destinations and optimize dynamic pricing. Tomohisa Yamano, the representative executive officer and CEO of Asoview, Inc., who moderated the AI session, said that physical communication and human networks unlock the potential of regions. "In reality, what it ultimately comes down to is effort - plain, old-fashioned legwork and sales. Whether or not you put in that effort determines whether AI can actually be utilized in a region," said Yamano. - Agencies

## Balochistan CM announces establishment of Tump district

QUETTA: Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Monday announced establishment of Tump as a new district, describing the move as a key step toward strengthening the administrative structure and improving governance at the local level. During his visit to Turbat, Sarfraz Bugti officially handed over the notification for the creation of Tump District to Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Energy Mir Asghar Rind. He said the new district would help streamline administrative affairs, accelerate development activities, and ensure government services reach residents at their doorstep. Sarfraz Bugti emphasized that the provincial government is prioritizing the development of remote and underdeveloped areas of Balochistan. He noted that establishing new districts is essential for strengthening the administrative framework and enhancing governance at the grassroots level, enabling authorities to address public issues more effectively. The chief minister reaffirmed his government's commitment to speeding up development projects across the province, stressing that public welfare initiatives would continue to be implemented on a priority basis to improve living standards. Several senior members of the provincial cabinet accompanied Bugti at the event, including, Provincial Minister for Planning and Development Mir Zahoob Ahmed Buledi, Provincial Finance Minister Shoaib Nosherwani, Provincial Minister for Revenue Mir Asim Kurd Gello. - APP

## PM Shehbaz announces cash prize for national hockey team

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday announced a cash prize of Rs1.5 million for each player of the national hockey team in recognition of their outstanding performance in the FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 Qualifiers. The prime minister, in a statement, said that the qualification for the World Cup was recognition of the players' hard work and dedication to the sport, besides being a significant step toward promoting and reviving hockey in Pakistan. He said that the national hockey team's participation in the World Cup qualifiers generated immense enthusiasm among fans. Prime Minister Shehbaz said that the cash prize was a resounding tribute to the determination of the players.

## Baseball: Japan holds on for 4-3 win over WBC surprise package Australia

TOKYO: Masataka Yoshida turned the game around with a two-run bomb in the seventh inning the other day as Japan battled to a 4-3 win against Australia and improved to 3-0 at the World Baseball Classic. Japan clinched a quarterfinal berth earlier in the day, when Taiwan's upset of South Korea guaranteed the defending champion a top two finish in Pool C. The win against Australia at Tokyo Dome ensured skipper Hirokazu Ibatata's team will finish on top of the pool. Despite starting as the heavy favorite, Samurai Japan struggled to generate offense against a gritty Australian outfit that came into the clash unbeaten following wins against Taiwan and the Czech Republic. Most of the Australian team's big-league experience came courtesy of manager Dave Nilsson - a former All-Star catcher for the Milwaukee Brewers who also spent a season as Ibatata's teammate at the Chunichi Dragons. Starting pitcher Connor MacDonald laid a solid foundation for the Australians as he limited Japan to one hit over three scoreless innings. Japan, meanwhile, received four strong shutout frames from starter Tomoyuki Sugano, who fanned two against four hits. The Australian bullpen continued to cause problems for the defending champion, and the underdog stunned the 42,331-strong Tokyo crowd by taking a 1-0 lead in the top of the sixth when Aaron Whitefield came home on a throwing error by catcher Kenya Wakatsuki. - APP

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: FG Polo clinched the 63rd Allied Bank National Open Polo Championship for the Quaid-e-Azam Gold Cup, defeating Master Paints/Diamond Paints 10-8 to lift the prestigious title. The final match was witnessed by a large gathering of spectators, families, polo enthusiasts and former players who filled the stands at the Lahore Polo Club to watch the high-profile contest.

Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. Allied Bank Limited Group Head CRBG Hasnain Raza Mirza, President Lahore Polo Club Malik Azam Hayat Noon, Club Secretary Maj (R) Amjad Ghafoor, along with executive committee members Feroz Gulzar and Raja Amir, also attended the ceremony. In the final, both teams displayed exceptional skill and determination throughout the game. The match remained closely contested until the final chukker, when FG Polo delivered an outstanding performance to seal victory with a 10-8 scoreline.

For FG Polo, Raja Mikayal Sami emerged as the top scorer with five superb goals, while teammates Raul Laplacette struck three goals, and Marcos Rivarola and Amin Rahman

## FG Polo Lift National Open Polo Championship Title



Fazal added one goal each. For Master Paints/Diamond Paints, Facundo Retamar Carnero scored four goals, Amirreza Behbudi added three, and Raja Temur Nadeem contributed one goal.

At the end of the match, several individual honours were presented. Raja Mikayal Sami was named the Best Pakistani Player, while Facundo Retamar received both the Best Foreign Player and Top Scorer of the Tournament awards. The Best Pony of the Final award went to a mare owned by

Abbas Mukhtar (Mandi Bola). Cash awards and trophies were presented to Admin Manager Muhammad Faisal, Polo Manager Muhammad Imran, Accounts Manager Muhammad Irfan, Club Secretary Maj (R) Amjad Ghafoor, Security In-Charge Muhammad Arif, Veterinary Doctor Dr. Hassan Siddiq, Head Groundsman Muhammad Khalid, Deputy Head Groundsman Muhammad Ali, Riding School Instructor Munawar Iqbal, Head Office Boy Muhammad Iqbal, and Caretaker Khizar Hayat during ceremony.

## Putin offers full support to Mojtaba

FROM PAGE 01  
our Iranian friends," Putin said in a message to Khamenei, adding that "Russia has been and will remain a reliable partner" to Iran. "At a time when Iran is confronting armed aggression, your tenure in this high position will undoubtedly require great courage and dedication," the Russian leader said.

## Pak Army destroys ammunition depots

FROM PAGE 01  
The Security Sources, the Pakistan Army is continuously targeting Afghan Taliban hideouts and military installations. Operation Ghazal Lil Haq will continue until its objectives are fully achieved, they said.

## SBP maintains interest...

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Hormuz, a key artery for global oil supplies, pushing energy prices higher. Pakistan imports most of its energy needs, making domestic inflation sensitive to changes in global fuel prices. On Friday, the federal government raised consumer prices for diesel and petrol about 20%, citing higher oil prices driven by conflict in Iran. The new price of petrol was set at Rs321.17 per litre from Rs266.17, while the diesel rate was increased to Rs335.86 per litre from Rs280.86 after the review.

## WAPDA wins Pak-China Friendship Basketball Titles

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: WAPDA emerged as the champions in the women's and departmental categories of the Pak-China Friendship Cup 3x3 Basketball Championship held at the Liaquat Gymnasium, Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad. The championship, held to celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, was organized by the Federal Basketball Association (FBA) in collaboration with the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB). In the women's final, WAPDA Black edged past Garrisons Team 17-14 in a closely contested match. WAPDA Black, who had earlier reached the final with a narrow one-point victory over Army Red in the semifinal, displayed impressive teamwork. Rubaila

and Sana scored 7 and 6 points respectively for the winners, while Farheen

contributed 6 points for Garrisons Team. In the departmental category, WAP-

DA Green defeated Army Red 21-14 to retain the title. Zain Khan emerged as

the hero of the final, scoring 11 points single-handedly for the champions. In the

club category final, YMCA defeated Friends Club 20-17 in an exciting contest to clinch the title.

Director General Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Yasir Pirzada, along with President Pakistan Basketball Federation (PBBF) Brigadier (Retd) Muhammad Iftikhar Mansoor, PBBF Senior Vice President Imtiaz Rafi Butt, President Federal Basketball Association Ejaz Rafi Butt, FBA Secretary Ouj-e-Zahoor, representatives from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pakistan, among others, witnessed the finals. A Chinese club team also attended the closing ceremony of the championship. A total of 28 women's teams, 13 departmental teams and 48 club teams participated in the four-day event.



## Briefs

## Gold falls by Rs6,500 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs6,500 and was sold at Rs533,362 on Monday against its sale at Rs539,862 in the local market, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs5,573 to Rs457,271 from Rs462,844 whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went down by Rs5,109 to Rs419,180 from Rs424,289. The rates of per tola and ten gram silver also decreased by Rs37 and Rs31 to Rs8,894 and Rs7,625 respectively.

In the international market, the price of gold decreased by \$65 to \$5,106 whereas that of silver declined by \$0.37 to \$84.10, the Association reported.—APP

## UNESCO, ICAIRE champion female leadership in AI

RIYADH: UNESCO marked International Women's Day, observed annually on March 8, highlighting the role of the International Center for Artificial Intelligence Research and Ethics (ICAIRE) Operating under the auspices of UNESCO in Riyadh, ICAIRE is committed to building an inclusive global AI ecosystem and empowering women in advanced technologies. The observance reflects efforts to support women's equal access to education and their advancement across development sectors. UNESCO Director-General Dr. Khaleel El-Ehany stressed the importance of women assuming responsibilities in the public sector, accessing economic resources, and participating in cultural and scientific life to support global sustainable development. In line with this vision, ICAIRE has launched several initiatives, including the "Elevate" program. The initiative attracted 30,000 participants from more than 100 countries and provided advanced training to develop women's skills in artificial intelligence. It also aims to build a global network of female technology leaders and strengthen women's participation in innovation and responsible AI development.—APP

## Vietnam mulls removing fuel duties

HANOI: Vietnam is considering a plan to scrap tariffs on fuel imports, the government said, as the US-Israeli war with Iran disrupts oil supplies and pushes prices to their highest level since 2022. The ministry of finance said Sunday it had drafted a decree that would slash import tax rates to zero on some petroleum products to "help stabilize the domestic market and ensure national energy security." "If the conflict continues and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz persists, alternative supplies on the international market will become scarce and risk driving prices up," it said in a statement, referring to the waterway through which a fifth of global crude passes. Since the war began more than a week ago with US and Israeli strikes on Iran, prices of fuel in Vietnam have risen sharply and the government has implemented emergency pricing protocols. The cost of the most widely used grade of gasoline has risen 21 percent to 27,040 Vietnamese dong (\$1.03) per liter — the highest since July 2022, state media reported. According to the finance minister 2022.—APP

## Bahrain's state oil company declares force

DUBAI: Bahrain's state oil company declared force majeure on Monday for its shipments after an Iranian attack set its refinery ablaze. The state-run Bahrain News Agency carried the announcement of the force majeure, a legal maneuver that releases a company of its contractual obligations because of extraordinary circumstances. It said the company's operations "have been affected by the ongoing regional conflict in the Middle East and the recent attack on its refinery complex.—APP

## Cabinet body reviews fuel stocks, global supply chain

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Committee to Monitor Petrol Prices in the Wake of the Emerging Situation in the Region, constituted by the Prime Minister and chaired by the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, continued its daily review of developments in the energy sector and assessed national preparedness measures in light of the evolving regional situation. The Committee deliberated on the evolving regional and global energy situation and undertook a detailed review of petroleum product stock positions across the country. A comprehensive briefing was presented on the current national inventory of crude oil and refined petroleum products, ongoing import arrangements, and supply chain logistics, including shipments currently en route and additional cargoes being arranged to strengthen national reserves. The Committee noted with satisfaction that petroleum product stocks remain at comfortable levels and supply chains are functioning smoothly,

with multiple cargoes and import arrangements in place to ensure continuity of supply in the coming weeks.

Members were also briefed on recent trends in global crude and refined petroleum product prices, which have witnessed significant volatility in recent days due to geopolitical developments in the region. The Committee reviewed international market indicators, including benchmark crude movements and refined product price trends, and assessed possible scenarios for global energy markets. It was noted that the Government is closely monitoring international price developments and undertaking continuous scenario planning to safeguard domestic energy security and economic stability. The meeting further reviewed logistical and operational arrangements for crude imports, refinery operations, and maritime transportation, including coordination with international suppliers and shipping arrangements. Relevant authorities briefed the Committee on steps being taken to facilitate cargo movements and ensure the uninterrupted functioning of refineries and supply infrastructure.



The Committee emphasized the importance of maintaining optimal refinery throughput and seamless coordination among all stakeholders to sustain national fuel availability.

In addition to supply-side measures, the Committee was also presented with a range of targeted energy conservation and demand management options aimed at reducing pressure on fuel imports during periods of global volatility. Various measures relating to fuel consumption, operational

and public sector conservation initiatives were reviewed. It was noted that responsible consumption and targeted conservation could generate meaningful savings in fuel imports while supporting national economic stability.

During the meeting, the Committee also took note of operational issues raised by stakeholders from the aviation and logistics sectors and directed the relevant authorities to undertake a detailed review of the matter and present a comprehensive assessment at the next meeting.

## RCCI raises concerns over fuel price hike, business climate

RAWALPINDI: A delegation of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), led by President Usman Shaukat and Group Leader Sohail Altaf, called on Federal Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb in Islamabad to discuss key economic issues and proposals from the business community. During the meeting, RCCI President Usman Shaukat briefed the finance minister on the Chamber's recent trade delegation visit to the United States. He highlighted RCCI's efforts to promote bilateral trade by connecting middle-market companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from Pakistan and the United States. The finance minister appreciated the Chamber's proactive role in advancing trade diplomacy and strengthening business-to-business linkages, assuring that RCCI's proposals would be considered in the upcoming trade policy. The delegation also raised concerns about structural and contractual enforcement challenges that are affecting bilateral investment. In response, the finance minister said the government is addressing these issues through upcoming policy initiatives, including a proposed industrial policy aimed at improving the investment climate. Group Leader Sohail Altaf expressed serious concerns from the business community over the recent increase in petroleum prices, warning

that it could trigger a fresh wave of inflation and place additional pressure on industries and the public. The delegation also pointed to alleged profiteering by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) on existing stocks, noting that the recent Rs55 per litre increase is among the highest in the region and has significantly affected consumers. Responding to the concerns, the finance minister said the price adjustment was necessary to prevent depletion of petroleum stocks and ensure uninterrupted supply nationwide. He assured the delegation that the government would closely monitor the situation to prevent undue inventory gains by companies and enforce a minimum 20-day inventory requirement for OMCs. The RCCI leadership also emphasized the need for a comprehensive package to revive the construction sector, stating that renewed construction activity could generate employment and boost economic growth. They stressed that strong domestic investment is essential for attracting foreign investment. The delegation highlighted the importance of creating a conducive and business-friendly environment to encourage investment and industrial growth. They noted that despite higher tax collections, excessive scrutiny and harassment by federal and provincial tax authorities are undermining business confidence and discouraging

economic activity. RCCI further urged the government to adopt austerity measures at the federal level to reduce public expenditure in view of rising costs for the general public. The finance minister informed the delegation that a meeting chaired by the prime minister was scheduled the same day to discuss measures to cut government spending. The Chamber also called for reducing the cost of doing business through tax reforms and urged the government to convey the business community's concerns to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). RCCI recommended broadening the tax base instead of repeatedly taxing existing taxpayers, recognizing compliant businesses, and offering a 10 per cent tax credit to withholding agents to improve compliance and efficiency. The finance minister assured the delegation that RCCI's proposals and concerns would be conveyed to the IMF and considered during preparations for the upcoming federal budget. He and his team also appreciated RCCI's role as a leading chamber of commerce for highlighting key economic issues and providing constructive policy recommendations. Senior Vice President Khalid Farooq Qazi and Executive Member Imran Ali were also present at the meeting.—DNA

## Passion for video games shapes new gen of players

JEDDAH: Amid the accelerating digital transformation, video games are no longer merely a form of entertainment; they have evolved into a global culture and digital community bringing together millions of players around the world. They provide young people with a space to express their passion and develop cognitive and technical skills. Abdulaziz Nabil stands out as an example of a new generation that has found in this virtual world a space for enjoyment, learning, and communication, particularly during the nights of the holy month of Ramadan. Abdulaziz's relationship with video games began at an early age, around eight years old, through the PlayStation console, which served as his gateway into this vast digital world. At that stage, gaming was simply an enjoyable experience through which he spent hours having fun. However, his curiosity about the field gradually led him to explore it more deeply and discover different gaming styles that require skill, planning, and interaction with other players. Over the years, Abdulaziz moved to playing on a personal computer (PC). In remarks to SPA, he noted that esports opened broader horizons in the gaming world, making the experience more professional in terms of performance, communication, and competition with players from around the globe. He explained that playing on a computer offers greater capabilities in control and interaction, in addition to the wide variety of games and digital platforms that bring millions of players together in one virtual space. During Ramadan, Abdulaziz's daily routine takes on a different rhythm that aligns with the nature of the holy month. Fasting does not hinder his practice of the hobby; rather, he believes it sometimes provides a mental state that helps him concentrate. He explained that video games essentially rely on quick thinking, attentiveness, and decision-making at the right moment—mental skills that are strengthened in the calm and focused atmosphere he finds during Ramadan nights.—APP

## Oil passes \$119 a barrel after 25% surge

SINGAPORE: Oil prices surged more than 25 percent on Monday to their highest levels since mid-2022 as some major producers cut supplies and fears of prolonged shipping disruptions gripped the market due to the expanding US-Israeli war with Iran. Brent crude futures rose as much as 29 percent to \$119.50 a barrel in early trading on Monday, with US West Texas Intermediate surging 31.4 percent to a session high of \$119.48 a barrel. Brent had already climbed 27 percent and WTI by 35.6 percent last week. By 10:48 a.m. Saudi time, prices had pared back, with Brent up 14.17 percent in the session to stand at \$105.80 a barrel. WTI was priced at \$100.80, up 10.95 percent. Energy markets are particularly nervous because the crisis is unfolding around the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply normally passes. Disruptions in tanker movements and rising security risks have already slowed shipping activity, leaving Asian buyers especially vulnerable given their heavy reliance on Middle Eastern crude. "Unless oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz resumes soon and regional tensions ease, upward pressure on prices is likely to persist," said Vasu Menon, managing director for investment strategy at OCBC in Singapore. Iraq and Kuwait have begun cutting oil output, adding to earlier liquefied natural gas reductions from Qatar, as the war blocked shipments from the Middle East. Analysts expect the UAE and Saudi Arabia will have to also cut output soon as they run out of oil storage. Also boosting prices is the appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father Ali Khamenei as Iran's supreme leader, signalling that hardliners remain firmly in charge in Tehran a week into its conflict with the US and Israel. "With the appointment of the late leader's son as Iran's new leader, US President Donald Trump's goal of regime change in Iran has become more difficult.—APP

## CDA chief Randhawa reviews pre moonsoon preparations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, chaired a meeting regarding pre moonsoon preparations on Monday at CDA Headquarters. The meeting was attended by CDA Member Administration and Estate Talat Mehmood, Member Environment Esfandyar Baloch, Member Finance Tahir Naeem, Director General (DG) Capital Emergency Services, Director General (DG) Environment, Engineering Wing and officers from Islamabad Administration. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa said that the purpose of the meeting is to be prepared in advance to deal with emergency like situations during the monsoon. He said that the Capital Emergency Service will play the lead role during the

monsoon season. Chairman CDA directed to identify low-lying and areas vulnerable for flooding. He further directed to mark areas and locations which were affected during last monsoon. He said that pre-emptive measures should be proposed keeping in view the experiences of last year. Briefing the meeting, Director General (DG) Capital Emergency Service apprised that in order to enhance the capacity of Capital

Emergency Service personnel, water rescue training for the staff has been conducted by Chinese experts and the Pakistan Navy. Similarly, staff have also been trained to deal with flash flooding situations. During the briefing, it was informed that the measures taken before the monsoon season include the inspection and availability of flood-fighting equipment, and the initiation of the process for cleaning streams

and nullahs. The meeting was informed that the establishment of a Flood Control Room for inter-departmental coordination, identification of low-lying areas, and an effective warning system are among the pre-emptive measures taken regarding the monsoon season. The meeting was further informed that the Capital Emergency Service department has formed a specialized Water Rescue Teams.



## Shelter rankings and shower-timing apps, Israelis, Palestinians adjust to Iranian rockets

Palestinians also took playful aim at a Facebook post by Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion detailing the proper conduct when an air raid siren sounds. One comment on the post, apparently from a resident of the east Jerusalem refugee camp Shuafat, asked: "What is someone in Shuafat refugee camp supposed to do? Jump out the window?"

JERUSALEM: What is Israel's best bomb shelter? And when is the best time of day to shower without interruption from a missile alert? The Middle East war that began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran has provoked waves of retaliatory Iranian fire as well as some tricky questions for Jews and Arabs from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A new app, which went viral in the country within hours of launching, uses statistical analysis of recent air raid alerts in specific areas to guide users on the optimal time of day to bathe, while limiting the chances of having to run for cover mid-wash. "Can't even take a shower. I'm naked in the dining room. Is that normal?" quipped an Israeli on a Telegram account with 60,000 followers, as an alert warning of incoming Iranian missiles ordered residents to head for shelter. Time Out, a publication known for directing people toward trendy restaurants and cocktail bars, is also trying to help the public navigate the war. It has published a list of desirable Tel Aviv beach spots based on their proximity to

a shelter. "We searched and found beaches that are near compliant protected areas (shelters) you can reach in just a few minutes' walk if necessary. Don't panic!" Journalist Ofek Tzach has offered a ranking of Tel Aviv's public shelters. Among the low performers are one that he derides as packed with tourists, another "with barking dogs," and a third he says is "quiet but with no one to talk to." There have also been endearing moments that have captured the public's attention. The wedding venue booked by Lior and Michael was no longer available, due to security restrictions, so the couple got married in a shelter — four levels below ground in a shopping center parking lot. "It was a wonderful moment," even if seventy percent of the people there were strangers, Michael told Israel's Channel 13. There has also been a surge of online advice on how to make time in shelters more bearable. Books, music and cushions are popular recommendations, standing in contrast to the more austere guidance from Israeli authorities,

which includes having a radio, batteries, a phone charger and ID papers. For Palestinians living in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, responses to the relentless air raid sirens have tilted toward dark humor. There are few public shelters in the eastern part of the city and private shelters are almost non-existent. "At the moment, Palestinians are taking a plate of qatayef and going up to the roof" to watch the missiles, said a Facebook post by pastry chef Mohammad Alayan, referring to the dessert traditionally eaten during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Palestinians in east Jerusalem regularly film rockets streaking through the sky from their rooftops. Palestinians also took playful aim at a Facebook post by Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion detailing the proper conduct when an air raid siren sounds. One comment on the post, apparently from a resident of the east Jerusalem refugee camp Shuafat, asked: "What is someone in Shuafat refugee camp supposed to do? Jump out the window?"—Agencies

## Lebanon postpones polls by 2 years

BIERUT: Lebanon's parliament on Monday postponed legislative elections, initially due to be held in May, by two years, according to a statement from the parliament speaker, due to the war between Israel and Hezbollah. MPs convened on Monday including Mohammed Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, even as Israeli warplanes flew above the nearby southern suburbs of Beirut.—APP

## Israel strikes Beirut's southern suburbs after warning

BIERUT: Israel on Monday renewed its strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanese state media reported, after Israel warned it would target branches of a financial firm linked to Hezbollah Footage on AFP TV's live broadcast showed large plumes of smoke rising from the area, where the Iran-backed group holds sway. Earlier on Monday, the Israeli military warned it would strike branches of Al-Qard Al-Hassan, a financial firm mainly operating in Hezbollah strongholds across Lebanon's south, east and Beirut's southern suburbs. 0 seconds of 1 minute, 0Volumsrael launched at least three strikes Monday on Beirut's south, according to the state-run National News Agency and AFP correspondents.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war last week when Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during US-Israeli strikes. Israel, which had kept up strikes targeting Hezbollah even before the war despite a 2024 ceasefire, launched multiple attacks last week across Lebanon and sent ground troops into border areas. Roads leading to one of Al-Qard Al-Hassan's branches in Beirut were closed on Monday, according to witnesses.—APP

## Turkiye deploys six F-16s to Northern Cyprus

ANKARA: Turkiye's defense ministry on Monday said it had deployed six F-16 fighter jets to Northern Cyprus as a security measure, days after the island was targeted by a drone attack. "In light of recent developments in our region, six F-16 fighter aircraft and air defense systems have been deployed to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as of today," it said in a statement, referring to a territory which is only recognized by Ankara.—APP

## Oman's Muscat airport limits private jet flights

MUSCAT: Oman's Muscat International Airport has asked private jet operators to avoid using the site for "additional flights," giving priority to government and commercial flights as fresh airspace closures hit the region's attempts to increase travel, according to an email seen by Reuters. "Due to the current crisis management measures at Muscat International Airport, flight movements are restricted to approved seasonal scheduled services only," the airport authorities told charter plane operators on Friday. The airport said this measure was necessary to manage congestion and ensure that airport capacity remains within acceptable limits. The email, first reported by the Financial Times, asked that all airlines and operators cancel any slots falling outside the approved seasonal schedule and to refrain from submitting non-approved flight requests until further notice. "The only additional flights that may be considered during this period are embassy-sponsored repatriation flights, subject to prior approval through the applicable diplomatic channels and on the condition that no commercial sale of seats is undertaken in connection with such operations," the email added.—APP

## Briefs

**Glasgow Central Station closed after major blaze**

### NEWS DESK

LONDON: Scotland's busiest railway station, Glasgow Central, has been shut down for the entire day following a major fire that broke out in a neighbouring building on Union Street yesterday evening. The blaze, which started in a vape shop around 15:45, quickly spread to adjoining Victorian-era buildings. Part of the structure, including a dome at one corner, collapsed during the incident. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service confirmed that nine appliances and three high-reach vehicles remain at the scene as crews continue to tackle the aftermath. Fortunately, no injuries have been reported. Rail operator Network Rail stated that while the fire caused significant damage to neighbouring properties, no major structural damage has been identified at Glasgow Central Station itself. However, all high-level platforms are closed, with no trains running to or from them. Services will also not stop at the low-level platforms, leading to widespread travel disruption across Scotland. Authorities have warned that disruption is expected to last throughout the day, with no estimate yet on when the station will reopen.

**Nepal poll: Balendra Shah's party on course for landslide**

### NEWS DESK

KATHMANDU: Early results from Nepal's general election suggest a historic shift in the country's politics, with the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by rapper and former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, on course to secure a landslide majority in parliament. This marks the first time in decades that a single party has managed to gain a majority in Nepal's two system format, which traditionally makes outright victories difficult. The 35 year old Shah stunned observers by defeating former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in Jhapa 5, a constituency long considered a safe seat for Oli. His victory positions Shah as the likely next prime minister, pending official certification of results. The election, held on 5 March, came just six months after widespread youth led protests against corruption, nepotism, and inequality toppled Oli's government. The unrest reflected growing frustration with elite rule and paved the way for Shah's rise. Meanwhile, Gagan Thapa, president of the Congress Party - Nepal's largest political force - also lost his seat, further consolidating RSP's dominance.

# EU needs to project its power assertively: Ursula

We will always defend and uphold the rules-based system that we helped to build with our allies, but we can no longer rely on it as the only way to defend our interests or assume its rules will shelter us from the complex threats that we face," von der Leyen said at a conference for EU ambassadors

BRUSSELS: The EU must be prepared to project its power more assertively as it can no longer rely on a "rules-based" system against threats and must determine if its institutions and systems help or hinder its credibility, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Monday. "We will always defend and uphold the rules-based system that we helped to build with our allies, but we can no longer rely on it as the only way to defend our interests or assume its rules will shelter us from the complex threats that we face," von der Leyen said at a conference for EU ambassadors. "We urgently need to reflect on whether our doctrine, our institutions and our decision making - all designed in a postwar world of stability and multilateralism - have kept pace with the speed of change around us. Whether the system that we built - with all of its well-intentioned attempts at consensus and compromise - is more a help or a hindrance to our credibility as a geopolitical actor," she added. The public prosecutor's office in southwestern Switzerland's Wallis canton, where the upmarket ski resort of Crans-Montana is located, declined to provide further details. However, a source close to the case confirmed to AFP that Nicolas Feraud, mayor of the Crans-Montana municipality, is among those under suspicion, as reported by Swiss media. The source said a former municipal councillor in charge



of security, a former fire safety officer and his deputy, had also been placed under criminal investigation. The move widens the scope of the investigation into the tragedy, which took place in the early hours of January 1 at Le Constellation, a bar in the town. The bar's owners, French couple Jacques and Jessica Moretti, are facing charges of manslaughter by negligence, bodily harm by negligence and arson by negligence. Crans-Montana's current head of public safety and a former fire safety officer in the town are also under criminal investigation. Wallis public prosecutors are tasked with determining the exact circumstances of the fire, whether safety regulations were complied with and who was responsible for what. Public prosecutors believe the fire started when champagne bottles with sparklers attached were raised too close to the bar's basement ceiling, igniting the sound insulation foam. The municipality triggered outrage on January 6 when it revealed that no annual safety check had been carried out at the bar since 2019. The five current and former municipal officials now under criminal investigation, as well as Jacques Moretti, are to be questioned by the public prosecutor's office between April 7 and 15, another source close to the case told. At the end of February, 58 survivors were still in hospitals and rehabilitation clinics in Switzerland and abroad. - Agencies

## Spain's migrants welcome amnesty

### DNA

MADRID: Diana left her native Peru two years ago, looking for financial and professional stability in Europe. But, as an undocumented migrant in Spain, life has been difficult. The 40-year-old's dream of working in the tourism industry has not transpired. Instead, she has got by doing occasional jobs. "Working without residency documents is hard because employers can tell you one thing and then get you to do something else," she says. "Sometimes they pay you less than what you've agreed to, so that makes things tough. It's stressful, you can get exploited, and then you can end up not just without any money, but sick and lonely." Access to many banking products and housing - which is seeing a crisis in Spain due to spiralling rental costs - is severely restricted for those unable to present residency papers to potential landlords. But the recent announcement by the Spanish government of a scheme to legalise the status of at least half a million migrants has provided Diana, and many others, with hope.

## Swiss bar fire probe widens

GENEVA: Swiss prosecutors on Monday said five current and former local officials were under criminal investigation over the New Year bar fire in Crans-Montana that killed 41 people, widening the probe. The public prosecutor's office in southwestern Switzerland's Wallis canton, where the upmarket ski resort of Crans-Montana is located, declined to provide further details. However, a source close to the case confirmed to AFP that Nicolas Feraud, mayor of the Crans-Montana municipality, is among those under suspicion, as reported by Swiss media. The source said a former municipal councillor in charge of security, a former fire safety officer and his deputy, and a current member of the public safety team, had also been placed under criminal investigation. The move widens the scope of the investigation into the tragedy, which took place in the early hours of January 1 at Le Constellation, a bar in the town. - APP

## IMF warns Middle East conflict could fuel global inflation

Her warning comes as the International Energy Agency (IEA) urged member states to consider a joint release of emergency oil stocks to stabilize energy markets

LONDON - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has cautioned that escalating conflict in the Middle East could drive global inflation



higher, threatening fragile economic recoveries worldwide. Her warning comes as the International Energy Agency (IEA) urged member states to consider a joint release of emergency oil stocks to stabilize energy markets. The agency stressed that coordinated action may be necessary to offset supply disruptions and prevent further price spikes. Meanwhile, reports from Bahrain confirmed multiple explosions overnight, heightening concerns about regional instability and its impact on critical energy infrastructure. Analysts note that with oil prices already volatile, any prolonged disruption in Middle Eastern supply routes could ripple across global markets, raising costs for households and businesses alike. The IMF has called for vigilance and cooperation among governments to mitigate risks, while the IEA continues to monitor energy flows and prepare contingency measures. - DNA

## G7 nations to hold emergency meeting on oil as stock markets sink

### NEWS DESK

LONDON: G7 nations will hold an emergency meeting on Monday to discuss surging oil prices as crude jumped above \$100 a barrel and stock markets slumped over the escalating US-Israeli war with Iran. Finance ministers from leading industrialised countries, including UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves, will gather to discuss the economic impact of the conflict. Global oil prices reached nearly \$120 on Monday over fears of a prolonged disruption to energy supplies through the key Strait of Hormuz shipping route and the UK's FTSE 100 share index fell 1.5%. The Financial Times reported the G7 meeting will discuss a joint release of petroleum from reserves, co-ordinated by the International Energy Agency (IEA). If reserves are released by IEA members it would be the first time since 2022, when action was taken following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Major disruption to energy supplies from the region threatens to push up prices for consumers and businesses around the world. Rising inflation could lead to fewer interest rate cuts by central banks. About a fifth of the world's oil supply is usually shipped through the Strait of Hormuz. But traffic through the narrow passage has

all but halted since the war started more than a week ago. On Sunday, Iran named Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father Ali Khamenei as Supreme Leader, signalling that more than a week into the conflict hardliners remain in charge of the country. The US and Israel launched fresh waves of airstrikes across Iran over the weekend, hitting multiple targets including oil depots. Meanwhile, Iran targeted energy infrastructure in neighbouring Gulf states. Overnight, Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted and destroyed two waves of drones heading towards a major oilfield. The latest developments on the war in the Middle East. On Monday morning in Asia, the price of Brent crude jumped by more than 25% to touch \$119.50 a barrel at one point before falling back to around \$107. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude saw similar movements and was trading at about \$104 a barrel. Gas prices also jumped. UK gas prices for month-ahead delivery surged by nearly 25% to 171p a therm when trading started on Monday, before slipping back to about 156p a therm. European stock markets opened lower, following steep falls earlier in Asia. Both Germany's Dax and France's Cac 40 indexes were down by about 2.5%. In London, nearly all shares in the FTSE 100 fell, with oil giants BP and Shell among the few companies to see an increase.

## Sindh mulls 'limiting petrol supply'

### DNA

KARACHI: Amid a possible fuel shortage due to the ongoing US-Israel war on Iran, the Sindh government has summoned a cabinet meeting on Tuesday (tomorrow) to discuss possible measures, including limiting petrol supply to vehicles, to address the situation. The ongoing conflict involving Iran, the US and Israel, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz - a key global oil supply route - have raised concerns across Pakistan about a potential fuel crisis. According to sources, proposals to be discussed include limiting unnecessary movement, shifting educational institutions to online classes and restricting petrol supply to vehicles. Alternative working arrangements for offices, except essential services, as well as changes to the fuel policy for government vehicles will also come under discussion during the meeting.

Furthermore, the Sindh government will review proposals put forward by the federal government, and the cabinet will be briefed on discussions held with Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb. Meanwhile, provincial ministers are scheduled to meet traders today to take them into confidence over the situation, sources said. The prospective policy changes come after the government raised petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre. Multiple universities in Karachi, including the University of Karachi (KU) and the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST), have decided to shift to virtual classes following the fuel price hike. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is set to announce the federal government's austerity and savings plan later today. The premier presided over a meeting on Sunday to review measures aimed at maintaining economic stability amid rising regional tensions.

# Middle East war triggers PSX sell-off; Market crash

Benchmark KSE-100 index drops by 12,375.17 points, or 7.98%, to intraday low of 144,929.84 points

### DNA

KARACHI: The week began on a grim note at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Monday, as escalating Middle East tensions triggered a massive sell-off, sending the benchmark index plunging more than 9,000 points in early trading. The KSE-100 index dropped by 9,453.22 points or 6% to 148,042.88, down from the previous close of 157,496.10 points, triggering a suspension in trading. The index traded between an intraday high of 150,174.09 (down 7,322.01 points, or 4.65%) and a low of 144,929.84 (down 12,375.17 points, or 7.98%) versus the previous close of 157,496.10. The benchmark index declined by 10,566 points or 6.3% last week due to the US-Israel vs Iran war. "The pressure is obvious due to war premium and 100 plus oil prices derailing macro stability with no signs of ceasefire. All eyes on SBP today," said AAH Soomro, an independent investment and economic analyst. Trading was briefly halted under PSX risk-management rules after a sharp drop, with the exchange's notice stating that the halt was triggered due to a 5% decrease in the KSE-30 Index, suspending all equity-based markets.

It also noted that outstanding orders were cancelled automatically and set out the re-opening schedule (Market Halt Time 09:22:15am; Pre-Open 10:22:15am; Open 10:27:15am). Analysts expect cautious trading this week as markets assess the impact of regional tensions, inflation trends and interest rate direction. The index currently trades at a price-to-earnings ratio of about 8.1 times and offers a dividend yield of around 6.3%, which analysts view as attractive at current levels. According to AHL Research, the KSE-100 index performance over the week will depend largely on geopolitical developments and the outcome of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting today. The research house noted that the market trades at relatively attractive valuations compared with its historical levels. It identified several sectors where fundamentals remain supportive despite recent volatility. Other Asian stock markets plunged Monday as oil prices soared 30% on fears about supplies from the Middle East as the US-Israeli war against Iran continued into a second week with no sign of letting up. Investors, already spooked by concerns over extended tech valuations and the huge spending on AI, ran for the hills as crude rocketed to its highest level since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.



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