



# Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**Pakistan, India barb wires during the US Session on Tuesday**

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**Foreign Minister talks to Bahrain counterpart on ME**

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**Sirbaz Khan Niaz Support Ambassador**

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## Temporary relief

# Oil falls as Trump predicts Middle East de-escalation

Prices remain under pressure as Trump considers easing oil sanctions on Russia and releasing emergency crude stockpiles

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Tuesday after hitting an over three-year high in the prior session as US President Donald Trump predicted the war in the Middle East could end soon, easing concerns about prolonged disruptions to global oil supplies. Brent futures LC0c1 fell \$4.17, or 4.2%, to \$94.79 a barrel at 0345 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 was down \$3.81, or 4%, to \$90.96 a barrel. Both the contracts fell as much as 11% earlier before paring some losses.

Oil surged past \$100 a barrel on Monday to its highest since mid-2022, as supply cuts by Saudi Arabia and other producers during the expanding US-Israeli war with Iran stoked fears of major disruptions to global supplies. Prices later retreated after Russian President Vladimir Putin held a call with Trump and shared proposals aimed at a quick settlement to the Iran war, according to a Kremlin aide, easing concerns about a prolonged supply disruption. Trump said on Monday in a CBS News interview that he thinks the war against Iran "is very complete" and that Washington was "very far ahead" of his initial four- to five-week estimated timeframe.

"Clearly Trump's comments about a short-lived war has calmed markets. While there was an overreaction to the upside yesterday, we think there is an overreaction to the downside today," said Suvro Sarkar, energy sector team lead at DBS Bank, adding that the market is underappreciating risks at these levels for Brent. "Murban and Dubai grades are still well above \$100 per barrel, so practically nothing much has changed in terms of ground realities."

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## B-52s arrive at UK air base amid conflict with Iran

DNA

LONDON: Three more US bombers have landed in the UK after Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer approved "defensive" US action against Iranian missile sites from UK bases. The B-52 bombers that arrived at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire earlier measure 160ft (49m) and are capable of launching missiles more than 1,500 miles (2414km). They join a fleet of US military planes now stationed at the base after a B-1 Lancer bomber arrived on Friday evening, followed by two more on Saturday. After granting the US permission to use RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, the prime minister told MPs the government "does not believe in regime change from the skies". A large black B52 military bomber, a long sleek black plane, coming down the runway at Fairford air base. It is a misty day and there is barbed wire in the foreground. The B-52 bombers were pictured arriving at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire earlier.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a high-level meeting to review fuel, other related issues. - DNA

## CEC says Govt not serious in LG polls

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi exempted from personal appearance

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja on Tuesday said it appeared that the current government is "ignoring" both the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the local government system. The CEC passed these remarks while hearing a case regarding the delay in local government elections in Islamabad. "Unfortunately, it appears that in the current government, the ECP and the local government system are being ignored," he said, adding that the commission had been compelled to issue a contempt notice. The ECP had earlier announced holding the local body polls in Islamabad on February 15, but the same were postponed after

Continued on Page 06

## Army destroys Afghan posts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Army destroys 'important' Afghan Taliban posts, centres in Arandu, Kurram sectors. The Pakistan Army has destroyed "important posts and centres" during a timely operation in the Arandu and Kurram sectors, security sources said, according to media. The security sources added that the "cowardly Afghan Taliban" were forced to flee the posts due to the "effective attacks and retaliatory actions". As per the sources, the armed forces were targeting the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al Khawarij's "hideouts and only military installations".

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## Gulf states protest

# Azam Tarar urges media caution on foreign policy

He added that the analyses coming out of Pakistan had caused "unease on diplomatic fronts from at least a friendly country or some other corner"

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Tuesday called on the media to exercise caution when discussing matters related to Pakistan's foreign policy amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, citing "unease" voiced by "friendly countries". He made the remarks while addressing a press conference alongside Information Minister Ataullah Tarar and Minister of State for Interior Tullal Chaudry. Taking note of the recent escalation in the Middle East following US-Israeli attacks on Iran, the minister stressed the need for caution in the "narrative on these matters on social media, electronic media, and print media". "As a nation, we must keep in mind that when expressing our views, we have to keep the constitution and Pakistan's

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## Stock exchange rebounds sharply

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) rebounded sharply on Tuesday, with the benchmark index jumping more than 6% after sentiment in global markets improved following US President Donald Trump's prediction that the ongoing war in the Middle East could soon de-escalate. The KSE-100 Index settled at 156,177.12 points, up 9,696.98 points, or 6.62%, from the previous close of 146,480.14, marking its second-highest single-day increase. During the session, the index climbed to an intraday

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## Briefs

### SC okays austerity measures

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: A top judicial committee on Tuesday approved a range of energy conservation measures, including a four-day working week and cut in fuel allowance, for courts as Pakistan moves to curb the impact of rising fuel prices amid the Middle East conflict. The emergent virtual meeting of the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee (NJP-MC), chaired by Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi, was attended by the chief justices of the Federal Shariat Court and high courts, while the Attorney General for Pakistan joined on special invitation, read a statement issued by the apex court. The committee approved a comprehensive Judicial Austerity and Energy Conservation Strategy to ensure responsible use of national resources while maintaining uninterrupted access to justice across the country.

### Govt to absorb fuel fluctuation

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik on Tuesday said that the government has decided to absorb any potential fluctuation in fuel prices, hinting at no immediate significant changes in the prices. The federal government, on March 6, announced a sharp increase of Rs55 per litre in the price of petrol and diesel each, following global oil supply disruption from the ongoing war in the Middle East. At the time, the petroleum minister said that the government would reduce prices promptly once the situation improved. "I think there will be no significant in this [prices] in reasonable time, as the government has decided to absorb them to prevent difficulties for the public," he added.

## Extends felicitations

# PM Shehbaz hopes Mojtaba will bring peace in region

Premier congratulates Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on assuming responsibilities of supreme leader

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday congratulated Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on assuming the responsibilities of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressing hope that his leadership will guide the country towards peace, stability, dignity, and prosperity in the years ahead. In a letter to Mojtaba, the prime minister conveyed condolences to the Iranian leadership and people on the martyrdom of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, father of the new supreme leader, and other family members, the PM's Office said in a statement. PM Shehbaz reiterated the deepest condolences and prayers of the people of Pakistan at this solemn moment for the brotherly people of Iran and the wider Muslim Ummah, it read. He noted that Ali Khamenei's martyrdom had deeply saddened the peo-

ple of Pakistan, who stand in solidarity with the leadership and people of Iran during this difficult time. The prime minister expressed the hope that Mojtaba's leadership would guide Iran towards peace, stability, dignity and prosperity in the years ahead. He underscored that relations between Pakistan and Iran are anchored in shared faith, history, culture and language. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continue working closely with Iran to further strengthen bilateral cooperation across all spheres of mutual interest for the benefit of the two brotherly peoples. PM Shehbaz also prayed for the good health, well-being and success of the new Iranian supreme leader and for peace, stability and prosperity for the brotherly people of Iran. Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of late Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei, had been appointed to

Continued on Page 06

# Pak raises \$507m via auction of much-awaited 5G spectrum

5G services initially will be launched in Islamabad and provincial capitals, says IT Minister Shaza Fatima

DNA

ISLAMABAD: federal government on Tuesday raised \$507 million in the much-awaited 5G spectrum auction, selling 480 MHz of spectrum against a target of 597 MHz, as three telecom operators secured frequencies to roll out next-generation mobile services. The auction concluded after three rounds, with results announced by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman, flanked by Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima. He said that the auction saw the sale of two out of three lots in the 700 MHz band, all five lots in the 2300 MHz band, all 19 lots in the 2600 MHz band, and 22 out of 28 lots in the 3500 MHz band, bringing the total spectrum sold to 480 MHz. The PTA chairman described the day as "a historic and joyous milestone" for Pakistan, highlighting the country's progress in digital transformation. He also emphasised the collaboration of telecom operators, who actively participated and ensured competitive pricing. Looking ahead, the chairman said the next stage of the auction, scheduled to be held the day after tomorrow, will involve assigning specific lots within each band.

Operators will internally decide which frequencies to take in the upper, middle, or lower segments of each band. On the occasion, the IT minister said the auction marked a major milestone in Pakistan's telecommunications history. She emphasised that the event was conducted with full transparency, with all bidding processes broadcast live from the control room established by the PTA. "Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif instructed that every detail of the auction be live and transparent, ensuring public trust," she said. The minister praised the contributions of the PTA, industry partners, international consultants, and the Ministry of IT for their roles in facilitating the auction. She recalled that Pakistan first entered the 3G and 4G era between 2014 and 2016 under the leadership of former prime minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. "Those earlier auctions laid the foundation for today's digital progress. With the 600 MHz spectrum now available, Pakistan moves from being spectrum-starved to meeting regional benchmarks," she added. Fatima highlighted that the new spectrum would significantly enhance internet speeds and connectivity for millions of Pakistanis, promising improved mobile experiences in the coming months.

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# KP second ring road on the cards

According to the briefing, the proposed road would be approximately 31 kilometers long and pass through several southern localities of the provincial capital, helping divert traffic away from congested urban routes, said an official

DNA

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government was considering construction of a second ring road here to address growing traffic congestion and improve transportation in the city's southern areas, with the project's preliminary cost estimated between Rs 50 to Rs 60 billion. The proposal was reviewed during a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi, where officials discussed various aspects of the proposed outer ring road for southern Peshawar. Accord-

ing to the briefing, the proposed road would be approximately 31 kilometers long and pass through several southern localities of the provincial capital, helping divert traffic away from congested urban routes, said an official. The chief minister directed authorities to incorporate suitable interchanges in the project to facilitate commuters and ensure that the planning takes into account the city's future transport needs. He also instructed officials to coordinate with the National Highway Authority (NHA) for establishing an interchange at the Peshawar Bus Termi-

nal so that traffic can directly access the terminal without entering the city. The meeting also reviewed the possibility of including a dedicated track for the Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along the new ring road to further strengthen the public transport system. Officials said the project, once completed, is expected to significantly improve mobility in southern parts of the city, reduce traffic pressure in urban areas and promote commercial activity. The scheme is proposed to be completed within about three years.

## 2-day weekly closure amid fuel crisis in KP

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has ordered all public and private sector universities, degree awarding institutions and colleges across the province to remain closed every Friday and Saturday for the next two months in response to the ongoing fuel crisis. According to a notification issued by the Higher Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the decision was taken following approval in the provincial cabinet meeting held on March 9. The directive, issued by the Secretary Higher Education Department, stated that the measure applies to all public and private universities, degree awarding institutions (DAIs) and colleges operating in the province. Institutions have also been advised to adopt hybrid or online modes of instruction during the remaining working days, wherever feasible, to minimize disruption to academic activities. Officials said the move aims to mitigate the impact of the evolving regional situation affecting fuel supply and prices. The arrangements would remain in force for a period of two months or until further instructions are issued by the government. —APP

## IESCO notifies power suspension programme

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Tuesday issued a power suspension programme for Wednesday, in various areas of its region, due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to an IESCO spokesperson, in the Islamabad Circle, electricity supply will remain suspended from 07:00 am to 12:00 pm for feeders including NIH, T&T, Bani Kahu-I, Bani Kahu-II, Tret, Golf City, Park View, Athal and Shahpur. Similarly, in the Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, power supply will remain suspended from 07:00 am to 12:00 pm in areas fed by the RIC and Rahimabad feeders. In the Rawalpindi City Circle, the feeders supplying Benazir Bhutto Hospital, Tehmasabad and Dhok Hukam Dad will remain without electricity from 07:00 am to 12:00 pm. Meanwhile, in the Attock Circle, electricity supply from Attock Rural, Teen Mela and Bagh Neelab feeders will remain suspended during the same hours from 07:00 am to 12:00 pm. In GSO Circle, from 07:00 am to 08:00 pm, Power Transformer T-1 at 132KV GSS D.S Bilawal, from 08:00 am to 06:00 pm, 132-KV Chakwal-Bhagwal-Talagang, 132KV Kahuta City-Palandri, from 09:00 am to 02:00 pm, 132KV T/L new Wah Bahter More, and surrounding areas will remain closed. The IESCO management apologized to consumers for the inconvenience and said that power supply may be restored earlier than scheduled if the maintenance work is completed ahead of time. —APP

## PM's 14 point austerity steps widely hailed

PESHAWAR: People of all walks of life including transporters, general public, farmers, Government employees, laborers and civil society in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday widely hailed the 14-points austerity measures announced by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. They termed it a right move to counter challenges emerged after an ongoing conflict in Gulf region. President Pakistan Moolim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Nowshera, Sahibzda Hamaza, told APP that the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif announced a wide-ranging 14-point austerity and saving plan under which schools would remain shut for two days and all Government departments to reduce expenditures by 20 percent. Alike, 50 percent staff in public and private sectors would work from home and imposition of

ban on foreign visits by federal and provincial ministers, advisers, special assistants and Government officials were positive steps in the right direction, he said. Misal Khan, a retired Information Officer also hailed the Prime Minister's wide ranging austerity measures and petrol saving plan, saying that in the wake of security escalations in the Middle East, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has taken positive measures to provide relief to the general public. He said the entire Gulf region has been gripped by the Iran-Israel-US conflict that resulted in unprecedented increase in prices of petroleum in the regional countries including Pakistan. He said the Prime Minister has announced that cabinet members, advisers and special assistants would

not draw salaries for the two months besides a 25 percent salary cut in salaries of members of the parliament. Four day work week in offices and two holidays in schools for two weeks would help offset the impact of the Middle East war on Pakistan besides tackling severe economic challenges. Taxi driver, Anwar Khan, labourer, Muhammad Irshad, farmer Umar Khan, former PST teacher Riazul Haq and civil society have praised the PM's austerity measures and petroleum saving plans and termed it an important measure to provide maximum relief to poor and underprivileged in the wake of conflict in Middle East. They said despite petroleum crisis in the regional countries, our government announced minimum increase in prices of petroleum and announced strict action against hoarding and black marketing. —APP

## PHMA opposes 0.9% infrastructure Cess in Punjab

DNA

FAISALABAD: Mr. Ahmad Afzal Awan, Senior Vice Chairman of Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PHMA) North Zone has strongly opposed the imposition of a 0.9 percent Infrastructure Development Cess in Punjab, stating that such levies would further increase the cost of doing business and adversely affect the competitiveness of Pakistan's export-oriented textile sector. In a statement issued here on Tuesday, Mr. Ahmad said that the value-added textile sector, particularly hosiery and



knitwear exporters based in Faisalabad and other industrial hubs of Punjab is already facing immense challenges due to high energy tariffs, rising raw material costs, and increased taxation. The imposition of an additional infrastructure cess will place an unnecessary financial bur-

den on exporters who are striving to sustain their presence in highly competitive international markets. He emphasized that exporters are contributing significantly to the national economy by earning valuable foreign exchange and providing large-scale employment. Instead of introducing new levies, the government should focus on facilitating exporters and reducing the cost of production to enhance Pakistan's export potential. He further noted that such provincial levies create distortions in the supply chain and discourage industrial growth. He urged the Punjab government to reconsider and withdraw the proposed infrastructure

cess, as it would ultimately harm export growth and slow down economic activity in the province. The PHMA North Zone leadership called upon the federal and provincial authorities to consult with industry stakeholders before introducing any additional taxes or charges that may negatively impact the export sector. He reiterated that the government must adopt policies that promote industrial expansion, boost exports, and ensure the long-term sustainability of Pakistan's textile industry. In view of these concerns he requested the Punjab Govt to immediately withdraw this proposed infrastructure cess in Punjab.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar addressing press conference. Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar & Federal minister of state for Interior Talal Chaudhry's also present with him.(Story on back page)

## Kamal pledges reforms to strengthen quality of patient care

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, on Tuesday pledged reforms to strengthen Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), to strengthen the quality of patient care and meet the local and international demand of Nursing staff. He made these remarks, while addressing members of the council during the second meeting of the Pakistan Nursing Council, which was held at the Ministry of National Health Services. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said nursing was a vital component of the country's healthcare system and the quality of patient care largely depended on the professional skills and competence of nursing staff. He highlighted that Pakistan currently faced a shortage of around 900,000 nurses, while the global demand stood at nearly 2.5 million nurses. Mustafa Kamal emphasized that achieving national healthcare goals required making the Pakistan Nursing Council a strong, effective and transparent institution. He reaffirmed his commitment to developing the council on modern lines in accordance with international standards. The minister noted that practical steps were needed to restore the damaged reputation of the council and urged all stakeholders to work collectively to promote merit and transparency within the institution. —APP

## PFA registers 110 cases, seals 182 food outlets

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) registered 110 cases and sealed 182 food outlets during a province-wide crackdown on unhygienic Sehri and Iftar points to ensure the provision of safe food during the holy month of Ramadan. According to PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javid, the action was taken during inspections of 14,143 Sehri points and 37,338 Iftar points across Punjab since the start of Ramadan. He said that 5,860 food businesses were fined more than Rs 80.6 million, while 27,582 outlets were issued detailed improvement notices for failing to meet food safety standards. In addition, 2,225

food samples were collected for laboratory testing. The DG said that over 198,000 kilograms/litres of substandard and adulterated food items were confiscated and destroyed during the inspections. These included food prepared with poor-quality ingredients, expired products, sauces, ketchup, meat, cold drinks and cooking oil. Several food outlets were sealed for using expired ingredients in food preparation, while inspections also revealed unhygienic kitchen conditions, including the presence of insects, flies and spider webs. He said food prepared with prohibited or stale ingredients could cause serious health issues and such items

were immediately seized and discarded during the operations. The DG added that training of food handlers had been conducted before Ramadan and is still ongoing, while additional directors, directors and district deputy directors are actively supervising field operations. He said that food outlets are being inspected in three shifts during Ramadan, adding that no compromise would be made on food quality, regardless of the size of the food point. The DG urged citizens to report any food-related complaints on the PFA helpline 1223, while advising food business operators to strictly comply with Punjab Food Authority regulations.

## Rs 980m minerals resource centre planned

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Science and Technology has proposed the establishment of an around Rs980 million state-of-the-art minerals resource centre in Peshawar to enhance value addition and promote exports in the mineral sector. The project is titled "Establishment of Minerals Resource Centre, Analytical Laboratory and Minerals Detection Facility at PCSIR Labs, Peshawar for Product Design, Development and Value Addition to Enhance Export". According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the project carries an estimated total cost of Rs979.621 million, with an allocation of Rs150 million proposed for the upcoming financial year. The scheme was approved by the Department-

tal Development Working Party (DDWP) on February 18, 2025. The project aims to establish advanced mineral processing and extraction facilities at PCSIR Laboratories Peshawar to strengthen Pakistan's capacity for mineral value addition and industrial utilization. A key objective is the installation of a state-of-the-art ore beneficiation pilot plant and electrolytic refining systems to support the industrial sector in processing and upgrading mineral resources. The initiative also seeks to develop modern extraction and beneficiation methods, along with advanced testing and analytical techniques for the production and characterization of rare earth metals and other strategic minerals. Another important component

of the project is the establishment of a geological survey system to facilitate the identification of ores, mines, and mineral deposits, as well as the mapping of areas with high potential for undiscovered mineral resources. In addition, the centre will provide technical and analytical services to both public and private sector organizations to support exploration, mineral evaluation, and resource development activities. Through research, innovation, and commercialization support, the project intends to strengthen Pakistan's mineral sector by improving technological capabilities, promoting scientific exploration, and enabling industries to produce high-value mineral-based products for domestic use and export markets. —APP

## Sanallah, Irfan discuss matters of mutual interest

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Irfan Neziroglu, met with the Prime Minister's Adviser on Inter-Provincial Coordination and Public Affairs, Rana Sanallah, in Islamabad. Federal Secretary for Inter-Provincial Coordination, Mohiuddin Ahmed Wani, was also present during the meeting. During the meeting, both leaders discussed matters of mutual interest and the changing political and security situation in the region. Rana Sanallah and the Turkish Ambassador expressed deep concern over the rising tensions and the threat of war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran. Both sides agreed that war is not a solution to any problem. They noted that conflict not only leads to the loss of human lives but

also poses serious risks to the global economy and energy supplies. Both leaders stressed the need for establishing peace in the region and finding diplomatic solutions to conflicts. The Prime Minister's Adviser also briefed the Turkish Ambassador on Pakistan's perspective regarding the situation along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and its relations with Afghanistan. The Turkish Ambassador informed Rana Sanallah that Turkey's Minister of Sports will visit Pakistan in May. The purpose of the visit is to pro-

vide joint platforms for the youth of both countries. Federal Secretary Mohiuddin Wani reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to enhancing cooperation with Turkey in various sectors at the inter-provincial level. War news updates

Rana Sanallah praised the long-standing brotherly relations between Pakistan and Turkey. He stated that Pakistan highly values its relationship with Turkey, and both nations have always stood by each other in times of need.





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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
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- RGH.....9290301-7
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- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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



## Islamabad Metropolitan

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

## Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Five Romanians evacuated from remote GB mountains

This operation highlights effective bilateral cooperation between Romania and Pakistan in consular matters, particularly in challenging and remote terrains amid broader regional tensions.



## DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Romanian Embassy in Islamabad, with the support of Pakistani authorities, successfully completed a complex repatriation operation for a group of five Romanian citizens who were in the mountainous northern regions of Pakistan.

The diplomatic mission was notified about the presence of the five Romanians in the Hushe Valley (Gilgit-Baltistan), a remote area in the Karakoram Mountains with altitudes exceeding 7,000 meters. This region is currently considered high-

sensitive from a security perspective. Amid recent regional developments—including the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and heightened security issues along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border—their evacuation became a priority. The five Romanian citizens entered Pakistan on February 24 this year and only recently contacted the Romanian Embassy in Islamabad to request assistance for extraction from the area and repatriation. The embassy had not been previously informed of their presence in the region. With the assistance of authorities in Gilgit-Baltistan, local police, and representatives of the Pakistani army, the

embassy located and evacuated the group via the route from Hushe Valley to Gilgit and then to Islamabad. The logistics and security operation lasted over 48 hours. The Romanian citizens were subsequently safely boarded on a flight from Islamabad to Istanbul and are now en route to Cluj-Napoca.

The embassy expressed gratitude to the local authorities, police, and Pakistani army for their prompt, professional support and excellent cooperation extended to the Romanian citizens and the embassy in this situation. Special thanks were also extended to the consular team of the Romanian mission, which acted with

responsibility and professionalism, as always.

The embassy reiterated its recommendation to Romanian citizens in Pakistan to closely monitor travel alerts from Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE), stay informed about local developments, and take enhanced personal safety measures: remain vigilant, avoid crowded areas, and ensure they are registered with the Romanian Embassy in Islamabad. This operation highlights effective bilateral cooperation between Romania and Pakistan in consular matters, particularly in challenging and remote terrains amid broader regional tensions.

## SSP Operations Qazi visits markets

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Islamabad Qazi Ali Raza visited various commercial centers and markets in the federal capital and inspected the police help desks established to guide and assist citizens. An official told APP on Tuesday that the SSP Operations reviewed arrangements made for facilitating citizens and ensuring security in busy marketplaces. During the visit, he inspected the police help desks set up in markets to provide guidance and immediate assistance to the public. Qazi said that police help desks had been established within the jurisdictions of all police stations, where officers and personnel had been deployed to ensure timely assistance to citizens. He said that lady police officers had also been deployed at the help desks to address the issues faced by women and provide them with prompt support. The SSP Operations added that these help desks would also assist in taking action against professional beggars and help ensure immediate response in case of any emergency.—APP

## Rawalpindi sewerage system revamp

RAWALPINDI: A major project to overhaul Rawalpindi's sewerage infrastructure is under way for the first time at an estimated cost of Rs15 billion under the Punjab Chief Minister's Development Programme. Secretary Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Department Noorul Amin Mengal on Tuesday visited various sites in the city to review the pace of work on the ongoing development schemes. Officials of the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi informed him that the project included laying around 82 kilometres of new sewerage lines across different parts of the city to improve drainage and sanitation facilities. A two-kilometre-long drain would also be constructed to ensure effective disposal of rainwater and reduce the risk of urban flooding. 'The scheme also envisages the establishment of a new disposal station with a capacity of 16 cusecs,' the officials said, adding that all development works under the project were scheduled to be completed by June 2026. Secretary Mengal was further informed that a nine-kilometre-long water supply scheme at Sixth Road had entered its final stages. —APP

## Capital on high alert for Youm-e-Ali, 3,000 cops deployed

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have finalized foolproof security arrangements for Youm-e-Ali (RA), with more than 3,000 police officers and personnel deployed to ensure the safety of processions and religious gatherings in the federal capital. An official told on Tuesday that comprehensive security arrangements had been made for processions and majalis on the occasion of Youm-e-Ali. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq said that participants would only be allowed to join the processions through designated routes after passing through walk-through gates, metal detectors and body search. He said that all streets and lanes falling along the procession routes had been sealed to ensure effective security. The DIG Tariq added that snipers had been deployed on rooftops along the procession routes while special checking would also be carried out at all entry and exit points of the city. He said that traffic police officers and personnel would perform their duties to ensure smooth traffic flow and facilitate citizens during the event. Tariq said that senior police officers would remain present in the field to review security arrangements and brief the deployed personnel. He reiterated that Islamabad Police had made foolproof security arrangements for the processions, adding that protecting the lives and property of citizens remained the top priority of Islamabad Police. Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) on Tuesday issued a special traffic plan for Youm-e-Ali (RA) to ensure smooth traffic flow and facilitate commuters in the federal capital. An ITP official told APP that Press Club Underpass will remain closed for traffic on the occasion. Citizens travelling from Super Market towards Aabpara and Melody have been advised to use Embassy Road and Suhrawardy Road as alternative routes. He said that Street No. 57 in G-6/4 will also remain closed for traffic. Vehicles coming from Shaheed-e-Millat Road may use Embassy Road via Street No. 57 and Municipal Road to reach Aabpara and Melody. The official further said that traffic from Lal Masjid Chowk towards Shaheed-e-Millat Road will remain closed. Citizens coming from Municipal Road may use Melody, GPO Chowk and Shuhada Chowk as alternative routes. He said that traffic will be diverted from Polyclinic Fazal-e-Haq Road towards Kulsum Plaza. Vehicles coming from Geo Chowk may use the Polyclinic Fazal-e-Haq service road to reach Kulsum Plaza. Similarly, vehicles travelling from Kulsum Plaza towards Geo Chowk have been advised to use the service road to reach their destination.—DNA

## Regional situation requires national unity

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Tuesday said the current regional situation requires national unity and responsible political conduct. Responding to points raised by members in the National Assembly, the minister said Pakistan's foreign policy is guided by its national interest. He said decisions are taken according to the country's priorities rather than to satisfy any other state. The minister said the regional situation is serious, but regretted that the matter is being politicised in the House. Referring to India's aggression in May, Dr Tariq Fazal said Pakistan gave a strong response and the entire nation stood united during that difficult time. He urged political leaders to avoid politicising the issue and refrain from making divisive statements. The minister said Pakistan remains committed to its defence agreement with Saudi Arabia and will continue to fulfil its obligations. He added that the people of Pakistan are ready to make every sacrifice for the defence of the Haramain Sharifain. Dr Tariq Fazal said Pakistan condemned the attack on Iran and the martyrdom of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressing solidarity with the Iranian people. At the same time, he said drone and missile attacks on Gulf countries were also condemnable. —APP

## Swedish Bank exploring climate investment fund in Pak

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan, Alexandra Berg von Linde, informed Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik that Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken (SEB), a Swedish financial institution engaged in green lending, is exploring the possibility of establishing a multi-country climate investment fund in Pakistan. During a meeting with the minister in Islamabad on Tuesday, the ambassador said the proposed fund would focus on projects related to water, infrastructure and energy, aimed at supporting climate-resilient development and sustainable investments. She explained that the initiative seeks to help local companies reduce risks associated with climate-related investments while promoting environmentally sustainable development. The fund is also expected to collaborate with GCF to mobilise climate finance for projects in Pakistan. The ambassador requested the ministry's support and coordination in this regard, noting that the Ministry of Climate Change serves as Pakistan's National Designated Authority for the GCF. —APP

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## Briefs

## Capital on high alert for Youm-e-Ali

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have finalized foolproof security arrangements for Youm-e-Ali (RA), with more than 3,000 police officers and personnel deployed to ensure the safety of processions and religious gatherings in the federal capital. An official told APP on Tuesday that comprehensive security arrangements had been made for processions and majalis on the occasion of Youm-e-Ali. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq said that participants would only be allowed to join the processions through designated routes after passing through walk-through gates, metal detectors and body search. He said that all streets and lanes falling along the procession routes had been sealed to ensure effective security. The DIG Tariq added that snipers had been deployed on rooftops along the procession routes while special checking would also be carried out at all entry and exit points of the city. He said that traffic police officers and personnel would perform their duties to ensure smooth traffic flow and facilitate citizens during the event. Tariq said that senior police officers would remain present in the field to review security arrangements and brief the deployed personnel. He reiterated that Islamabad Police had made foolproof security arrangements for the processions, adding that protecting the lives and property of citizens remained the top priority of Islamabad Police.—APP

## Govt evacuates Pakistani students from Iran amid regional tensions

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Tuesday informed the National Assembly that the government had taken comprehensive measures to ensure the safety and evacuation of Pakistani nationals, particularly students, from Iran amid the escalating military tensions in the region. Responding to a Calling Attention Notice moved by Natasha Daultana, Shazia Marri, Dr. Nafisa Shah, Muhammad Shaharyar Khan Mahar, and Nawabzada Mir Jamal Khan Raisani, the minister said the situation in the region had become alarming following attacks by Israel and the United States on Iran, which had created serious security concerns. He said the developments had also heightened tensions across the Gulf region, making the safety of Pakistani nationals in Iran a top priority for the government. The minister said the government prepared a comprehensive evacuation plan to facilitate Pakistani students studying in various universities across Iran. "Our embassy and two consulates in Iran are actively working and maintaining contact with students through multiple channels," he told the House.—APP

## Serena Hotels Raabta initiative highlights women challenges

To conclude the International Women's Day programme, the evening also featured a soulful Qawwali performance by Imran Aziz Mian, held in the spirit of Ramadan, bringing guests together in an atmosphere of reflection, cultural harmony, and the timeless tradition of Sufi music



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels, under its Public Diplomacy initiative Raabta, hosted a special panel discussion to mark International Women's Day, bringing together accomplished women from diverse fields to share their journeys, achievements, and perspectives on women's empowerment. The dialogue highlighted the importance of resilience, leadership,

and creating opportunities for women to thrive across all sectors of society.

The panel featured three distinguished women whose work has created meaningful impact in their respective fields: renowned Pakistani singer Natasha Baig; Ms. Summiya Andrabi, Vice President of PFOWA; and Ms. Sarah Ahmad (Tamgha-e-Imtiaz), Chairperson of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau Punjab and a leading child rights advocate. The conversation was moderated

by Sidra Iqbal, a renowned television anchor and global speaker, who also serves as the curator of Serena Hotels' Raabta platform under its Public Diplomacy initiative. Guiding the discussion, she encouraged reflections on women's leadership, perseverance, and the transformative role women continue to play in shaping inclusive and progressive societies.

During the session, the panelists encouraged young women to pursue their

ambitions with confidence and determination, emphasizing that perseverance, passion, and purpose remain key drivers of success.

To conclude the International Women's Day programme, the evening also featured a soulful Qawwali performance by Imran Aziz Mian, held in the spirit of Ramadan, bringing guests together in an atmosphere of reflection, cultural harmony, and the timeless tradition of Sufi music.

## Pak-China hospital treats over 48,000 patients

DNA

GWADAR: GDA Pak-China Friendship Hospital in Gwadar treated more than 48,000 patients during the first two months of 2026, further strengthening its position as a primary healthcare facility for residents of the coastal areas of the Makran Division.

According to data shared by the hospital on Monday, 25,575 patients were treated in January, while 23,081 patients received treatment in February, bringing the total number of patients treated during the first two months of the year to 48,656, according to a Gwadar Pro's report. As per the hospital administration, the facility continues to provide free medicines, diagnostic services, and meals to admitted patients. On average, around 1,100 to 1,200 patients visit the hospital daily to receive medical treatment and free diagnostic services.

## IGP visits police facilitation centre Cascade

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi visited the Police Facilitation Centre "Cascade" located in the Diplomatic Enclave and reviewed the facilities being provided to citizens. An official told APP on Tuesday that the IGP inspected various sections of the centre and assessed the services being offered to the public.

During the visit, he appreciated the performance of the staff and commended the officers and personnel for performing their duties with dedication, efficiency and a strong sense of responsibility.

Rizvi emphasized that providing quality and timely services to citizens was a top priority of Islamabad Police, adding that facilitation centres had been established to ensure maximum convenience for the public.

He directed the staff to continue performing their duties with professionalism and courtesy while ensuring prompt service delivery to visitors.

The IGP Rizvi reiterated that Islamabad Police were committed to improving public service delivery and strengthening the trust of citizens in the police force.—APP

## 5G spectrum auction historic step for Pak's digital future: Shaza

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Tuesday said the spectrum auction was a historic step that would improve digital connectivity and strengthen Pakistan's digital economy. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Spectrum Auction for Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS)/5G, she said Pakistan had seen several technological revolutions in the past, but the current phase of digital transformation was especially important for the country. The ceremony was attended by Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority Chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman and several parliamentarians. The minister said different institutions worked together to make the spectrum available for the auction. She added that the development was an encouraging moment for Pakistan as it would help the country move towards the next generation of technology. She said Pakistan entered the 3G and 4G era during the government of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif between 2014 and 2016. Since then, no major spectrum auction has been held, which has caused problems with internet quality and user experience. Shaza Fatima said the auction would not only introduce 5G services but also improve the quality and capacity of existing 4G networks. She said fast, reliable and affordable internet had become a basic need for citizens, adding that digital connectivity now played an important role in sectors such as the economy, agriculture, industry and national security. The minister said the government had also removed right-of-way charges for telecom infrastructure to speed up the expansion of fiber networks across the country. She added that a national fiberization plan would soon be launched to help telecom companies expand their infrastructure after acquiring spectrum. She said the auction framework was prepared after consultations with several institutions, including the Spectrum Advisory Committee, the Ministry of Finance, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and the Frequency Allocation Board. According to the minister, international telecom organisations appreciated Pakistan's auction framework. She said positive feedback was received during discussions at the Mobile World Congress, where some countries praised the arrangements. She added that people would start seeing improvement in 4G services within four to five months after the auction, while 5G services would first be launched in Islamabad and provincial capitals within five to six months. The minister also acknowledged the role of former IT minister Aminul Haq, government institutions and the armed forces for making spectrum available for commercial use in the national interest. She said progress in the telecom sector was part of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's "Digital Nation Pakistan" vision, which aims to promote digitization, provide technology training to youth, increase IT exports and support a cashless economy. Speaking on the occasion, PTA Chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman said the long-awaited day had finally arrived. He thanked all institutions that helped make the spectrum auction possible and said the availability of spectrum had been the biggest challenge. He said the PTA and the Frequency Allocation Board worked closely to ensure the spectrum was made available, adding that 5G services would bring modern internet facilities to remote areas.—DNA

## SC commutes death sentence of man

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has commuted the death sentence of Muhammad Ameen, convicted of murdering his wife and daughter, to life imprisonment, granting him major relief in the case. According to the detailed written judgment approved for reporting by the Supreme Court, the court partially set aside the decisions of the trial court and the high court, observing that executing the convict would effectively render his minor daughter an orphan under the custody of the state. The judgment, authored by Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, stated that the convict's 15-year-old daughter, Insa Ameen, is his only surviving dependent. Therefore, maintaining the death penalty would not be appropriate in the circumstances. The court clarified that converting the death sentence into life imprisonment did not amount

to pardoning the crime, but rather ensured that the state did not become the cause of a child being left completely without support. The judgment further noted that under international obligations, including relevant United Nations conventions, the state must consider the best interests of the child in such cases. It also observed that when the legal heir of a victim is the accused himself, the punishment of Qisas could not be enforced under Section 306 of the Pakistan Penal Code. According to the court record, Muhammad Ameen murdered his wife and daughter in April 2021 in Vehari district following a dispute over the sale of agricultural land. A day before the incident, the convict had argued with his wife and children over the land sale. The judgment states that the convict stabbed his wife 21 times and his daughter eight times with a dagger, while another daughter was injured during the attack.

## Global significance, opportunities of Chinese modernization

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: China Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with China Media Group (CMG) organised a seminar titled "China in Springtime: The 15th Five-Year Plan - The Global Significance and Opportunities of Chinese Modernization". The event highlighted China's recently concluded Two Sessions, which set the course for the country's governance, economic growth, and global engagement. Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mehmood, in his welcome remarks highlighted that China's modernization under the 15th Five-Year Plan reflects a strong focus on innovation, sustainability, and people-centered development. He noted that China's evolving development trajectory carries important global implications and presents opportunities for cooperation, particularly with partners like Pakistan. Emphasizing the significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, he underscored that collaboration in areas such as technology, green development, and con-

nectivity will further strengthen the longstanding strategic partnership between the two countries. The Chief Guest, Mr Murtaza Solangi, reflected on the broader geopolitical context of China's development trajectory, noting that the deliberations of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference provide insights into China's long-term economic planning and policy priorities. He observed that China continues to emphasize steady economic growth, technological self-reliance, innovation, and

green transformation while expanding the digital economy and strengthening domestic consumption. Highlighting the evolving global environment, he remarked that the world is transitioning toward a multipolar world order, in which countries of the Global South will play an increasingly significant role. Pakistan, given its strategic location and longstanding partnership with China, can contribute constructively to a more balanced and cooperative international system. Ambassador Masood Khalid, in his keynote address, highlighted the

importance of understanding China's development model through its Five-Year Plans, noting that the planning process, initiated in 1953, has evolved into a pragmatic framework combining long-term vision with periodic evaluation. He observed that these plans have driven China's remarkable transformation, including lifting over 800 million people out of poverty and building world-class infrastructure. Continued investment in education, research, and innovation has enabled China to emerge as a major economic and technological power. Dr Hassan Daud Butt highlighted China's development trajectory as the gradual building of a "Great Wall of Development." Despite demographic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges, China has sustained strong economic growth and technological advancement, particularly in innovation and clean energy. Referring to the forthcoming 15th Five-Year Plan, he underscored its focus on innovation, green development, and high-quality growth, while emphasizing that Pakistan could benefit by strengthening special economic zones, expanding technological cooperation.



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## Ramadan and the Rhythm of Prices

USAMA ABDUL RAUF

**R**AMADAN is both a month of prayer and self-denial. It is supposed to train the lust and streamline the consumption. But once in a year, as the sacred month nears, families start adjusting grocery lists, wholesalers are on the move, and market prices are also starting to shift. The paradox is familiar. A time of an austerity policy is usually accompanied by quantifiable strain on key commodities. Think of the time before Ramadan towards the end of 2024. Weekly inflation in November 2024 was 0.67 percent. Some of the basic commodities were stable and even slightly decreasing. These were slight declines in sugar and wheat flour. The situation in the market was relatively stable, there were no significant peaks in perishables or protein products. Compare that now to the week ending 13 March 2025, when it is the Ramadan period. Inflation was significantly stronger on a weekly basis. There was an increase of 36 percent in tomatoes in one week. The price of chicken rose by 6.4 percent. Sugar, that hitherto had been stable, increased by approximately 6 percent. These were not fringe benefits. They were focused initiatives on accurately those items that prevail in Ramadan consumption baskets. The same rhythm was also present in the next cycle. The weekly rate of price growth was quite low at a humble 0.31 percent in the week ending 13 August 2025, which is well before Ramadan. A number of necessary commodities were not very volatile. However, now the weekly inflation grew accelerated to 1.16 percent. In one week bananas increased by 16 percent. Again upwards pressure was demonstrated in chicken and tomatoes. There is consistency in this rhythm, and this indicates that it must be something structural and not accidental. The former is due to the concentration of demand. Ramadan does not just augment the consumption. It synchronises it. There is a huge purchase of similar commodities by homes in the nation at approximately the same period. Demand of items such as sugar, cooking oil, flour, dates, poultry and fruits are clustered in a narrow range. Even a stable supply annually may experience short term pressure when the demand is not evenly distributed. This is enhanced by behaviour. In case the consumers expect prices

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to rise, they start to purchase earlier or more. This is a sensible anticipatory purchasing on an individual level. When, however, a large number of millions of households respond to the same expectations, the outcome may be expectations driven inflation. The prices not only increase due to tight supply, but because the market participants are convinced that it will be tight. The expectations make themselves true. The results are also determined by wholesale market structure. Mandi networks have an imbalanced distribution of information. Big traders usually have insight into the volume of incoming supplies as compared to small-scale retailers. Retailers react by changing prices when the cues of the tighter availability before replacement costs are fully realised. Competition at the top is thin which makes inventory holding a strategic move. A few days delay in releasing stock at the time of high demand can increase margins. Downstream retailers react. These pressures are aggravated by energy volatility. Moving perishables have a moderate impact on transportation costs due to even slight alterations in the cost of fuel. Cold storage and cold distribution are affected by electricity charges. When all these elements of cost are flowing in a time of increased demand, their aggregate impact can be increased in the retail level. The cyclical nature of the seasons indicates that reactive measures might not be adequate. Much of the policy emphasis will tend to kick into operation when the prices are already in motion. A more preventative intervention would be based on an enhanced real time monitoring of inventory, deliveries, and interprovincial traffic. Better coordination of data collection and market oversight mechanism is also important. Demand changes seasonally are predictable. It is not a case of heavy intervention but the goal is to be better anticipated. When the wholesale arrivals, storage capacity and the transportation bottlenecks are digitally monitored, uncertainty can be minimized before it becomes reflected in price spikes. Finally, the Ramadan price trend provides more structural characteristics of food markets. The supply chains are still divided. There is limited storage capacity of perishable goods. Ramadan will always reshape consumption behaviour. That is part of its social character. The difficulty lies in making sure that the expected seasonal demand does not turn out again into preventable instability. The economic rhythm of the month could be more stable by means of enhancing the transparency, coordination of the supply chains and promotion of competitive practices in the marketplace. In doing so, the marketplace can better reflect the spirit of balance that Ramadan seeks to promote.

## Trump Buries the United Nations

Qamar Bashir



The inability of the United Nations to enforce its resolutions has led many analysts to question whether the organization still possesses meaningful authority. Critics increasingly describe it as toothless—a forum for speeches rather than an institution capable of imposing consequences on those who violate international law. In earlier decades, the credibility of the United Nations rested largely on the willingness of major powers, particularly the United States, to enforce its principles. When Washington itself begins to bypass those principles, the entire structure weakens

**I**N the ashes of the Second World War, humanity stood at the edge of civilizational collapse. Two catastrophic wars had devastated continents, killed more than 70 million people, and shattered the illusion that unrestrained nationalism and military power could coexist with global stability. Out of this devastation emerged one of the most ambitious political projects in human history: the creation of the United Nations in 1945. Designed largely under the leadership of the United States and its wartime allies, the institution was meant to prevent future wars, eliminate poverty, encourage diplomacy, and build a world governed by rules rather than brute force. For nearly eight decades, the United Nations and its related institutions helped construct what came to be known as the "rules-based international order." Agencies such as the World Health Organization, World Food Programme, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank worked to alleviate poverty, distribute health services, stabilize economies, and assist countries emerging from conflict. The United Nations oversaw peacekeeping missions in dozens of conflict zones, helped eradicate diseases like smallpox, and coordinated humanitarian aid to millions facing famine or displacement. The rule-based trading and financial architecture that followed—embodied in institutions like the World Trade Organization—enabled unprecedented economic growth across the globe. Yet today, the institution that once symbolized humanity's collective commitment to peace stands increasingly weakened. The very country that was instrumental in creating and enforcing this system appears to be drifting away from it. Since the return of Trump to the presidency, his rhetoric and actions have undermined the legitimacy of international law and institutions that once amplified American power. Trump has repeatedly emphasized that the United States possesses the most powerful military on Earth, the largest economy, and unmatched technological capability. While these facts are widely acknowledged—U.S. defense spending alone exceeds \$850 billion annually, greater than the next ten countries combined—the repeated emphasis on raw power signals something deeper: a belief that international rules constrain American freedom of action. For decades, the United States championed a system where even small nations possessed legal standing and diplomatic voice within the United Nations. The foundational principle was simple but revolutionary: sovereign equality. In theory, the smallest island nation had the same vote in the General Assembly as the largest superpower. This principle helped legitimize the system and ensured that disputes would be resolved through negotiation, consultation, and diplomacy rather than war. However, the resurgence of "might-makes-right" thinking threatens to unravel that consensus. Increasingly, global politics appears to be drifting away from

diplomacy toward unilateral action backed by military superiority. The use of strategic bombers such as the B-52 Stratofortress and stealth platforms like the B-2 Spirit symbolizes this shift. Rather than relying on multilateral consensus or international arbitration, military power is again being invoked as the ultimate arbiter of global disputes. Nowhere is this erosion of international authority more visible than in the Middle East. Israel's military operations across Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran have frequently proceeded despite criticism from international bodies and resolutions calling for restraint. Investigations and appeals from the International Court of Justice and multiple UN resolutions have had little practical effect on events on the ground. The devastating war in Gaza, which according to humanitarian agencies has resulted in tens of thousands of civilian casualties and widespread destruction of infrastructure, illustrates the limits of global institutions when powerful states choose to ignore them. The inability of the United Nations to enforce its resolutions has led many analysts to question whether the organization still possesses meaningful authority. Critics increasingly describe it as toothless—a forum for speeches rather than an institution capable of imposing consequences on those who violate international law. In earlier decades, the credibility of the United Nations rested largely on the willingness of major powers, particularly the United States, to enforce its principles. When Washington itself begins to bypass those principles, the entire structure weakens. Recent geopolitical events reinforce this perception. The United States has seized foreign oil shipments, imposed sweeping sanctions on adversaries, and conducted military strikes in multiple regions without clear UN authorization. Washington has also openly discussed strategic control over resources in regions such as Greenland and emphasized pre-emptive military action as a legitimate doctrine. These developments signal a shift away from the cooperative frameworks that once defined post-war international politics. The consequences of this shift extend far beyond the Middle East. If international rules are no longer respected by their principal architect, other countries may follow the same path. Already, conflicts such as the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, border tensions across Asia, and unilateral military actions by various regional powers reflect a growing willingness to bypass diplomacy in favor of force. This erosion of legal norms creates a dangerous precedent. If powerful states feel free to violate borders, eliminate political leaders, or destroy infrastructure without accountability, smaller nations will face increasing insecurity. The collapse of trust in international law could also disrupt global commerce, maritime navigation, and air travel agreements that depend on mutual respect for established rules.

Ironically, this transformation could ultimately weaken the very country that once championed the rules-based order. The international system created after World War II magnified American influence by aligning global institutions with its values and interests. By abandoning those frameworks, Washington risks encouraging a fragmented world where competing blocs pursue power without restraint. The war in Gaza illustrates another paradox. Despite overwhelming military superiority and the deployment of some of the world's most advanced weapons systems, Israel and its allies have struggled to achieve decisive strategic outcomes against irregular forces. The persistence of groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah demonstrates that military might alone cannot resolve deeply rooted political conflicts. Even after years of bombardment and tens of thousands of casualties, the underlying grievances and power dynamics remain unresolved. These realities raise a fundamental question: if overwhelming military force cannot eliminate small insurgent groups, what would be the consequences of applying the same strategy against a large and heavily armed nation like Iran? Iran has a population exceeding 90 million and a vast geographical landscape stretching across mountainous terrain. Any prolonged conflict would carry immense regional and global repercussions. The deeper lesson may be that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through force alone. Lasting solutions require dialogue, diplomacy, and recognition of mutual sovereignty. The original vision behind the United Nations was precisely this: a system where disputes would be resolved through negotiation rather than war. Today that vision appears battered, perhaps even buried. Yet history suggests that institutions often evolve through crisis. The devastation of two world wars gave birth to the United Nations. The present erosion of international law may eventually compel global leaders to reform and strengthen the very institutions that now appear weakened. Humanity possesses one enduring advantage over the forces of chaos: the capacity for reflection and hope. If the United States and other major powers rediscover the value of the rules-based system they once built, the United Nations could yet regain its relevance. The alternative—a world governed solely by power and intimidation—would not merely undermine international stability. It would return civilization to the very conditions the United Nations was created to prevent. In that sense, the future of the global order may depend not on military strength, but on whether humanity chooses once again to believe that law must stand above 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

## Gulf on the Verge of Catastrophe

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The resilience of Iran's retaliatory capability has surprised many observers. Missile strikes and asymmetric responses have demonstrated that even under intense pressure Iran retains the ability to inflict strategic costs. At the same time, Israel's celebrated multilayered defence system has faced severe strain as repeated waves of missiles and drones...

**T**HE present confrontation in the Middle East has brought the international system to one of its most delicate moments since the end of the Cold War. The joint military campaign launched by the United States and Israel against Iran in late February 2026 has rapidly expanded into a wider regional crisis, drawing in multiple actors and raising fears of an uncontrollable escalation. Independent analysts describe the conflict as the opening phase of what some commentators already call a "third Gulf war," whose consequences may extend far beyond the immediate battlefield. The campaign began with coordinated air and missile strikes by Israel and the United States against Iranian military installations and infrastructure. The stated objective was to weaken Iran's missile capabilities and strategic facilities that Washington and Tel Aviv believe threaten regional security. Yet the war has not unfolded according to simple expectations. Iran has responded with missile and drone attacks against Israeli targets and military facilities in several Gulf countries, while tensions around the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted global shipping and energy supplies. The resilience of Iran's retaliatory capability has surprised many observers. Missile strikes and asymmetric responses have demonstrated that even under intense pressure Iran retains the ability to inflict strategic costs. At the same time, Israel's celebrated multilayered defence system has faced severe strain as repeated waves of missiles and drones test the limits of interception technologies. The war has therefore turned into a contest of endurance rather than a swift demonstration of military superiority. The economic consequences of the conflict are already visible. Oil prices have surged rapidly, shaking global financial markets and raising fears of recession in several economies. The United States, already confronting inflationary pressures and fiscal burdens from earlier conflicts, may find the continuation of a prolonged war economically difficult. Wars fought far from home often impose invisible costs that gradually accumulate in national budgets and public opinion. The Gulf countries, despite their close security ties with

Washington, are deeply worried about the consequences of the conflict. Iranian retaliatory attacks have already reached several states of the region, and analysts warn that vital infrastructure—including desalination plants and energy facilities—could become targets if hostilities intensify. For countries whose survival depends on imported technology and fragile water infrastructure, the specter of a wider war is profoundly alarming. Beyond the immediate region, the positions of major global powers further complicate the situation. China and Russia have voiced strong diplomatic criticism of the military strikes and warned that the conflict could destabilize the international system. Beijing in particular appears to be pursuing a cautious long-term strategy, balancing its economic ties with Iran and its global diplomatic interests while urging de-escalation. Moscow, for its part, sees the crisis through the prism of great-power competition with the West and fears that a prolonged war could reshape strategic alignments in Eurasia. These reactions highlight a deeper transformation in world politics. The Middle East is no longer merely a regional theatre; it has become an arena in which the strategic interests of major powers intersect. Energy routes, technological supply chains, and geopolitical influence are all at stake. Consequently, even a localized war has the potential to produce global consequences. One of the most troubling questions raised by the present conflict concerns the possibility of nuclear escalation. While neither the United States nor Israel has publicly suggested the use of nuclear weapons, analysts acknowledge that the longer the war continues without decisive results, the greater the temptation for extreme measures may become. History offers a sobering precedent. During the final phase of the Second World War, the United States resorted to atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to force Japan's surrender. That decision ended the war but introduced a terrifying new era in human history. The comparison is not exact, yet the psychological logic of war often follows similar patterns. When conventional military campaigns fail to achieve rapid victory,

decision-makers may consider extraordinary options. However, the geopolitical environment today is fundamentally different from that of 1945. The existence of multiple nuclear powers, combined with complex alliances and global media scrutiny, creates powerful deterrents against such a catastrophic step. Any nuclear attack on Iran would almost certainly provoke unpredictable reactions across the world, potentially drawing other nuclear states into the crisis. For countries such as Pakistan, the implications of such an escalation would be profound. Pakistan lies at the crossroads of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Instability in the Persian Gulf would affect its energy security, economic stability, and regional diplomacy. Moreover, Pakistan's strategic partnership with China and its historical ties with Muslim countries of the region would place it in a highly sensitive diplomatic position. The most realistic future scenario may therefore involve neither total victory nor immediate peace, but a prolonged confrontation punctuated by periods of negotiation. Wars in the modern era often evolve into complex stalemates in which military operations coexist with diplomatic maneuvering. International pressure—from Europe, China, Russia, and regional actors—may gradually push the warring parties toward a ceasefire or negotiated arrangement. Yet the broader lesson of the current crisis is unmistakable. Military power alone cannot resolve deeply rooted geopolitical rivalries. Every missile launched and every city bombed deepens mistrust and multiplies the risks of miscalculation. The Middle East, already burdened by decades of conflict, can ill afford another generation of instability. The present war has therefore become more than a regional struggle. It is a test of whether the international community has learned the lessons of history or remains condemned to repeat them. The shadow of Hiroshima still hangs over humanity. The responsibility of avoiding another such catastrophe rests not only on the nations directly involved but on the collective wisdom of the entire world.

## Briefs

Oil falls  
as Trump  
predicts...

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he added, referring to benchmark Middle Eastern oil grades. In response to Trump, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said they would "determine the end of the war," and Tehran would not allow "one litre of oil" to be exported from the region if US and Israeli attacks continued, state media reported on Tuesday, citing the IRGC's spokesperson. Prices, however, remain under pressure as Trump considers easing oil sanctions on Russia and releasing emergency crude stockpiles as part of a package of options aimed at curbing spiking global oil prices, according to multiple sources.

B-52s arrive  
at UK air  
base amid...

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Air activity has increased significantly at RAF Fairford in the last 72 hours, with the United States putting in some of its heavy-duty bomber forces. This is the first time B-52s have been seen in the UK during this current conflict. The B-52, piloted by a crew of five, is one of the US Air Force's longest-serving and most versatile heavy bombers and can carry up to 70,000 pounds (31,751kg) of mixed weapons. It first flew in 1952, yet remains a core part of the United States' strategic power today due to its capacity, long range, and flexibility.

PM Shehbaz  
hopes  
Mojtaba...

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succeeded his father as the new head of the nation. The younger Khamenei was named supreme leader by the top clerical body, the Assembly of Experts, in a statement published shortly after midnight on Monday in Iran. The 56-year-old mid-ranking cleric has survived the US-Israeli air war on Iran. His 86-year-old father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was martyred in an airstrike by US-Israel last week. A member of the council, Ayatollah Mohsen Heidari Alekassir, said in a video on Sunday that a candidate had been selected based on Khamenei's guidance that Iran's top leader should be "hated by the enemy". "Even the Great Satan (US) has mentioned his name," Heidari Alekassir said of the chosen successor, days after US President Donald Trump said Mojtaba was an "unacceptable" choice for him.

Pak raises  
\$507m via  
auction...

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She said 5G services initially would be launched in Islamabad and provincial capitals, marking Pakistan's entry into the list of countries offering next-generation mobile services. The minister acknowledged the crucial role of the Spectrum Advisory Committee (SAC), the Ministry of Finance, and other government institutions in facilitating the auction. She also commended the media for supporting the live broadcast of the event.

Azam Tarar  
urges media  
caution...

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foreign policy under consideration," he said. He added that the analyses coming out of Pakistan had caused "unease on diplomatic fronts from at least a friendly country or some other corner". "We have been asked if this was Pakistan's stance or an individual one," he added. At the outset of the press conference, the minister reiterated Pakistan's stance on the tensions in the Middle East, stating that the country had been pushing for efforts to "find a diplomatic solution" to the conflict.

Sirbaz Khan joins Niaz Support  
as Goodwill Ambassador

Founded by visionary social entrepreneur Hussain Odhwani, Niaz Support is Pakistan's leading disability-focused social enterprise. It restores mobility and dignity through customized wheelchairs, scholarship support, and workplace inclusion initiatives

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Niaz Support is proud to announce the appointment of renowned Pakistani mountaineer Sirbaz Khan as its newest Goodwill Ambassador. Sirbaz's exceptional achievements, including being the first Pakistani to summit all 14 of the world's highest peaks, reflect not only physical courage but also a profound understanding of human perseverance. His journey, marked by extreme challenges and high-risk expeditions, has brought him close to fellow climbers and sherpas who have suffered life-altering injuries, giving him personal insight into the realities of living with disability and the critical importance of support and mobility. Sirbaz joins a distinguished roster of national champions who have previously served as goodwill ambassadors for Niaz Support, including international squash legend Jahangir Khan, celebrated artist Abrar-ul-Haq, former Chief of Air Staff Mujahid Anwar Khan, ex-state minister and life coach Azam Jamil, and actor-producer Khaled Anam. Their collective efforts have elevated public awareness and inspired community engagement for persons with disabilities, and Sirbaz's unique connection to the challenges faced by disabled climbers brings a deeply personal perspective to the role. Founded by visionary social entrepreneur Hussain Odhwani, Niaz Support is Pakistan's leading disability-focused social enterprise. It restores mobility and dignity through customized wheelchairs, scholarship support, and workplace inclusion initiatives, integrating persons with disabilities into meaningful employment while enhancing independence for thousands of beneficiaries. Hussain Odhwani said, "Sirbaz Khan embodies courage, determination, and empathy. His firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by those disabled in extreme conditions will bring authenticity and urgency to our mission, inspiring millions to support and advocate for inclusion." Sirbaz Khan shared his excitement about the role: "Having seen



friends and fellow sherpas face life-changing disabilities during expeditions, I know how critical access, mobility, and support are. I am honored to join Niaz Support and contribute to a cause that empowers persons with disabilities to regain independence, confidence, and hope."

Pakistan Announce Preliminary  
Squad for SAFF U-20 C'ship

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) announced the 26-member preliminary national squad for the upcoming SAFF Under-20 Championship to be held in the Maldives from March 23 to April 3, with Pakistan drawn in Group 'B' alongside Bangladesh and India. Pakistan will play Bangladesh in their opening match on March 24, before facing India two days later. The top two teams will advance to the semi-finals. "We have tried our best in forming a competitive team that will hopefully deliver results at the SAFF Under-20 Championship," team coach Shehzad Anwar said. The players are currently training at the Jinnah Stadium in Islamabad, with the

squad having been finalised after week-long trials. Preliminary squad: Goalkeepers: Zulqurnain (Landikotal), Adil Ali Khan (Islamabad), Kashif (South Waziristan), Ghulam Abbas (Sargodha). Defenders: Umar Javed (Swabi), Zarib Haider (Parachinar), Majid Ali (Faisalabad), Waseem Abdul Rashid (Karachi), Ubaid Ullah (Bhakkar), Abdul Khaliq (Chaman), Abdur Rehman (Faisalabad), Aabis Raza (Layyah), Sheraz Khalid (Karachi). Midfielders: Ali Zafar (Quetta), Zain Imran (Melbourne), Shahab Ahmed (Chitral), Khubaib (Bannu), Owais Ilyas (Karachi), Junaid (D.I. Khan), Mansoor Khan (Islamabad). Forwards: Najeeb Ullah (Bhakkar), Abdul Samad (Swat), Sajjad Hussain (Quetta), Abdullah (Rawalpindi), Faham (Islamabad), Umar Nawaz (Peshawar/UK)

Indian team receive  
\$14.2 million bonus for  
historic T20 WC win

AHMEDABAD: The T20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team was awarded a bonus of INR1.31 billion (\$14.24 million) on Tuesday by the country's cricket board, six times the prize money they claimed for lifting the title in Ahmedabad. India secured their historic third men's T20 World Cup crown with a dominant 96-run victory over New Zealand in a one-sided final on Sunday, earning \$2.34 million for the tournament win. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the world's richest cricket board, announced the additional prize for the Indian team in recognition of their victory – a sum roughly \$3 million higher than the tournament's overall prize pot of \$11.25 million. "The Board congratulates the players, support staff and selectors once again on this historic achievement and wishes them continued success in the future," the BCCI said in a statement. – APP

Stock  
exchange  
rebounds  
sharply

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high of 158,354.12 (up 11,873.98 points, or 8.12%) and fell to a low of 155,294.65 (up 8,814.51 points, or 6.02%). During the previous session on Monday, the index shed 11,015.96 points, marking the second-largest single-day drop in the index's history. "Market is rebounding due to lower oil prices and improving sentiment in regional markets," Samiullah Tariq, Head of Research at Pak-Kuwait Investment Company, told Geo.tv. Topline CEO Mohammad Sohail told Theneews.pk that a sharp decline in global oil prices has prompted investors to aggressively buy local stocks.

CEC says  
Govt not  
serious in  
LG polls

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the federal government decided to bring a new law. During the hearing on Tuesday, Raja remarked that Islamabad has been without a local government since February 2021. He noted that two governments, including a caretaker setup, had come during this period, and both had shown a positive response toward holding local government elections. Meanwhile, the ECP exempted Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi from appearing in person during the hearing. The interior minister did not appear before the commission, while the interior secretary attended the proceedings and informed the bench that Naqvi was unwell and unable to appear. The chief election commissioner granted Naqvi an exemption for the day. The ECP had previously summoned the interior minister in his personal capacity during the last hearing.

Army  
destroys...

FROM PAGE 01  
There are reports of suspected militants carrying out a late-night grenade and gun attack on a police post near Atta Bazaar in the Khwezi area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Mohmand district, located along the Pak-Afghan border. According to police sources, unidentified attackers hurled a hand grenade and opened fire on the Muharrar police post late on Sunday night. Police personnel stationed at the post responded with immediate retaliatory fire, the sources said. Following the brief exchange of gunfire, the attackers fled the scene under the cover of darkness, the sources said. Security in the area has been tightened, and all police posts in the district have been placed on high alert as a precautionary measure, they added.

UNHCR mobilizes  
resources to  
support Syrians

*Border crossings between Syria and Lebanon have recently witnessed a significant increase in the return of Syrian nationals as regional developments unfold, prompting coordinated humanitarian and government efforts to assist families arriving back in the country*

DAMASCUS: More than 80,000 Syrians have crossed from Lebanon into Syria since March 2 amid escalating security developments, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Syria, Celine Schmitt, said in remarks to SANA. Schmitt said many families left Lebanon quickly due to nearby bombardment, often without taking personal belongings, and are currently staying with relatives inside Syria. No requests for emergency shelter have been recorded so far. She added that UNHCR is working closely with Syrian authorities at both central and local levels to support the arrivals, including coordination with officials at border crossings such as Jdeidet Yabous, Jousieh and Arida. The agency has reinforced its presence at these crossings to assist authorities as the number of arrivals increases. According to Schmitt, the assistance provided at border points includes water, blankets and basic relief items when needed, along with transportation support for people without means to travel. New arrivals are also given information about community centers operated by UNHCR where they can receive services including legal assistance and support in restoring lost personal documents. Many of the returning Syrians are heading to Damascus and its countryside, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Daraa – areas that already host large numbers of returnees and face significant needs due to damaged housing and limited services. Schmitt stressed the need for additional funding to support UNHCR programs and partners assisting returning families, including community centers offering psychosocial support, legal services, child protection and housing rehabilitation initiatives. Border crossings between Syria and Lebanon have recently witnessed a significant increase in the return of Syrian nationals as regional developments unfold, prompting coordinated humanitarian and government efforts to assist families arriving back in the country.

Russian anthem played for 1st  
time in 12 yrs after ski gold

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO: The Russian national anthem was heard at a Paralympics for the first time in 12 years the other day, after alpine skier Varvara Voronchikhina won her country's first gold at the Milan Cortina Paralympic Winter Games in the women's super-G standing. The crowd greeted the 23-year-old with polite applause and scattered cheers as she received her medal at the Tofane Alpine Skiing Center. She appeared visibly moved as she looked toward her country's flag and sang along to the State Anthem of the Russian Federation. "It's really special for me because I can see my flag on my friends who arrived here. Maybe now I can't believe it, and I don't understand what happened," said the skier, who competed in a classification for people with impairments in one arm. "Maybe a little bit later I will see my gold medal. It's so special for me really."

As of Monday, Russia was 13th in the medal standings on one gold and two bronze, with Voronchikhina responsible for two of them. Russia, which hosted the 2014 Sochi Games, was banned from the Pyeongchang 2018 Paralympics over a doping scandal and from the Beijing Paralympics in 2022 over the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that began that year. Last September, the majority of International Paralympic Committee members voted to lift a partial suspension on Russia and Belarus, which had served as a staging point for the invasion, paving the way for their return to the games. The subsequent invitation of six Russian and four Belarusian athletes to the games has proved controversial, with seven European countries including Ukraine boycotting Friday's opening ceremony over their inclusion.

All-round Saim  
guides Karachi  
Whites to  
victory

PESHAWAR: Karachi Region Whites secured their second consecutive victory in the National T20 Cup 2026 with a 12-run win over Bahawalpur Region in a rain-interrupted match at the Imran Khan Cricket Stadium on Monday. After being put into bat, Bahawalpur posted a competitive total of 185-8 from their allotted 20 overs, thanks to a superb batting performance led by Muhammad Imran and Muhammad Faizan Zafar. The innings was given a solid foundation by openers Muhammad Akram and Faizan Zafar, who shared a fluent 54-run partnership. Akram was the first to fall for a brisk 25 off 19 deliveries, which included five boundaries, with Muhammad Umar providing the breakthrough. – APP

Pakistan's squash future  
bright: Qamar Zaman

ISLAMABAD: Former World Squash Champion and Executive Member of Pakistan Squash Federation (PSF), Qamar Zaman, has expressed optimism about Pakistan's squash future, citing the presence of talented young players who can excel on the international stage. In an interview with APP, he said that several training camps have been established in different cities to bring forward new talent. He added that renowned players must further improve their fitness, talent and morale so that they can achieve success and raise Pakistan's profile in international squash. Zaman, who is also the Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association said that training camps are

currently underway in Peshawar and Lahore to nurture emerging talent. He is personally supervising the training camp in Peshawar, where 110 boys and girls from Under-7, Under-8, Under-9, Under-10 and Under-11 categories are re-zed coaching during the holy month of Ramadan. He said the players are being trained by chief coaches under modern and high-standard training methods. He added that a tournament for these young players will also be organized this month to provide them with match practice. Similarly, the Pakistan Squash Federation has also established a training camp in Lahore where junior players are undergoing training. Zaman noted that Pakistan currently has two prom-

ising players – Noor Zaman, who recently won the World Under-23 Championship in Karachi, and Hamza Khan, the winner of a World Junior Squash event – have the potential to achieve success for Pakistan in international mega events. He emphasized that more international squash events should be held in Pakistan to help players improve their global rankings and gain greater exposure. He also said that Noor Zaman and Hamza Khan should be provided with more opportunities to participate in international competitions. Zaman further said that the Pakistan Air Force is providing full support to the Pakistan Squash Federation, which has contributed to players achieving success in two junior events. – APP

IBCC, PHF discuss roadmap to  
promote hockey at grassroots level

*The initiative aims to promote hockey at the grassroots level by expanding school-based competitions, organizing inter-board tournaments and establishing a structured pathway for young players to progress towards national representation*

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Inter Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC) on Tuesday hosted a meeting of the National Education-Hockey Coordination Committee at its Secretariat in Islamabad to discuss a comprehensive national strategy aimed at reviving hockey through Pakistan's education system. The meeting was co-

chaired by IBCC Executive Director Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah and Secretary Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) and President of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) Mohyuddin Ahmed Wani. Directors of Physical Education from various educational boards, representatives of the PHF and former Olympians including Hassan Sardar, Islahuddin and Khawaja Junaid attended the session. During the meeting, the Federal Sec-

retary IPC presented the IBCC-PHF School and Inter-Board Hockey Revival Program (2026-2029), a strategic roadmap designed to rebuild Pakistan's hockey talent pipeline through schools and educational boards. The initiative aims to promote hockey at the grassroots level by expanding school-based competitions, organizing inter-board tournaments and establishing a structured pathway for young players to progress to-

wards national representation. Participants welcomed the initiative and expressed their commitment to work collectively for the revival of Pakistan's national sport through the education sector. It was also decided that a joint Steering Committee, comprising representatives of IBCC, PHF and former Olympians, would oversee the implementation of the roadmap and ensure effective coordination among educational boards across the country.

## Briefs

## Gold price surges by Rs 6,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs6,200 on Tuesday and was traded at Rs539,562 against its sale at Rs533,362 in the local market the previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association reported The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs5,316 to Rs462,587 from Rs457,271 whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs4,873 to Rs424,053 from Rs419,180. The rates of per tola silver increased by Rs460 to Rs9,354 whereas that of ten grams silver rose by Rs394 to Rs8,019. The price of gold in the international market increased by \$62 to \$5,168 from \$5,106 whereas that of silver rose by \$4.6 to \$88.70, the Association reported.—APP

## Rupee gains 01 paisa against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Tuesday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.36 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs279.37. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279 and Rs 280.3, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee increased by Rs2.71 to close at Rs 325.55 from the previous day's closing of Rs 322.84, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen went up by 01 paisa and closed at Rs 1.77, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decline of Rs3.69 and closed at Rs 376.37 compared to the previous day's Rs 372.68. The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham remained unchanged, closing at Rs 76.06, while the Saudi Riyal surged by 01 paisa, closing at Rs 74.43.—APP

## Kyrgyzstan, Korea to explore new projects

BISHKEK : Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers – Minister of Water Resources, Agriculture, and Processing Industry Erist Akunbekov met with the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Kyrgyz Republic, Kim Kwangjae. According to Kyrgyz Cabinet of ministers, during the meeting, the parties discussed the current state and future directions of bilateral cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Korea in various fields, paying particular attention to agriculture and water resources management. The meeting also discussed the preparation of bilateral documents between Kyrgyzstan and Korea, which are planned for consideration at a high-level international event scheduled for this year. Furthermore, it was noted that cooperation between the Ministry of Water Resources, Agriculture, and Processing Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea is actively developing in four areas: livestock farming, seed production, food security, and water resources. The parties explored the possibility of implementing new joint projects. In turn, Lim So-yeon, Head of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Representative Office in Kyrgyzstan, and Kwang Sog Chu, Director of the Korea International Program on Agriculture (KOPIA) Center in Kyrgyzstan, who participated in the meeting, expressed gratitude for the joint implementation of numerous projects and collaboration on ongoing initiatives, and confirmed their readiness for further close cooperation. At the end of the meeting, Erist Akunbekov and Kim Kwangjae agreed to continue constructive cooperation and further develop a mutually beneficial partnership.—APP

## ME investors can play key role in Pak's real estate growth: ICCI

Sardar Tahir Mehmood emphasized that the real estate sector plays a pivotal role in Pakistan's economy as it drives more than 40 allied industries, including cement, steel, tiles, electrical equipment, glass, paints, sanitary fittings, transport, architecture, engineering and interior design

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has urged the government to adopt proactive policies to facilitate Pakistan's real estate and construction sector and extend attractive incentives to foreign investors in the backdrop of the ongoing geopolitical tensions and uncertainty in the Middle East. He said that the evolving situation in the Middle East has created uncertainty for investors and businesses in the region, which provides Pakistan with a timely opportunity to position itself as a secure and profitable destination for investment, particularly in the real estate and construction sector. Sardar Tahir Mehmood emphasized that the real estate sector plays a pivotal role in Paki-

stan's economy as it drives more than 40 allied industries, including cement, steel, tiles, electrical equipment, glass, paints, sanitary fittings, transport, architecture, engineering and interior design. He noted that strengthening this sector would not only stimulate economic activity but also generate large-scale employment opportunities across multiple segments of the economy. He said that Pakistan's rapidly growing urban population and increasing housing demand make the country an attractive destination for foreign investment in housing, commercial infrastructure and mixed-use development projects. Encouraging overseas Pakistanis and foreign investors to invest in the real estate sector would significantly boost economic growth, expand

the tax base and enhance economic stability. The ICCI President urged the government to introduce investor-friendly measures, including tax incentives, simplified documentation, protection of property rights, transparent regulatory mechanisms and digital land record systems to enhance investor confidence. He further said that facilitating the real estate sector would activate a chain reaction in the economy by stimulating construction activities, boosting demand for building materials, supporting small and medium enterprises, and creating employment opportunities for engineers, architects, contractors, skilled labor and daily wage workers. Sardar Tahir Mehmood also recommended that the government should launch special investment packages for

overseas Pakistanis and international investors, particularly from the Middle East, to encourage them to invest in housing projects, modern urban infrastructure and commercial real estate in Pakistan. He said that the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry firmly believes that reviving and promoting the real estate sector can serve as a powerful engine of economic growth, especially at a time when the country needs to stimulate investment, expand employment opportunities and strengthen economic activity. He assured that ICCI would continue to work closely with the government and relevant stakeholders to promote policies that support the real estate sector and attract foreign investment for sustainable economic development in Pakistan.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ms. Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik.

## Red Cross launches Iran emergency appeal as needs soar

GENEVA: Humanitarian needs in Iran are growing sharply due to the war, the Red Cross said Tuesday as it launched an emergency appeal for more than \$50 million. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said its appeal for 40 million Swiss francs (\$51.5 million) would help support five million people through the next 16 months. "Across the country, communities are facing growing humanitarian needs related to health care, shelter, water and sanitation, and mental health and psychosocial support," the IFRC said. The funds will help the national Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) to prioritize those directly affected by the war, and deal with infrastructure damage and disruptions to essential services. "With humanitarian needs growing sharply with every passing day, this emergency appeal will help scale up lifesaving assistance and get support to those most affected," Maria Martinez, the IFRC's delegation chief in Iran, said in a statement. The United States and Israel launched their first wave of attacks on Iran on February 28, triggering a war that has seen Iran strike targets in multiple countries around the Gulf. "The Iranian Red Crescent Society immediately mobilized its network of staff and volunteers to respond to communities affected by the hostilities," said Martinez. "This work on the ground by the IRCS and the IFRC is vital to saving lives – every moment counts." The IFRC said that 529 IRCS branches were undertaking emergency response operations across 30 provinces and 197 cities. More than 2,100 response teams and over 6,500 staff and volunteers have been deployed, it said, while emergency teams have been carrying out search and rescue operations. The emergency appeal funds will go toward shelter support, providing relief items, health services and maintaining water and sanitation services. The Geneva-based IFRC has already allocated 1.5 million Swiss francs from its Disaster Response Emergency Fund to support immediate life-saving activities in Iran. The IFRC, which has more than 17 million volunteers in more than 191 countries, is the world's largest humanitarian network.—DNA

## China becomes world's largest holder of AI patents

BEIJING: In China, AI technologies are advancing at an unprecedented pace, entering a phase of explosive growth. By the end of 2025, China was home to over 6,000 AI enterprises, with its core AI industry valued at more than 1.2 trillion yuan (\$174.3 billion). At the same time, China's intelligent computing power capacity has exceeded 1,590 EFLOPS. In recent years, China has continued to strengthen basic research in AI. Both the quantity and quality of AI research papers produced in the country rank among the top globally. Data released in 2025 by the World Intellectual Property Organization showed that China has become the world's largest holder of AI patents, accounting for as much as 60 percent of the global total. Innovation-driven progress has fortified China's AI sector with robust core technologies. The country has launched multiple AI chips, accelerated the development of high-quality industry datasets, and cultivated domestically developed large-scale models that contribute to the global open-source ecosystem. These advances reinforce China's capacity to maintain control over critical AI technologies amid growing international competition.—APP

## SECP okays independent Shariah screening process

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has approved Al-Hilal Shariah Advisors (Pvt) Limited to independently conduct Shariah screening of securities. It is the first entity other than the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) and its partners to receive such approval, opening the door for greater competition in Shariah-compliant investment services, said a press release issued by the SECP here on Tuesday. Under the Shariah Governance Regulations, 2023, any person other than an issuer who publicly declares securities as Shariah-compliant is required to develop a Shariah screening process approved by SECP. The approval granted to Al-Hilal Shariah Advisors provides a structured regulatory pathway for alternative Shariah screening arrangements. Currently, listed securities are screened for Shariah compliance by the Pakistan Stock Exchange in collaboration with Meezan Bank Limited and Al-Meezan Investments. Out of a total of 535 listed securities at PSX, 308 are currently classified as Shariah-compliant. These companies represent a market capitalization of Rs. 12,373 billion, accounting for approximately 63 percent of the total market capitalization of Rs. 19,679 billion as of December 31, 2025. The data also reflects a growing trend among listed companies towards Shariah compliance in recent years. Al-Hilal Shariah Advisors (Pvt) Limited is an SECP-licensed Shariah Advisor providing Shariah advisory, governance, and compliance services to capital market participants, financial institutions, and corporate entities. The company also offers investment advisory services in its capacity as a securities advisor. The approval enables the company to independently screen securities for Shariah compliance for the benefit of its clients and the general public. A key feature of the approved process is the use of the latest available financial information for screening purposes. The process also establishes clearly defined continuity rules for the inclusion and exclusion of securities from the Shariah-compliant list, supported by a formal compliance mechanism to ensure adherence to regulatory requirements. The approved methodology is expected to support the development of new Islamic indices, providing additional benchmarks for Shariah-compliant investing in Pakistan's capital market. SECP has granted the approval with the condition that the participant will coordinate with PSX before creating any Shariah-compliant index in the future. The updated list of Shariah-compliant securities will be published on a quarterly basis, compared to the earlier six-monthly screening cycle.—APP

## Japan economy grows 1.3%, revised up on stronger investment

Nominal GDP expanded an annualized rate of 3.5 percent, revising up from a 2.3 percent gain reported earlier

TOKYO: Japan's economy expanded an annualized real 1.3 percent in the October-December quarter, revised up from an initially reported 0.2 percent increase, on stronger business spending as Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pushes investment in priority areas, government data showed Tuesday. Helped also by an uptick in private consumption, accounting for over half of gross domestic product, the GDP data marked the first rise in two quarters. Yet, crude oil price rises due to a Middle East conflict overshadowed the economic outlook for resource-poor Japan, economists say. Real GDP, adjusted for inflation, grew 0.3 percent from the previous quarter, compared with the initially reported 0.1 percent increase, the Cabinet Office said. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a country. Capital spending increased 1.3 percent in the three months through December, revised up from a 0.2 percent increase, after data showed solid corporate investment in building data centers and producing semiconductor-making

devices amid the spread of artificial intelligence. With labor costs rising, companies have also been pushing digitalization and other labor-saving measures, resulting in purchases of software, the economists say. Public investment was upgraded to a 0.5 percent dip from a 1.3 percent decline. Private consumption grew 0.3 percent in the October-December period, in an upward revision from a 0.1 percent climb, reflecting increased demand for new smartphone models, but car purchases declined and persistent inflation dampened spending for food. The revision was also due to a reduction in the margin of decline for spending on toys, games, fisheries and outlays for dining, a Cabinet Office official said. Housing investment was slightly revised upward to a 4.9 percent rise from the 4.8 percent increase reported earlier. Exports and imports both slid 0.3 percent, unchanged from the preliminary reading. U.S.-bound shipments of cars remained affected by the imposition of higher tariffs by

U.S. President Donald Trump that took effect in September. Spending by foreign visitors to Japan, which contributes to export figures, also fell. Due to the moderate recovery in personal consumption and expected growth in real wages on slower inflation, the Japanese economy is estimated to grow in the January-March quarter, said Yoshiaki Shinke, senior executive economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. He warned, however, that the recent increase in crude oil prices, stemming from U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran since the end of February, raises uncertainties from the April-June quarter onwards for Japan, which relies almost entirely on foreign energy to power its economy. Shinke said, "If rising energy prices continue, they will raise inflation," which will hurt the economy by reducing household spending. He added that companies are expected to pass on the increase in costs to consumers by raising the prices of their products and services. Nominal GDP expanded an annualized rate of 3.5 percent, revising up from a 2.3 percent gain reported earlier.—Agencies

## Indonesia to buy Indian-Russian missile system for coastal defense

JAKARTA: Indonesia has agreed to purchase a super-sonic missile system from a Russian-Indian company to strengthen security on its coastline, the Ministry of Defense confirmed on Tuesday. The BrahMos missile is one of the world's fastest super-sonic cruise missiles. It can reach speeds of Mach 2.8, or nearly three times the speed of sound, and be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft or land. It was developed by BrahMos Aerospace, a joint venture between the Indian military research and development agency DRDO and Russian weapons manufacturer NPO Mashinostroyeniya. "Indonesia has partnered with India to strengthen our defense technology and industry," Rico Ricardo Sirait, spokesperson for the Indonesian Defense Ministry, told Arab News on Tuesday. "This includes (the procurement of) the BrahMos missile system to beef up our coastal defense, as part of efforts to modernize our weaponry." He declined to disclose more information about the deal. Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic state with around 18,000 islands and over 7.9 million sq. km of sea, is the latest Southeast Asian nation to acquire the weapons. In 2022, the Philippines closed a \$374 million deal to acquire three BrahMos anti-ship missile batteries, while Vietnam has reportedly been in talks to purchase the weapons system. Jakarta has been working to upgrade the country's aging military hardware in recent years, setting aside big budgets for defense spending.—APP

## Turkiye tells Iran violation of its airspace unacceptable

ANKARA: Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told Iranian counterpart Abbas Araqchi in a call on Tuesday that violation of Turkey's airspace by Iranian ballistic missiles was unacceptable, a Turkish Foreign Ministry source said. The source said Araqchi told Fidan that Tehran had conducted a wide investigation into the missiles, adding Fidan reiterated Turkey's demand for all sides to refrain from steps that could put civilians at risk and told Araqchi that Ankara would take measures against missiles targeting it. Iranian President Masoud Peshkian had spoken by phone with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always declared its readiness to reduce tension in the region; provided that the airspace, soil and waters of our neighbors are not used to attack the Iranian people," Peshkian said in a statement about the call. The missile was the second fired from Iran to be shot down in Turkish airspace in five days. Erdogan said Turkey had delivered the necessary warnings to Iran after the missile incident. "Regarding today's incident (missile interception), we are again reminding (Iran) that they are not supposed to insist and repeat wrongdoings. We are going to discuss the developments with our NATO and other allies and will take necessary measures to increase our security and take extra measures," he said on Monday.—APP

## Kyrgyzstan, Korea to explore implementing new projects

BISHKEK : Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers – Minister of Water Resources, Agriculture, and Processing Industry Erist Akunbekov met with the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Kyrgyz Republic, Kim Kwangjae. According to Kyrgyz Cabinet of ministers, during the meeting, the parties discussed the current state and future directions of bilateral cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Korea in various fields, paying particular attention to agriculture and water resources management.—APP

## Briefs

**Russia is the only winner of ME war: EU official**

DNA

BRUSSELS: Russia has so far been the only winner from the war in the Middle East as energy prices soar and attention for its war against Ukraine has faded, EU Council President Antonio Costa said on Tuesday. "So far, there is only one winner in this war - Russia," Costa said in a speech to EU ambassadors in Brussels. "It gains new resources to finance its war against Ukraine as energy prices rise. It profits from the diversion of military capabilities that could otherwise have been sent to support Ukraine. And it benefits from reduced attention to the Ukrainian front as the conflict in the Middle East takes center stage." Costa stressed the need for the EU to protect the international rules-based order, which he said was now being challenged by the United States, and for all parties in the Middle East to return to the negotiating table. "Freedom and human rights cannot be achieved through bombs. Only international law upholds them," he said. "We must avoid further escalation. Such a path threatens the Middle East, Europe, and beyond."

**Troops guard BD fuel stations**

DHAKA: The oil price spike caused by the war in the Middle East has sparked unrest in Bangladesh and exasperation at petrol pumps around Asia, where many economies are heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports. Even as governments move to limit the impact on fuel prices, lines have formed at petrol stations in countries including Vietnam, Pakistan and the Philippines, although the situation remains stable elsewhere. In Bangladesh - which imports 95 percent of its oil and gas needs - the military has been deployed at major oil depots, as police patrol in and around filling stations. "We haven't received supply from the depot, but the bike riders weren't convinced and vandalized the station," said petrol station worker Ashrafuzzaman Dulal told AFP, describing violence on Sunday. On Tuesday his station Shahjahan Traders, one of the oldest in the capital Dhaka, had hung a banner apologizing because its stock had run out. The South Asian nation of 170 million people has started fuel rationing, sent students home and scrapped celebratory light displays over the energy crunch. One man was killed on Saturday night in the southern Bangladeshi district of Jhenaidah after an altercation over refueling with staff. Following the 25-year-old's death, angry crowds torched three buses and vandalized a filling station, police said. - APP

# Mily Ops aim to break terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan: Asim

*Pakistan tells UN*

*"India, in particular, must cease and desist from its policy of stoking terrorism inside Pakistan from Afghan soil, now together with their new found friends in the Taliban regime," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, said in the Council's discussion on the situation in Afghanistan*

UNITED NATIONS: A senior Pakistani diplomat told the UN Security Council Monday that Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations are only meant to neutralize the persistent threat of terrorism emanating from Afghan soil, not directed against the "brotherly" Afghan people, as he hit back at India and the so-called representative of Afghanistan who brought up civilian casualties in the ongoing clashes between the two neighbours. "India, in particular, must cease and desist from its policy of stoking terrorism inside

Pakistan from Afghan soil, now together with their new found friends in the Taliban regime," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, said in the Council's discussion on the situation in Afghanistan. Addressing himself to the "sequestered" representative of Afghanistan Naseer Ahmad Faiq - an appointee of the previous Afghan government since the UN has not yet recognized the Taliban government - the Pakistani envoy said he does not represent anyone but himself.

"(Faiq) is completely cut off from ground realities, and he chose to selectively comment on some aspects of the situation, particularly with reference to Pakistan," Ambassador Asim Ahmad said. "So it was not surprising that Mr. Faiq had nothing to say about the cross border terrorism from Afghanistan that is so heavily impacting Pakistan in terms of casualties among civilians, among our armed forces, law enforcement agencies and infrastructure." The Pakistani envoy said that the international community had offered an olive branch to the Taliban

to change its behaviour, but to no avail. "Today, Afghanistan is sanctuary for terrorist groups and proxies," Ambassador Asim Ahmad said. Elements within the Taliban have chosen the path of "complicity and active support", with grave impacts for its neighbours. Warning of wider regional spillover, he declared: "Pakistan will not sit idle while suffering from terrorist attacks from across the border." The meeting was presided by the United States, which held the presidency of the 15-member Council for the month of March. - APP



ISLAMABAD: The Indonesian Ambassador hosted fellow ASEAN ambassadors at his residence and presented them with copies of CENTRELINE magazine (a publication focused on diplomatic news, interviews, and international relations in Pakistan). Specifically, the magazines featured interviews with the Ambassadors of Thailand and the Philippines highlighting their views on bilateral ties with Pakistan and ASEAN-related matter). - DNA

## 'Trump crackdown on protests, immigration led to Islamophobia'

NEW YORK: Record high Islamophobia in the US in 2025 was driven in part by President Donald Trump's crackdown against pro-Palestinian protests and immigration, a Muslim advocacy group said on Tuesday. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) said it recorded 8,683 anti-Muslim and anti-Arab complaints in 2025, the highest since it began publishing data in 1996, compared to 8,658 in 2024. Most complaints were about employment discrimination (12.7%), immigration and asylum (6.5%), hate incidents (6.4%), and travel discrimination like government watchlists and screenings (5.6%), CAIR's report noted. Over the years, advocates have attributed Islamophobia to the September 11, 2001 attacks; and more recently to anti-immigration sentiment, white supremacy and the fallout of Israel's war in Gaza. Trump denies being discriminatory and says his administration aims to curb illegal immigration and improve domestic security. - Agencies

# UN peacekeepers defy South Sudan military's order

Christophe Garnier, the leader of Doctors Without Borders in South Sudan said the organization had to evacuate its staff from Akobo on Saturday and learned of the subsequent looting of its hospital and the ransacking of its office

NEWS DESK

JUBA, South Sudan: The United Nations Mission in South Sudan said Monday that it would not comply with a government order to shut down its base in Akobo, an opposition stronghold near the Ethiopian border where tens of thousands of refugees have fled. On Friday, the South Sudanese army ordered UN peacekeepers as well as NGOs and civilians to vacate the town ahead of a planned assault. But the mission refused to leave and said it would provide "a protective presence for civilians" in the town, adding that the safety and security of its personnel "must be fully respected at all times." The UN Mission said it was engaging "intensively with national, state and local stakeholders" regarding this order. "Any military operations in and around Akobo gravely endanger the safety and security of civilians," said mission chief Anita Kiki Gbeho. The South Sudanese government has been fighting opposition forces since a 2018 peace deal broke down about a year ago. A dramatic escalation took place in December 2025, when op-

position forces seized several government outposts in northern Jonglei. A government counter-offensive repelled their forces a month later and displaced over 280,000 people. Tens of thousands have sought refuge in Akobo, where a small contingent of UN peacekeepers is stationed. Fearing the looming government assault on Akobo, humanitarian workers were evacuated over the weekend, and a mass exodus of the population has also begun. Local officials contacted by the Associated Press said fleeing civilians faced danger and widespread shortages of essential supplies. Dual Dew, the Akobo County health director, who has fled to Ethiopia, said there were 84 wounded patients at the hospital. "We have most of them with us here now," he said, adding that they lack medicine and basic nursing equipment. Christophe Garnier, the leader of Doctors Without Borders in South Sudan said the organization had to evacuate its staff from Akobo on Saturday and learned of the subsequent looting of its hospital and the ransacking of its office. "People in Akobo must now either flee without protection or remain at risk of being killed, while losing access to health care and other essential services," he said.

## IMF relief on petrol levy to cushion future oil price shocks

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The government is weighing a set of financial and policy options to prevent further increases in petroleum prices if global oil rates continue to surge amid the expanding regional conflict following the US-Israeli attack on Iran, an official source said on Monday. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a televised address on Monday, warned that the region had been gripped by conflict and acknowledged that international crude prices had already jumped sharply, forcing the government to make difficult decisions, including a recent increase of Rs55 per litre in petrol and diesel prices. He, however, indicated that in case the global oil price further goes up, the government would try not to shift the burden onto the people. When approached, a well-placed official source said the government would explore ways to absorb part of any further increase in the global oil bill to avoid passing the entire burden on the consumers. He said, one option could be diverting a portion of the federal development budget to finance the additional cost of oil imports if international prices continue to rise. The move would allow the government to cushion the impact on domestic fuel prices at a time when inflationary pressures remain high. Another option being examined is approaching the International Monetary Fund to seek flexibility on petroleum-related taxation, particularly the petroleum levy and other charges imposed on fuel.

## IMF questions govt's plan to raise revenue

Sources say tax rates for higher income slabs in salaried class might be reduced

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has questioned the government's ability to boost revenue in the upcoming budget after the abolition of the super tax and a reduction in tax rates for the salaried class. The IMF mission, holding parleys virtually with Pakistani authorities, argues that one-time measures such as litigation, enforcement and outstanding instalment of super tax might enable the FBR to collect Rs13,400 to Rs13,500 billion by the end of June 2026, but how it will help achieve the tax collection target of the fiscal year 2026-27. The Pakistani authorities' response is that these would not be one-time measures, as the resolution of cases pending with the courts would also yield billions of rupees in the coming budget. "The IMF mission will hold parleys in May 2026 to finalise the upcoming budget where all relevant details will be firming up," said official sources. The IMF has also asked for adjusting the rupee against the US dollar in accordance with the Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER). Such a decision may see the rupee depreciating in the range of Rs290 to 300 against US dollar from the existing rate of around Rs280. In a meeting held at the Prime Minister's Office, the government decided to request the IMF to abolish super tax and reduce the salaried class rate by 5% for the next budget. However, in a virtual meeting held on Friday, a heated debate occurred when the IMF mission raised objections that if they agreed to a reduction in the overall tax collection after accepting one-time measures, then how the next fiscal year target would be materialised.

## Dar reaffirms Pakistan's solidarity with Bahrain

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar spoke with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani on Monday night and discussed the evolving situation in the region. During the discussion, they exchanged views on the developments in the Middle East and the wider region, conveying grave concern over recent attacks, including in Bahrain, a press release issued by the Foreign Office Spokesperson on Tuesday said. The deputy prime minister reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity with Bahrain and its people, highlighting the need for de-escalation, dialogue, and efforts for peace and stability in the region.

# US: Afghanistan 'state sponsor of wrongful detention'

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday designated Afghanistan as a 'State Sponsor of Wrongful Detention', with Secretary of State Marco Rubio accusing the Taliban of using hostage-taking as leverage against Washington. Earlier, in February, Iran was also designated a 'State Sponsor of Wrongful Detention'. The announcement came as Washington sharpened its criticism of Taliban policies at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where US Ambassador Mike Waltz questioned continued international engagement and funding provided to Afghanistan. Rubio, in a statement issued on Monday evening, said: "Today, I am designating Afghanistan as a State Sponsor of Wrongful Detention." He warned Americans against travel to Afghanistan, saying: "It is not safe for Americans to travel to Afghanistan because the Taliban continues

to unjustly detain our fellow Americans and other foreign nationals." He alleged that the Taliban "continue to use terrorist tactics, kidnapping individuals for ransom or to seek policy concessions," calling such actions "despicable tactics" that "need to end". He also demanded the immediate release of US nationals in Afghan custody. "The Taliban needs to release Dennis Coyle, Mahmoud Habibi, and all Americans unjustly detained in Afghanistan now and commit to cease the practice of hostage diplomacy forever," he said. At the UNSC, US Ambassador Mike Waltz stressed the need to "carefully evaluate the utility of international assistance and engagement in Afghanistan" in light of the "Taliban's intransigence". He claimed that the US and others had invested considerable amounts of time and money to "improve Afghanistan's future", adding that the UNSC "must continue to demand responsible actions from the Taliban. The people of Afghanistan deserve no less."

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