



Islamabad POST

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Aurangzeb chairs high level meeting to review growth

Detailed News On Page-07

Cyber security vital for country: Tahir

Detailed News On Page-0



Farhan named in team of tournament

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

Eid likely on March 21

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Eid ul Fitr 2026 is likely to fall on March 21 in Pakistan after a 30-day Ramadan, with experts saying the chances of sighting the Shawwal crescent on the evening of March 19 are low. "The new moon of Shawwal 1447 AH is expected to be born on March 19, 2026, at 06:23 PST," the Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) said on Wednesday.

"At the time of sunset on March 19, 2026, the age of the new moon will be approximately 12 hours and 41 minutes, with an estimated 28-minute interval between sunset and moonset along Pakistan's coastal belt," it added. Based on these astronomical parameters, the Suparco said, the chances of sighting the Shawwal crescent on the evening of March 19 were "low".

The first Shawwal is therefore anticipated to fall on Saturday, March 21, marking the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan. However, Suparco said the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee of Pakistan will make the final decision regarding the sighting of the crescent and the commencement of Eid ul Fitr across the country.

Govt to launch Amazon-style digital marketplace

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan plans to launch an Amazon-style digital marketplace to connect small and medium-sized enterprises with global buyers, a move aimed at boosting exports and expanding the international reach of local businesses. The platform, being developed by the Ministry of Industries and Production, will allow Pakistani SMEs to showcase and sell products directly to international customers. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Industries Haroon Akhtar Khan said during a high-level meeting reviewing digital initiatives for the SME sector. Officials said the portal will be modelled on global e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Alibaba and AliExpress, offering similar functionality to help Pakistani firms access international markets.

UK govt bans pro-Palestine march in London

NEWS DESK

LONDON: The UK government has banned an annual pro-Palestinian march planned for Sunday which London police claim is organized by a group "supportive of the Iranian regime." Interior minister Shabana Mahmood said late Tuesday she had approved the rare police request to prevent "serious public disorder" if the Al-Quds Day march and counter-protests had gone ahead. It is the first time a protest march has been banned since 2012 but a static demonstration will be permitted, according to London's Metropolitan police. Mahmood said she was "satisfied" a ban was "necessary" due to "the scale of the protest and multiple counter-protests, in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East." The minister added that she expected to see "the full force of the law applied to anyone spreading hatred and division."

Middle East crisis

Pak begins importing oil via Red Sea

PNSC vessel carrying 73,000 tonnes of crude oil set to depart from Saudi Arabia for Karachi

DNA

KARACHI/RIYADH: Pakistan has started importing crude oil through the Red Sea route after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz disrupted shipments in the wake of the conflict in the Middle East, sources told on Wednesday. A Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) vessel has reached Yanbu port in Saudi Arabia and will depart for Karachi on Thursday carrying 73,000 tonnes of crude oil, the sources said. Another PNSC vessel, Shalamar, has also managed to load oil from the Fujairah port and is now heading towards Karachi. Shipping sources said the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz has affected several vessels, with two PNSC ships currently stranded near Karachi and at a charter port due to the ongoing situation. The developments come as the ongoing Middle East war has severely disrupted energy shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil transit route.

Shipping through the narrow waterway has nearly come to a halt since the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran more than a week ago. The disruption has blocked the export of around one-fifth of the world's oil supply and liquefied natural gas, pushing global oil prices to levels not seen since 2022. The global price hike also led to the federal government raising petrol and diesel prices by Rs55 per litre as surging international prices,

PM Shehbaz Sharif congratulates Rabi

APP

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday extended his heartfelt felicitation to Rabi Lamichhane and Balendra Shah of the Rastriya Swatantra Party on their remarkable victory in Nepal's 2026 elections. He said this strong mandate reflected the trust of the Nepali people in the new and dynamic leadership. "Pakistan looks forward to working closely with the newly elected Government of Nepal to further strengthen our historic friendship and cooperation," the prime minister said in a post on his X handle.

fuelled by the US-Israel war with Iran, put pressure on domestic energy costs. The new price of petrol was set at Rs321.17 per litre, up from Rs266.17, while the diesel rate increased to Rs335.86 per litre from Rs280.86 after the latest review. It may be noted that four petrol-laden ships arrived at Port Qasim on Tuesday as well, officials confirmed. Around 37,000 tonnes of petrol have already been offloaded, while another shipment of 50,000 tonnes was being transferred.

Heightened tensions

Iran threatens to target US, Israeli economic interests

Iran says oil will reach \$200 a barrel, warns of 'continuous strikes'

NEWS DESK / DNA

TEHRAN: In the escalating U.S.-Israel war against Iran, now in its second week as of March tensions continue to surge with fresh threats and conflicting reports on leadership. Iran has issued stark warnings of targeting US-Israeli economic and banking interests across the region. Iranian state media and military spokespersons declared that Tehran would expand its retaliation beyond military sites to include American capital, banks, and economic assets if joint strikes persist. A military spokesman cautioned that continued aggression could push oil prices to \$200 per barrel, vowing to block Gulf oil exports "until further notice." This follows Iran's repeated attacks on energy infrastructure and vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting one-fifth of global oil flows and prompting rerouting of tankers. Iran's president

Continued on Page 06

Ukraine says it has hit Russian 'missile component' plant

DNA

MOSCOW: Ukrainian forces have struck one of Russia's "most important military factories", President Volodymyr Zelensky has said. "The plant produced electronics and components for Russian missiles. The very missiles that strike our cities, our villages and civilians," he said. British Storm Shadow missiles were used to hit Kremniy El plant in the border region of Bryansk, Ukraine's military said. Russian local authorities say at least six civilians were killed and 42 injured in

Continued on Page 06

Pakistan will support Saudi Arabia 'whenever needed'

"Unquestionable that Islamabad will come to Riyadh's aid", says Mosharraf Zaidi

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Amid the ongoing US-Israel war against Iran, Pakistan has expressed readiness to support Saudi Arabia "whenever needed". Speaking to Bloomberg TV, Prime Minister's spokesperson for Foreign Media Mosharraf Zaidi has said it is unquestionable that Islamabad will come to Riyadh's aid "no matter what and no matter when". Zaidi's remarks are to be taken amid escalating tensions in the Middle East after the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on February 28, with Tehran retaliating by targeting US bases across the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, with missiles and drones. Although Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has expressed regret over strikes in regional countries, Tehran has maintained that it will target those sites which are used to launch attacks on its soil. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the landmark Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) in September last year, which treats an attack on either nation as an act of aggression against both. A day earlier, PM Shehbaz had congratulated Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on assuming

Continued on Page 06

APNS for release of dues before Eid

DNA

KARACHI: The APNS has appealed to the Prime Minister to approve payment of dues of newspapers before Eid which has already been approved by the Economic Coordination Committee. Senator Sarmad Ali, President of All Pakistan Newspapers Society in a statement has stated that due to non-payment of overdue payments the newspapers across the country are facing acute financial crises and therefore unable to pay the wages of their employees and other obligations before Eid. He has stated that the liquidity crunch has increased further due to inflation and cost of living caused by unprecedented hike of petroleum prices. He therefore requested the Prime Minister to formally approve the pending payment of

Continued on Page 06



DUBAI: Shafqat Ali Khan, Pakistan Ambassador to UAE inquires about health of Pakistani injured in drone attack. - DNA

Bangladesh crush Pak in 1st ODI

DNA

DHAKA: Bangladesh pace sensation Nahid Rana claimed his first five-wicket haul in one-day internationals to lead his team to a crushing eight-wicket win over Pakistan in their opening match on Wednesday. Rana returned figures of 5-24 to skittle out Pakistan for 114, a total Bangladesh overhauled in 15.1 overs of the 50-over contest in Mirpur to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Opener Tanzid Hasan hammered an unbeaten 67 off 42 balls and put on a second-wicket partnership of 82 with Najmul Hossain Shanto, who made 27, in a statement win. Saif Hassan fell early for four, while Litton Das remained unbeaten on three with Tanzid. Earlier, Nahid laid the platform for victory with his outstanding spell in his seven overs to bowl out Pakistan for their lowest ODI total against Bangladesh, eclipsing the previous 161

Continued on Page 06

Lanka court orders on sailors

NEWS DESK

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan court has ordered that the bodies of 84 sailors killed in an attack on an Iranian warship off the island nation's coast last week be handed over to the embassy of Iran, local media reported on Wednesday. The warship, IRIS Dena, was hit by a torpedo from a US submarine in the Indian Ocean while it was returning from a naval exercise organized by India, amid the US-Israeli war on Iran.

US-India ties 'back on track'

Trump unveils US refinery backed by 'historic deal' with India

Refinery will be built at Brownsville port, will offset \$300bn in trade deficit with India, announces US startup

DNA

WASHINGTON: In a major development, President Donald Trump has announced the construction of a refinery on the southern US border backed by India's Reliance Industries, operator of the world's biggest refining complex. Trump announced as drivers react to spiking gasoline prices since the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran, and while Republicans and Democrats prepare for midterm elections that could determine which party controls Congress through the last two years of his presidency. "Thank you to our partners in India, and their largest privately held Energy Company, Reliance, for this tremendous investment," Trump said on the social media platform Truth Social. The 168,000 barrels-per-day (bpd) refinery will be built at the port of Brownsville and will

Continued on Page 06

Three vessels hit by drone in Hormuz

DNA

DUBAI: Three vessels have been hit by unknown projectiles in the Strait of Hormuz, maritime security agencies and sources said on Wednesday. One of the strikes led to a fire onboard a ship and forced most of its crew to evacuate it. The Thailand-flagged bulk carrier Mayuree Naree was targeted and damaged approximately 11 nautical miles north of Oman, two maritime security sources cited by Reuters have said. The fire had been extinguished and

Continued on Page 06

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21.6kg hashish, 735g ice seized

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Department has seized 21.6 kilograms of hashish and 735 grams of ice (crystal meth) in two separate operations in Peshawar, foiling attempts to smuggle narcotics and arresting one suspect. Separate cases have been registered while further investigation is under way. According to details received from Excise Department, the operations were conducted as part of the provincial government's zero-tolerance policy against narcotics, under which the department has intensified actions against drug trafficking and sale across the province. The Excise Police Station in Peshawar Region carried out a major operation on the motorway service road towards Akbarpura, where officials intercepted a vehicle bearing registration number NG-399. During the search, the team recovered 21,600 grams (21.6kg) of hashish from the vehicle. The operation was conducted under the supervision of Majid Khan, Excise and Taxation Officer (Counter Narcotics Operations), and Circle Officer Hamidullah, while the raid was led by SHO Excise Police Station Peshawar Region Imad Khan, along with Sub-Inspector Zia Anwar Khan and ASI Saem Khan. A case has been registered and further legal proceedings are in progress.

In another operation, the Excise Intelligence Squad acted on a tip-off near Pir Zakori Bridge, where officials recovered 735 grams of ice and arrested a suspect. The raid was conducted under the supervision of Saud Khan Gandapur, Provincial In-Charge Excise Intelligence and Majid Khan, Excise and Taxation Officer (Counter Narcotics Operations). During the operation, Inspector Moazzam Jan Khan, along with his team, recovered the narcotics from the possession of Muhammad Imran, son of Purdil, a resident of Mardan, who was arrested on the spot. A case has been registered against the suspect at the Excise Police Station in Peshawar Region, and further investigation is underway.—APP

Three killed in lightning strike

PESHAWAR: At least three members of a family lost their lives after being struck by lightning during heavy rain in Shangla district, according to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA). The incident occurred in Muniwari area of Achar, Shangla, where lightning struck a house during rain-fall. As a result, Yar Muhammad (30), son of Bakhs, his wife Taj Bibi, and their minor son Murad Ali, aged around four to five years, were seriously injured and fell unconscious. District administration and rescue teams rushed to the scene however, all three victims had succumbed to their injuries by the time help arrived. According to the PDMA daily situation report issued by the Provincial Emergency Operation Center (PEOC), no damage to houses, schools, livestock or other infrastructure was reported in the incident.—APP

Lahore-Sialkot Motorway approved from 2 to 3 lanes

Abdul Aleem Khan emphasized a new policy standard, stating that no future Motorway project will be constructed with fewer than 3 lanes on each side, totaling a 6-lane configuration. He underscored that infrastructure planning must proactively address the nation's future travel requirements rather than just current demand

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan presided over a high-level National Highway Authority (NHA) meeting on Wednesday, where several landmark decisions regarding the country's Motorway network were approved.

During the meeting, it was formally decided to commence work on expanding the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway from 2 lanes to a 3-lane facility. Similarly, the Federal Minister issued directives to accelerate construction on the Sialkot-Kharan and Islamabad Motorway, confirming that these routes will also be developed as 3-lane dual carriageways. Abdul Aleem Khan emphasized a new policy standard, stating that no future Motorway project will be constructed with fewer than 3 lanes on each side, totaling a 6-lane configuration. He underscored that infrastructure planning must proactively address the nation's future travel requirements rather than just current demand.

The minister further instructed the NHA to expedite work on the Sialkot-Rawalpindi Motorway in collaboration with the Frontier Works Organization (FWO). He noted that the completion of this vital link would significantly reduce the traffic burden on the M-2 and drastically improve the travel experience between



Lahore and Islamabad. By providing a more direct route, the distance between the two major cities will be reduced by approximately 100 kilometers, saving commuters at least one hour of travel time, he added. In a move to bolster religious tourism, the meeting also reviewed plans to link Kartarpur and Nankana Sahib directly to the Motorway

network. These new highways will also feature 3 lanes and high-standard safety fencing to ensure secure and efficient transit for pilgrims.

Highlighting the economic potential of religious tourism, Federal Minister Abdul Aleem Khan remarked that these initiatives would encourage a large influx of the Sikh Community from Europe,

North America, and beyond.

To accommodate these visitors, the Government envisions the development of 3, 4, and 5-star hotels alongside modern shopping malls near these holy sites. He pointed out that such infrastructure presents a massive opportunity for foreign investment in the hospitality sector. Consequently, he directed the NHA

to organize investment Roadshows in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and Europe to attract international investors.

He concluded that by combining superior communication infrastructure with world-class facilities, Pakistan would effectively project a "soft image" to the global community.—DNA

Over 8,000 ration bags distributed in Karachi

KARACHI: Team Karachi Welfare Society International has completed the fourth phase of its grand Ramadan ration distribution drive in Karachi, delivering over 8,000 ration bags to deserving families as part of its 15,000-bag target for the holy month.

Saqib Zeeshan, President of Team Karachi, along with other members of the organization, participated in a distribution of the second phase 400 ration bags among deserving families from different areas of Karachi at Decent Marriage Hall, Korangi. These distribution drives were carried out with the support of management, volunteers and donors, ensuring that essential food support reached low-income households in an organised manner during Ramadan. The latest phase adds to the

organisation's continuing ration and food support efforts aimed at easing pressure on families facing rising financial hardship.

"Ramadan reminds us of our shared responsibility towards families facing hardship. Every ration bag delivered through this campaign represents collective compassion from our donors, volunteers and well-wishers, and we remain committed to serving deserving communities with dignity," said Saqib Zeeshan, President Team Karachi Welfare Society International.

"The Rashan drive initiative was not only about distributing food; it was about reaching homes with respect, hope and timely support in the holy month. We are grateful to every person who stood with us to make this phase possible," said Mehmood

Arshad of Team Karachi Welfare Society International.

Beyond this Ramadan drive, Team Karachi continues to work in different areas of community welfare aimed at supporting vulnerable families in Karachi through practical and need-based assistance.

Team Karachi's wider projects include marriage assistance for deserving girls, scholarship support for students, and livelihood programmes through which people are helped with income-generating support such as rickshaws and sewing machines. The organisation also works on skills development initiatives, including sewing, embroidery and IT training, alongside other welfare efforts intended to help individuals and families move towards greater stability and self-reliance.—APP

Sindh okays fuel conservation plan

KARACHI: The Sindh Cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah approved a comprehensive austerity and fuel conservation plan along with a series of governance, economic, social protection, and education reforms aimed at addressing the prevailing energy situation and strengthening public service delivery across the province. The meeting, held at the CM House, was attended by provincial ministers, advisors, special assistants, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, and relevant administrative secretaries. Senior Minister for Information Sharjeel Inam memon addressing the press conference, said that the cabinet considered a 23-point agenda, approving measures related to fiscal discipline, fuel conservation, education reforms, women's rights, agriculture, healthcare, and institutional strengthening. The cabinet decisions were shared by Minister Information Sharjeel Memon. The cabinet approved the launch of a comprehensive austerity and fuel conservation drive aimed at reducing public expenditure and ensuring efficient use of energy resources in view of the prevailing economic pressures and uncertainty in global fuel markets. The chief minister directed the chief secretary to implement a series of spending cuts, operational adjustments, and fuel conservation steps across government departments and public institutions. Under the austerity plan, the government has reduced fuel allocations for official vehicles by 50 per cent for two months, a step expected to save around Rs960.55 million. Operational vehicles such as ambulances, buses and emergency services will remain exempt from the restriction. In addition, 60 per cent of official vehicles in government departments will remain grounded for the next two months, while departments have been directed to promote carpooling among officers to reduce fuel consumption. To demonstrate solidarity with the public during the economic strain, provincial ministers, advisors and special assistants have voluntarily decided to waive their salaries and allowances for three months April, May, and June. A 25 per cent voluntary cut in the salaries of provincial legislators has been suggested during the same period for which the Speaker of the provincial assembly would be informed of the cabinet decision. Senior government officials in BS-20 and above earning more than Rs300,000 per month have also been encouraged to voluntarily forgo two days' salary, except those serving in the health and education sectors. The cabinet also approved a 20 per cent reduction in non-essential government expenditure for the final quarter of the current fiscal year, excluding electricity bills and medicine procurement. The measure is expected to generate savings of more than Rs12 billion. A complete ban on the purchase of new vehicles and government durables will remain in force until June 2026. Procurement of IT equipment will only be allowed after scrutiny by the relevant authorities. The government has also imposed a ban on official foreign visits, except in unavoidable cases. Ministers, parliamentarians and government officials undertaking official travel will be required to travel in economy class. Similarly, official dinners and large ceremonial events have been banned, except for receptions for visiting foreign delegations. Government departments have been directed to conduct meetings through virtual or online platforms to minimise travel and lodging expenses. To reduce fuel consumption caused by commuting, the government has approved work-from-home arrangements for up to 50 per cent of staff on alternate days, except for essential services. Both public and private sector offices will also observe a four-day work week, with adjustments in working hours where necessary. However, these measures will not apply to the banking sector, industry and agriculture, which will continue normal operations.—Lahore-Sialkot Motorway approved from 2 to 3 lanes

Kundi for steps to strengthen cyber defense

The Governor said that Pakistan's youth were the country's greatest asset, adding that the young people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also possessed remarkable potential in the field of technology

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday said that in the modern era wars were no longer confined to borders but were also being fought in the digital domain, stressing the need for Pakistan to secure and strengthen its cyber systems to safeguard national security, economy and state institutions from potential threats.

Addressing the National Cyber Security Conference organized by the local media in Islamabad, the Governor highlighted the growing importance of cyberse-

curity amid rapid technological advancements. The conference was attended by cybersecurity experts and students from various institutions.

Governor Kundi appreciated the role of the Media Group for organizing the conference on such an important topic and said that with the rapid development of technology, security challenges were also increasing, which required a comprehensive strategy and collective efforts to tackle effectively.

He said that information, data and cyber systems had become fundamental pillars of any country's economy, governance and security. If these systems were

not adequately protected, not only the economy but also state institutions and national security could face serious risks, he added. The Governor said that Pakistan's youth were the country's greatest asset, adding that the young people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also possessed remarkable potential in the field of technology. By providing them with modern education and training in technology and cybersecurity, Pakistan could not only protect its digital systems but also achieve a significant position at the global level, he remarked. Kundi said Pakistan was part of the global digital transformation and its youth

had immense capabilities in the fields of information technology and innovation. He stressed the need to modernize and secure the country's cyber infrastructure in line with contemporary requirements to promote the digital economy.

He added that conferences and seminars of this nature were highly important as they provided experts with a platform to share ideas, research and possible solutions.

The Governor expressed hope that the recommendations emerging from the conference would help further strengthen Pakistan's cybersecurity framework.

Health experts warn against classifying nicotine as recreational items

PESHAWAR: Civil society organizations, public health advocates and child rights networks have expressed deep concern over reports suggesting classification of nicotine products as 'recreational item' to allow its sale in the country. In a statement issued here on Monday, the public health advocates observed that these reports are particularly troubling given earlier indications that policymakers were examining stronger measures, including a potential ban on vaping products due to increasing health concerns and growing use of such products among young people. The stance taken by Federal Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, signalling its intention of addressing public health risks associated with vaping products and other emerging nicotine devices, was widely welcomed and appreciated by civil society and public interest groups across Pakistan. That position was widely

regarded as a responsible and timely step toward protecting public health and safeguarding youth from nicotine addiction, the statement added. However, the recent and unconfirmed reports suggesting that nicotine products may instead be categorized or regulated under "recreational items" have created serious concern among health advocates and civil society organizations. Public health experts emphasize that nicotine is a highly addictive and harmful substance and should never be classified as a recreational product. Such a classification risks normalizing nicotine consumption and could lead to increased accessibility and use, particularly among adolescents and young adults, they added. Nicotine exposure has been linked to addiction, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory complications, and harmful impacts on brain development among youth. Scientific evidence shows that early exposure to nicotine significantly in-

creases the risk of long-term dependency and can serve as a gateway to other tobacco and nicotine products. In addition to the serious health consequences, nicotine addiction also imposes substantial economic costs, creating long-term burdens on healthcare systems, families, and the national economy due to the treatment of tobacco-related illnesses. Usman Afridi from National Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco and Nicotine Control (NASTNC) mentioned that any move to categorize nicotine as a recreational item would represent a serious setback for country's public health and tobacco control efforts. "Nicotine is not a recreational substance. It is an addictive chemical that poses severe health risks and contributes to long-term social and economic burdens. Any progress toward regularizing nicotine under recreational items must be immediately rolled back," said Mr. Afridi.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

March 01/Bosnia National Day

March 03/Bulgaria National Day

March 06/ Ghana Independence Day

March 12/Mauritius National Day

March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day

March 20/Tunisia Independence Day

March 21/Namibia National Day

March 25/Greece National Day

March 26/Bangladesh National Day

March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police...9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092



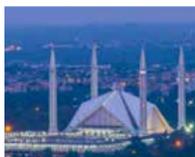
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MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



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CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3



Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224
Potohar Town.....9209224
Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

11 shopkeepers detained from 4 Ramzan bazaars

Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon instructed all assistant commissioners to continue daily visits to their assigned Ramazan markets. He directed them to monitor price lists, quality of food items and overall arrangements at the stalls

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration on Wednesday detained 11 shopkeepers during inspections at four Ramazan relief markets in the federal capital as officials checked prices, food quality, parking and sanitation arrangements to ensure that government relief measures reach consumers during the holy month. The visits were carried out by assistant commissioners on the directions of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Memon, who asked officials to conduct daily inspections at Ramazan markets and ensure strict monitoring of prices and facilities for the public. Assistant commissioners visited Ramazan relief markets in Barakhu, G-6, Pakistan Town and Tar-

lai. During the inspections, officials reviewed the availability and quality of food items being sold to the public under the government relief program. The teams also examined parking arrangements and cleanliness conditions at the markets to ensure that visitors can shop without facing problems. Officials moved through different stalls and checked whether vendors were displaying official price lists and selling goods according to the approved rates. During the checks, authorities found several cases where vendors were not following the official price list. As a result, 11 shopkeepers were taken into custody for violating the government's price regulations. Assistant commissioners also spoke with shoppers present at

the markets. They met visitors individually and asked about their experience while purchasing food items. Complaints shared by citizens were noted during the visits, and officials directed vendors to resolve issues on the spot. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Irfan Memon instructed all assistant commissioners to continue daily visits to their assigned Ramazan markets. He directed them to monitor price lists, quality of food items and overall arrangements at the stalls. The deputy commissioner also ordered that price control magistrates remain present at every Ramazan market at all times to ensure that vendors follow government rates and other rules. According to the instructions, price control magistrates

have been directed to take action on every complaint received from citizens without discrimination. Officials have been told to respond immediately whenever a violation of the official price list or quality standards is reported.

The district administration has also urged residents to play a role in monitoring the markets. Citizens have been asked to report vendors who do not display official price lists or sell items that do not meet quality standards.

The administration said public complaints will help authorities maintain oversight of Ramazan relief markets and ensure that the government's relief measures benefit consumers throughout the holy month.

Wafaqi Mohtasib meets CJP

ISLAMABAD: Wafaqi Mohtasib Naveed Kamran Baloch has called on the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, at the Supreme Court. During the meeting, matters relating to the provision of justice to the public and the resolution of citizens' grievances were discussed, said a news release issued here on Wednesday. Both sides exchanged views on strengthening institutional cooperation and enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure more effective public service delivery. The Chief Justice of Pakistan observed that the Wafaqi Mohtasib played a significant role in providing free and prompt relief to citizens against maladministration. He appreciated the importance of the Ombudsman's office in addressing public complaints and ensuring administrative justice. The meeting also emphasized improving access to justice and strengthening coordination among institutions. Both sides agreed on the need to further activate and streamline the system for the effective redressal of public grievances in order to provide timely relief to citizens.—APP

IRSA releases 112,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 112,900 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1455.00 feet which was 55.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 14,500 cusecs and 48,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1150.95 feet, which was 100.95 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 8,900 cusecs and 50,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 60,600, 29,500, 32,200, and 14,300 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 6,700 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 1,500 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Senats body reviews compliance by various ministries

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Housing and Works was held here on Wednesday, under the chairmanship of Senator Nasir Mehmood, to review compliance by various ministries and divisions regarding the transfer and payment of salaries to the assigned Pakistan Public Works Department (PWD) maintenance staff. The committee reviewed a detailed report presented by the Secretary Ministry of Housing and Works regarding the implementation of the Federal Cabinet decision notified by the Ministry of Housing and Works on 6 September 2024. The decision directed several ministries and divisions to accept the transfer of assigned Pak PWD maintenance staff and ensure payment of their salaries, along with arrears for the last eight months. During the meeting, it was informed that the National Accountability Bureau, the Intelligence Bureau and Federal Board of Revenue have shown compliance with the committee's directives. The Intelligence Bureau has accepted 8 employees and issued appointment orders after approval by the Director General. Appointment letters have been dispatched and salary bills will be processed shortly. One case is pending since the employee is deputed in Karachi rather than Balochistan. The pension process for the deceased employee has also been initiated and dispatched. The committee was informed that the Auditor General of Pakistan has forwarded a list of twenty employees to the Ministry through the Director General Pak PWD on 9 March 2026. Officials stated that once funds are released by the Finance Division, the salary bills will be generated and the process of payment will begin within the next two days. Officials from the Ministry of Defence informed the committee that seven employees fall under their jurisdiction and the matter has been referred to the Finance Division for allocation of budgetary resources. Similarly, the Cabinet Division has also approached the Finance Division for the required funds to process salary payments. The Federal Investigation Agency informed the committee that it received the staff list only on Tuesday. Officials stated that the number of employees initially communicated was twenty-one, but the revised list contains forty nine employees, it requires time to complete internal processing. It was further noted that other departments have begun receiving the lists of assigned staff and are in the process of initiating compliance in accordance with the Cabinet decision. Chairman Committee Senator Nasir Mehmood reviewed the status of each ministry individually and directed all concerned departments to expedite the process. He emphasized that the delay in payment of salaries and arrears must be addressed without further delay.

Over 19,000 online taxis registered Motorcycle M-Tag chip plan announced

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has registered more than 19,000 online taxis and bikes as part of a new monitoring system, while officials also announced that a new M-Tag chip for motorcycles will be issued free of cost once development is completed. Speaking to journalists at Parliament House, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon said the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) is working on a new chip for motorcycle M-Tags. He said the chip will be provided to citizens free once it is ready. According to FWO, the current motorcycle M-Tag becomes unusable once it is removed from the bike. The deputy commissioner said this design prevents misuse. He added that authorities do not expect a situation where the same M-Tag could be used on another motorcycle. Memon said that if an M-Tag is stolen, citizens can report the incident through a helpline. The tag will be blocked immediately after the complaint is registered. He added that a replacement M-Tag will also be installed without any fee. He said the M-Tag system includes several security and safety features aimed at improving monitoring on roads and preventing misuse. The deputy commissioner also said security arrangements have been strengthened at Mosques and Imambargahs across the federal capital. He added that officers remain present in the field to monitor the situation and respond when required. Discussing transport monitoring, Memon said the registration process for online taxi services is continuing in the city. So far, more than 19,000 taxis and bikes linked to online ride services have been registered with the administration. Under the system, drivers are required to record the identity of passengers and provide details of where the ride begins and where it ends. Authorities say this process helps improve monitoring of transport activity. Memon said that in many countries taxis cannot operate without proper licensing. He added that Islamabad is also introducing taxi registration under a security system to keep a record of vehicles and drivers operating through online ride services.—APP

Pak-China joint research to focus on genomics, genome: Sajid

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China would undertake joint research in advanced agricultural technologies including genomics, genome editing and speed breeding to improve crop productivity, Director General Agricultural (Research) Dr Sajid Rehman said while chairing a seminar at the Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI). The seminar was organised for agricultural scientists who recently returned after completing advanced agricultural training in China under the Prime Minister's 1,000 Internship Programme. Dr Sajid Rehman said the joint research would also cover areas such as high-throughput phenotyping, hybrid development, climate change, regenerative agriculture, soil and plant health, and stress tolerance, particularly heat and drought. He said these efforts were part of a broader plan to modernise agricultural research in Punjab so that new high-yielding and climate-resilient crop varieties could be developed for farmers. According to him, the initiative would support the Punjab government's development project titled "Revamping of Agricultural Research in Punjab," aimed at strengthening the province's research system through modern technologies and improved research facilities. The DG said the project, with an estimated cost of Rs five billion, would help establish state-of-the-art laboratories and promote the use of advanced agricultural technologies in research institutions. Around 30 researchers were sent to China for three and six-month specialised training programmes under the government initiative and they successfully completed their training.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Bulgaria, Irena Gancheva and Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe) Amb. Ayesha Ali talked on advancing relations and sharing views on regional developments. —DNA

Cybersecurity vital for digital trade, eco growth: Tahir

Sardar Tahir Mehmood said that the business community relies heavily on digital platforms for financial transactions, supply chain management, and customer engagement, making cybersecurity vital for protecting commercial activities and maintaining investor confidence

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has emphasized that cybersecurity has become a critical requirement for safeguarding Pakistan's digital economy, protecting business operations, and ensuring national security in an increasingly interconnected world. Addressing a conference on Cyber Secure Pakistan here on Wednesday, he said that the rapid growth of digital platforms, e-commerce, digital banking, and fintech services has created vast opportunities for economic development. However, the expansion of the digital ecosystem has also in-

creased exposure to cyber threats, data breaches, financial fraud, and cyber espionage. He noted that ensuring the protection of digital infrastructure and data is essential for building trust in the digital system and encouraging investment in Pakistan's technology sector. He stressed that the country needs a comprehensive cybersecurity framework that includes strong policies, modern cyber defense technologies, and greater awareness among businesses and citizens. Sardar Tahir Mehmood said that the business community relies heavily on digital platforms for financial transactions, supply chain management, and customer engagement, making cybersecurity vital for protecting commercial activities and maintaining

investor confidence. He also highlighted the importance of developing skilled cybersecurity professionals through specialized education and training programs so that Pakistan can effectively protect its digital infrastructure and benefit from opportunities in the global cybersecurity industry. He reaffirmed that the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry is committed to working with the government, technology institutions, and the private sector to promote cyber awareness among businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises. He concluded that strengthening cybersecurity is essential for creating a secure environment for digital trade, innovation, and sustainable economic growth in Pakistan.

Cars' sale, production surge 45.53%, 52.31%

ISLAMABAD: The sale and production of cars in the country increased by 45.53 percent and 52.31 percent, respectively, during the first eight months of the current fiscal year 2025-26 compared to the same period last year, demonstrating a revival in economic activity and growing consumer confidence in the automobile market. During July-February (2025-26), as many as 97,900 cars were sold as against 67,267 units during the corresponding months of last year, while production rose to 104,652 units from 68,708 units, according to official data of the Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA) available with APP. Analysts attributed the significant growth in automobile sales and production to the government's prudent economic policies, improved macroeconomic indicators, easing inflationary pressures and relatively stable exchange rates, which helped restore consumer purchasing power and boost demand for vehicles. Among different models, the

sale of Honda cars increased by 49.91 percent, rising from 10,265 units last year to 15,389 units during the period under review. Similarly, the combined sale of Toyota Corolla and Toyota Yaris grew by 75.70 percent to reach 23,900 units compared to 13,602 units sold during the same period of the corresponding fiscal year. The sale of Suzuki Swift also recorded a substantial growth of 99.33 percent, increasing from 5,295 units to 10,555 units. Hyundai Elantra sales also climbed to 1,743 units from 965 units, indicating a rising consumer preference for mid-sized sedans in the local market. Meanwhile, Suzuki Cultus sales rose to 3,423 units from 1,887 units during the corresponding months of last year. Suzuki Alto remained the top-selling model in the country, with sales increasing to 36,694 units compared to 28,194 units in the same period last year, reflecting strong demand in the small car segment. The sale of

Suzuki Every also witnessed a sharp increase of 250.03 percent, rising from 1,577 units to 5,520 units during the months under review, largely driven by higher demand in the light commercial and small transport segments. Meanwhile, the country's transition towards cleaner transportation also gained momentum as 210 units of the newly launched Dewan Honri-VE electric vehicle were sold during July-February of the current fiscal year. On the production side, Honda cars' output increased by 57.77 percent from 10,065 units to 15,880 units during the eight-month period. Similarly, the production of Toyota Corolla and Toyota Yaris also grew by 76.85 percent, increasing from 13,839 units to 24,475 units during the period under review. Suzuki Swift production also rose significantly by 96.46 percent, increasing from 5,438 units to 10,684 units, while Hyundai Elantra production increased to 2,142 units from 1,135 units.—APP

Briefs

President
felicitates
Nepal's new
leadership

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has congratulated Nepal's Rastriya Swatantra Party and its leader Balendra Shah on their historic electoral victory. President Zardari said the active role of young people in the electoral process was very encouraging and reflected a wider regional aspiration for accountable governance and reform. He noted that the emergence of youth-driven leadership sent a positive signal across South Asia and the world at large. The President also recalled that Pakistan takes pride in the legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who became the youngest Prime Minister of Pakistan, and said that the emergence of a young Prime Minister in Nepal was a welcome development for the region. Recalling the warm and longstanding ties between Pakistan and Nepal since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1960, President Zardari reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to further deepen bilateral cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, goodwill and shared interests. President Zardari conveyed his best wishes for the success of the new leadership in fulfilling its reform agenda by advancing Nepal's progress and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening its longstanding friendship with Nepal.—APP

Early
education
reform project
launched in
Balochistan

ISLAMABAD: The government has launched a \$9.07 million early education reform project in Balochistan to reach thousands of children, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, where access to early education remains a major challenge. According to documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the project is being implemented by the Balochistan Education Department and is scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2029. The initiative titled 'System Transformation in Balochistan for Early Education' is designed to expand access to quality early learning programmes, enhance teacher training, and improve institutional capacity within the provincial education system. The project also focuses on upgrading school infrastructure in underserved districts, introducing standardised curricula for early education, and implementing monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective delivery of educational services. The project has officially started and staffing for the project has already been completed. The procurement of educational materials, training programmes, and infrastructure contracts is expected to begin soon. APP

CEO
education
visits
centres

RAWALPINDI: Chief Executive Officer District Education Authority Rawalpindi, Tariq Mahmood visited several examination centres on the first day of Grade-VIII annual examinations conducted under the Punjab Examination Commission/PECTAA and reviewed arrangements to ensure transparent and orderly conduct of the exams. Earlier, a meeting chaired by the CEO was held to review examination preparations in detail, where officials and staff were directed to ensure transparency, discipline and merit during the examinations and that no irregularity would be tolerated. The district administration had completed all necessary arrangements a day earlier to ensure smooth and peaceful conduct of the exams. During the visit, the CEO inspected arrangements, examination environment and staff attendance at various centres including Government Zeenat Sikandaria Girls High School, Government Johar Memorial Girls High School, Government MC Millat High School, Government Girls High School AOC Morgah, Government Boys High School AOC Morgah and Government Higher Secondary School Elite Morgah.—APP

“Beyond Celebration Inclusive protection, justice & empowerment for all women”



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Women Welfare & Development Center, the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) in collaboration with Rozan convened a high-level International Women's Day celebration bringing together senior government officials, civil society leaders, disability rights advocates, and representatives from the private sector. The event, themed "Beyond Celebration: Inclusive Protection, Justice & Empowerment for All Women," moved beyond ceremonial recognition to deliver substantive dialogue on the structural reforms needed to realize women's rights across Pakistan. The gathering featured opening remarks, a multi-stakeholder panel discussion, and closing remarks by Ms. Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson, NAVTTC underscoring the government's

commitment to placing women's protection and empowerment at the heart of national policy. "Empowering women is not just a social responsibility; it is a national priority that shapes the future of our society." Said Ms. Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson, NAVTTC. Ms. Asmat Afridi, Deputy Director of Women Welfare & Development Center, opened the event calling for renewed commitment to ensuring every woman regardless of age, ability, or background can access her rights. Ms. Fouzia Yasmin, Director Programmes at Rozan, underscored that empowerment encompasses emotional resilience, informed choice, and the dignity to exercise rights with confidence. She noted, "I hope today's discussions inspire us to translate ideas into action, ensuring that empowerment is not just celebrated but realized across every community in Pakistan." The centerpiece of the event was a

panel discussion on the "Role of Institutions for Advancing Women's Rights," moderated by Ms. Meerab Lodhi, Senior Manager at Rozan, featuring five distinguished panelists: Ms. Shabana Nawaz, Director Social Welfare, MoHR, Ms. Laila Naz Taj, Director, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) Pakistan Communications, Ms. Abia Akram, Disability Rights Activist, Ms. Rabia Farhan, Vice President Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chairperson Standing Committee on Banking and Finance, CEO Crust and Clusters and Enchanting Horizons of Science, Ms. Sameena Gul, Chairperson, Forum for Awareness and Integrated Development (FAID), Ms. Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson, National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC). The panel emphasised on strengthening institutional mechanisms for survivor sup-

port, inter-agency coordination, and women's economic and social empowerment through government structures and on amplifying women's voices in decision-making and supporting young women as leaders and innovators in their communities. The importance of community driven development and ownership and financial inclusion was discussed in detail that allowed for more economic empowerment of women at grass root levels. Discussions focused on the barriers facing women with disabilities and the systemic reforms needed for inclusive protection and economic opportunity. There was an increased focus on intersectional challenges faced by older women and women from marginalized communities, and priorities for advancing women's rights in Pakistan including GBV survivors, while challenging gender norms through non-traditional training pathways.

Biometric
attendance
to be
introduced

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Biometric attendance of the candidates would be implemented for the first time during matric exams under Rawalpindi board. The decision was taken to further improve transparency in the examination system. Commissioner Rawalpindi and Chairman Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Rawalpindi (BISE), Engineer Aamir Khattak, has directed officials to ensure biometric attendance of candidates at hard examination centres. While charging a high level meeting, he directed to maintain continuous online CCTV monitoring during the Matric First Annual Examinations 2026 commencing from March 27 to ensure transparency. He said the measures were being implemented in line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif to establish a transparent, organized and cheating-free examination system. He directed the relevant officers to complete all arrangements at examination centres in time and strictly enforce rules and discipline during the examinations. Controller of Examinations Tanveer Asghar Awan said foolproof arrangements were being finalized for the conduct of the examinations. He said online CCTV monitoring of centres and the biometric attendance system would help ensure an effective and transparent examination process, providing candidates with an organized and fair examination environment.

Car flips
on Srinagar
Highway

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A high-speed car lost control and overturned near the Rose and Jasmine Garden on Srinagar Highway in Islamabad on Wednesday afternoon, leaving the driver seriously injured as emergency responders rushed to the scene. Rescue officials said emergency teams responded quickly to the incident and moved the injured driver to PIMS Hospital for treatment, a private news channel reported. While authorities have started an investigation into the incident. The identity of the driver has not yet been confirmed.

UN Women Pakistan launches 'Mardangi Nahi, Kamzori Hai Yeh' campaign

DNA

ISLAMABAD: UN Women Pakistan has launched a new campaign titled "Mardangi Nahi, Kamzori Hai Yeh," aimed at challenging harmful gender norms and promoting positive expressions of masculinity. The campaign uses powerful storytelling and creative communication to question the normalization of violence and harmful stereotypes associated with masculinity. Through digital storytelling, media engagement, and social media outreach, the initiative seeks to catalyze meaningful dialogue and inspire men and boys to play an active role in advancing gender equality. The campaign builds on the broader conversation around masculinity and accountability highlighted in a recent opinion piece by Jamshed M. Kazi, Country Representative, UN Women Pakistan published in The News International[1], where he emphasized that violence should never be mistaken for strength and that redefining masculinity is essen-

tial to achieving gender equality. "Gender equality requires more than commitment—it requires a shift in mindsets and behaviours," said Jamshed M. Kazi. "Through the 'Mardangi Nahi, Kamzori Hai Yeh' campaign, we aim to challenge harmful stereotypes and encourage men and boys to stand for respect, accountability, and equality for women and girls." The campaign highlights how true strength lies in empathy, responsibility, and standing against violence. By using creative storytelling and relatable narratives, the initiative aims to inspire reflection and dialogue around how societies define masculinity and power. The campaign will roll out across digital platforms and media channels, encouraging individuals, institutions, and communities to join the conversation and support a culture of equality and non-violence. By leveraging the power of creative communication, the "Mardangi Nahi, Kamzori Hai Yeh" campaign aims to contribute to a more inclusive society where women and girls can live free from discrimination and gender-based violence.

HEC scholarship programme for GB students

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has successfully completed phase-I of the Undergraduate Scholarship Programme for Students of Gilgit-Baltistan in Top Pakistani Universities/Institutions, achieving a phenomenal scholarship utilisation ratio of 99.4 percent. Against the sanctioned target of 335 scholarships under phase-I, HEC provisionally extended scholarship offers to a total of 430 candidates to ensure maximum outreach and merit-based selection. A total of 333 students secured admission and availed the opportunity. Currently, 312 scholars are pursuing undergraduate studies in leading universities, while 11 students have graduated. The programme has also demonstrated encouraging gender participation,

with 182 male and 151 female students benefiting from the initiative, maintaining a balanced male-to-female ratio of approximately 55:45.

The scholarship package covers tuition fee, hostel charges, stipend/living allowance, book and travelling allowance, enabling talented students from Gilgit-Baltistan to access quality higher education opportunities. Scholars have been enrolled in diverse disciplines in reputable public sector institutions of the country. The programme was initiated in 2021 with the aim to provide scholarships to the students from Gilgit-Baltistan to equip youth with the latest education for upcoming challenges and for the development of their area and the country. Building upon the success of the phase-I, HEC aims to sustain and further expand opportunities for students from underserved and remote regions of the country.

AIOU highlights Prophet PBUH's teachings

ISLAMABAD: At the third session of the weekly Seerat lecture series at Alama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), the important aspect of the Holy Prophet's PBUH life, "Service to Humanity," was highlighted. Delivering the lecture, Dr Muhammad Abu Bakr Siddiqi said that the entire blessed life of the Holy Prophet PBUH is a practical model of serving humanity, compassion and goodwill. He explained that the Prophet PBUH, through his teachings and practical life, made it clear that serving humanity is a fundamental requirement of Islam. He, PBUH, treated not only Muslims but all people with kindness, justice and mercy. Assisting orphans, the poor,

widows and those in need was an essential part of his PBUH life and caring for society's vulnerable groups was considered a responsibility. Dr Siddiqi emphasized that serving humanity is a core command of religion and the true meaning of religion is goodwill and the welfare of people. He stressed that helping someone in need is not only a great investment for the Hereafter but also the best way to attain Allah's pleasure. Regardless of the extent of one's ability, whether small or large, or whether one is financially constrained or well-off, service to humanity is essential. Dr Abu Bakr Siddiqi added that in today's times, there is a strong need to adopt the spirit of serving humanity

as a part of life in light of the Prophet's PBUH teachings and to play a practical role in the welfare of people. Delivering the inaugural remarks, Syed Ghulam Kazim Ali, Head of Library, said that the weekly Seerat sessions are organized jointly by the University's Central Library and the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies. These sessions provide a scholarly environment for discussions on various aspects of the Holy Prophet's PBUH life. He added that the purpose of these gatherings is to instill a passion for studying the Seerat among students and university staff and to encourage the practical application of the Prophet's PBUH teachings in daily life.—DNA

No new LPG price notification issued, clarifies OGRA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) clarifies that Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) prices are officially notified by the Authority once every month, effective from the 1st day of the month in accordance with the prescribed pricing mechanism. At present, no new LPG price notification has been issued by OGRA, and therefore any claims or rumours regarding an increase in LPG prices are incorrect. The general public is advised that OGRA's notified price remains applicable, and consumers should ensure that LPG is being sold in accordance with the officially notified rates. In case of any instance of overcharging or price manipulation in the market, the matter may be reported to the local district administration for immediate action and enforcement of the notified price. OGRA remains committed to protecting consumer interests and ensuring transparency and compliance in the LPG market across the country.—APP

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Pakistan's fuel price fiasco: a betrayal of the common man

In a decision that has sparked nationwide outrage, the Pakistani government has imposed a staggering Rs 55 per liter increase on petroleum products, effective March 7, 2026. Petrol prices have skyrocketed to Rs 321.17 per liter, while diesel now stands at Rs 335.86 per liter. This abrupt surge comes amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, involving Iran, Israel, and the United States, which have led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and driven global crude oil prices toward the \$100 per barrel mark. For millions of ordinary Pakistanis already grappling with economic woes, this hike feels like a punch to the gut, exacerbating hardships while the elite class remains comfortably insulated. The government's justification for the increase has been met with widespread skepticism. Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik described the move as "under compulsion," attributing it to volatile international markets. However, critics argue that this rationale falls flat. Pakistan's existing fuel reserves, procured at lower pre-surge prices, are ample enough to last until the end of March—approximately four weeks from the announcement.

If the stocks were bought cheaply, why inflict this pain on consumers prematurely? This premature adjustment reeks of opportunism, a calculated effort to extract revenue from the public before global prices truly necessitate it. Compounding the controversy is the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Amid virtual negotiations for Pakistan's bailout program, the IMF has insisted on immediate price alignments to enhance revenue collection and phase out subsidies. With inflation surging to a 16-month high and the government faltering on fiscal targets, officials seemingly viewed this as an opportune moment to comply. Yet, this compliance comes at the expense of the vulnerable. Instead of pursuing genuine austerity—such as slashing bloated administrative expenditures or overhauling inefficient state-owned enterprises—the regime has chosen the path of least resistance: burdening the masses with higher fuel costs. The ripple effects of this decision are profound and far-reaching. Fuel is the lifeblood of Pakistan's economy, influencing everything from transportation to agriculture and manufacturing. Higher petrol and diesel prices will inevitably lead to inflated transport fares, pushing up the cost of essentials like food, medicine, and utilities. Low-income households, already stretched thin, will bear the brunt of this "inflation bomb," as opposition leaders have aptly termed it. Farmers reliant on diesel for irrigation and machinery face diminished yields, while small businesses struggle with elevated operational costs. In a country where over 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, such policies deepen inequality and stifle economic mobility.



What's particularly infuriating is the glaring hypocrisy in government spending. While ordinary citizens tighten their belts, there's no corresponding restraint among the elite. Politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers continue to enjoy lavish perks, including free petrol allocations that remain untouched. This disparity underscores a system rigged in favor of the powerful, where the powerless foot the bill for extravagance. The petroleum development levy has been ramped up to Rs 82 per liter on petrol, purportedly to offset subsidies in other areas, such as diesel for agriculture and transport. However, this cross-subsidization from car and bike owners to other sectors does little to rectify underlying inequities. It merely shifts the burden without addressing the root causes of fiscal mismanagement. Adding insult to injury is the windfall profit handed to oil companies. Estimates suggest that this price hike has funneled approximately Rs 800 billion in profits to these corporations in just one week. Rather than increasing government taxes on fuel—which would transparently direct funds to public coffers and signal accountability—the regime opted to boost the margins of oil marketing companies. This choice speaks volumes about priorities: profits for the elite over relief for the people. In a nation where crony capitalism thrives, such decisions reinforce the notion that Pakistan is governed for the elite, by the elite. Oil companies, often intertwined with influential lobbies, reap massive gains while the average citizen pays the price at the pump. The regime's confidence in implementing this hike stems from a sobering reality: mass protests are unlikely. Pakistan, in this cynical view, isn't a cohesive nation but a fragmented "huddle of people," divided along ethnic, sectarian, and economic lines. Collective action is rare, hampered by these fissures and a history of suppressed dissent. Social media platforms are alight with fury—hashtags like #FuelPriceTerrorism trending as users decry the move as economic sabotage. Posts lambast the government for prioritizing IMF dictates over domestic welfare, with memes juxtaposing luxury vehicles of ministers against the queues at fuel stations. Yet, this digital outrage has not translated into widespread street demonstrations. Fear of crackdowns, economic precarity, and apathy born from repeated betrayals keep the masses subdued. This fuel price saga is more than a policy misstep; it's symptomatic of deeper governance failures. Successive administrations have failed to diversify energy sources, reduce dependency on imports, or invest in renewables, leaving the economy vulnerable to global shocks. The current crisis, fueled by Middle East instability, highlights the urgency for long-term reforms. Instead of reactive hikes, the government could explore strategic hedging in oil markets, subsidize public transport, or incentivize electric vehicles. But such measures require vision and political will—qualities in short supply. As Pakistan navigates this turbulent period, the fuel hike serves as a stark reminder of the social contract's erosion. The elite's insulation from economic pain breeds resentment, eroding trust in institutions. If unaddressed, this could sow seeds for unrest, even in a divided society. For now, the common man endures, hoping for relief that seems perpetually out of reach. In the end, this isn't just about Rs 55 per liter; it's about justice, equity, and whether Pakistan can ever truly prioritize its people over its privileged few.

Pakistan's Tightrope Diplomacy During the US–Iran War

Qamar Bashir



Amid these challenges, Pakistan continued to maintain a carefully balanced diplomatic approach. At international forums such as the United Nations, Pakistani representatives emphasized the principles of sovereignty, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. Islamabad expressed concern about escalating hostilities while avoiding steps that might jeopardize its relationships with key partners in the Gulf or with Washington. This delicate balancing act illustrates the complexity of Pakistan's...

The war between the United States, Israel, and Iran did not erupt suddenly. Beneath the surface of the conflict lay years of planning, strategic positioning, and diplomatic maneuvering aimed at weakening Iran's nuclear, missile, and regional influence. When the first strikes were launched, they appeared dramatic and unexpected to the outside world, but the broader geopolitical architecture had already been carefully prepared. Alliances were strengthened, intelligence networks expanded, and regional actors were positioned in ways that limited Iran's ability to respond effectively. In this unfolding strategic landscape, Pakistan found itself walking a diplomatic tightrope, attempting to maintain balanced relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States while safeguarding its own national interests.

One of the earliest signals that the geopolitical chessboard was being rearranged appeared soon after the new American administration assumed office. In an unprecedented gesture, the U.S. president hosted Pakistan's Field Marshal for a high-profile meeting in Washington. The event was widely interpreted as a recognition of Pakistan's strategic importance in the region and the central role played by its military leadership in shaping the country's security policies. The meeting suggested that Washington was carefully engaging key regional players as it prepared for a more assertive approach toward Iran. Following this engagement, Pakistan's strategic posture began to shift in noticeable ways. Islamabad strengthened its defense cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, entering into a broader security framework with Gulf states that host significant American military installations. These arrangements reinforced Pakistan's role in the Gulf's defense architecture while simultaneously limiting its freedom to openly align with Iran in the event of a regional confrontation. The diplomatic message was clear: Pakistan remained a close partner of the Gulf states and the United States.

At the same time, another important strategic issue emerged. The United States expressed renewed interest in regaining operational flexibility at key regional facilities, including the strategically located Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan. Although the situation surrounding the base remained complex, the discussion itself highlighted Washington's desire to strengthen its presence in the region and maintain strategic reach across South and Central Asia. Parallel to these developments, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan began to deteriorate rapidly. For decades, despite periods of tension, the two countries had maintained a relationship rooted in shared culture, history, and geography. Even during difficult times, the narrative of fraternity and mutual interest had prevailed. However, increasing

cross-border security incidents and accusations of militant infiltration gradually eroded trust. Preventive military strikes by Pakistan against militant targets inside Afghan territory further strained relations, transforming a historically complex but manageable relationship into one marked by deep suspicion.

The deterioration of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations created new geopolitical openings. Afghanistan's leadership began exploring stronger ties with other regional actors, particularly India. This shift coincided with an already expanding partnership between India and Israel in areas such as defense technology, intelligence cooperation, and cybersecurity. Gradually, these relationships began to intersect in ways that reshaped the regional security environment.

The growing alignment between India and Israel is a part of Israel's broader long-term strategic thinking. Israeli leaders have historically viewed nuclear and missile programs of Pakistan as potential threats to their national security. In the past, Israel has been associated with efforts to neutralize such capabilities in countries like Iraq, Syria, and others that were perceived as developing strategic weapons. From this perspective, the dismantling of Iran's strategic infrastructure during the recent conflict is seen by some analysts as part of a wider effort to remove potential threats to Israel's security. Within this evolving landscape, Israel is strengthening its security cooperation with India and Afghanistan to position itself to establish spy and intelligence networks in Pakistan by using Afghanistan as a springboard. Similar methods by Israel have been extremely successful in taking out high profile leadership and kinetic and economic assets of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Qatar Yemen and Iran and the world over. For Pakistan, these developments highlight the importance of vigilance and preparedness. The experience of Iran demonstrates how advanced intelligence capabilities, combined with technological surveillance, can identify and target critical infrastructure with extraordinary accuracy. Pakistan must therefore strengthen its counterintelligence systems, enhance cybersecurity defenses, and protect sensitive strategic facilities to ensure that its leadership and defense capabilities remain secure. Meanwhile, the war itself delivered a severe blow to Iran's strategic capabilities. Several key installations associated with its missile, drone, and nuclear programs reportedly suffered extensive damage. Economic infrastructure was also affected as sanctions tightened and regional instability disrupted trade and energy markets. The cumulative effect significantly weakened Iran's ability to project power across the region.

The consequences of the conflict were felt far beyond Iran's borders. Global oil markets experienced dramatic volatility, with prices briefly soaring before gradually

stabilizing. For Pakistan, an energy-importing nation already struggling with economic pressures, these fluctuations created additional financial strain. Rising fuel prices translated into inflation, higher transportation costs, and growing hardship for ordinary citizens.

Amid these challenges, Pakistan continued to maintain a carefully balanced diplomatic approach. At international forums such as the United Nations, Pakistani representatives emphasized the principles of sovereignty, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. Islamabad expressed concern about escalating hostilities while avoiding steps that might jeopardize its relationships with key partners in the Gulf or with Washington. This delicate balancing act illustrates the complexity of Pakistan's geopolitical environment. Few countries must simultaneously manage such diverse relationships with competing global and regional powers. Maintaining constructive ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other regional actors requires a level of diplomatic precision rarely seen in international politics.

The broader lesson from the crisis is that modern conflicts are often shaped long before the first shots are fired. Strategic alliances, diplomatic engagements, intelligence networks, and regional realignments gradually build the framework within which military operations eventually unfold. By the time war begins, many of the key variables have already been determined.

Pakistan's experience during the U.S.–Iran conflict underscores the importance of strategic foresight. While the war reshaped the Middle East's balance of power, Islamabad managed to avoid direct involvement while preserving its relationships with multiple partners. Through cautious diplomacy and calculated restraint, Pakistan maintained stability at home while navigating one of the most volatile geopolitical crises of the decade. As the region moves forward, Pakistan's challenge will be to convert this diplomatic survival into long-term strategic advantage. Strengthening economic resilience, enhancing security infrastructure, and continuing a balanced foreign policy will be essential for navigating an increasingly uncertain global order. In an era defined by shifting alliances and emerging power struggles, Pakistan's ability to walk the diplomatic tightrope may prove to be its greatest strategic strength. By combining prudence, vigilance, and diplomatic agility, the country can continue to protect its sovereignty, safeguard its strategic assets, and remain a stabilizing force in a turbulent region.

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Former Press Attaché to Malaysia

Former MD, SRBC

Macomb, Michigan

Japan and Indonesia in the Indo-Pacific

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Indonesia's position is equally pivotal, though its approach differs in tone and emphasis. As the world's largest archipelagic state and Southeast Asia's biggest economy, Indonesia sits astride some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Its strategic geography makes it both a beneficiary of and a guardian over Indo-Pacific stability. Yet Jakarta has consistently avoided formal alignments, preferring...

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the defining geopolitical theatre of the 21st century. Stretching from the eastern shores of Africa to the western Pacific, it is home to vital sea lanes, rising economies and a delicate balance of power. As rivalries intensify and economic interdependence deepens, middle and major powers alike are recalibrating their strategies. In this evolving landscape, Japan and Indonesia two maritime democracies with distinct histories but converging interests are steadily shaping the region's future.

For Japan, the Indo-Pacific is not merely a geographic expression but a strategic vision. Tokyo was among the first to articulate the idea of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", underscoring respect for international law, freedom of navigation and rules-based connectivity. As a trading nation dependent on sea routes for energy and commerce, Japan's security and prosperity are closely tied to the stability of the South China Sea and the broader Pacific. In recent years, Japan has moved beyond its traditionally cautious post-war posture. It has expanded defence cooperation with regional partners, enhanced maritime capacity-building assistance, and deepened its alliance with the United States while also diversifying partnerships across Southeast Asia. This shift does not signal a departure from its pacifist principles but reflects a pragmatic reading of strategic realities. The war in Ukraine and rising tensions in East Asia have reinforced Tokyo's belief that deterrence and diplomacy must go hand in hand.

Indonesia's position is equally pivotal, though its approach differs in tone and emphasis. As the world's largest archipelagic state and Southeast Asia's biggest economy, Indonesia sits astride some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Its strategic geography makes it both a beneficiary of and a guardian over Indo-Pacific stability. Yet Jakarta has consistently avoided formal alignments, preferring instead a doctrine of "free and active" foreign policy. Indonesia's leadership within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) amplifies its influence. ASEAN centrality remains a cornerstone of Jakarta's diplomacy, even as external powers compete for leverage in the region. By advocating dialogue, inclusive cooperation and adherence to international law, Indonesia seeks to prevent the Indo-Pacific from hardening into rival blocs. Its stewardship during regional summits has

often reflected a careful balancing act – engaging major powers without becoming entangled in their disputes.

The convergence between Japan and Indonesia lies in their shared commitment to maritime security and economic resilience. Japan is one of Indonesia's largest investors and development partners, financing infrastructure, transport networks and energy projects. These initiatives are not merely commercial ventures; they serve as strategic anchors that bind the two countries together in a web of mutual interest. Infrastructure development, particularly in ports and connectivity, strengthens Indonesia's maritime ambitions while offering Japan reliable economic footholds. Security cooperation has also gathered momentum. Joint naval exercises, coast guard collaboration and defence dialogues signal a maturing partnership. For Indonesia, Japanese assistance in maritime domain awareness and capacity building enhances its ability to patrol its vast waters, including areas around the Natuna Islands where tensions occasionally flare. For Japan, closer ties with Indonesia reinforce a networked approach to regional security – one that complements but does not replicate its alliance system.

Economically, both countries are navigating a world of supply chain disruptions and protectionist impulses. Japan's push to diversify manufacturing bases has dovetailed with Indonesia's ambition to move up the value chain, particularly in sectors such as electric vehicles and critical minerals. Indonesia's vast nickel reserves have drawn Japanese investment, reflecting the intersection of resource security and green transition strategies. In this sphere, cooperation offers a template for how middle and major economies can align development goals with strategic considerations. Yet challenges persist. The South China Sea remains a flashpoint, with competing territorial claims and frequent maritime incidents. While Japan is not a claimant, it has consistently voiced concern over unilateral actions that alter the status quo. Indonesia, though not formally party to the main disputes, has faced encroachments in its exclusive economic zone. Both countries thus share an interest in upholding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and resisting coercive behaviour.

At the same time, neither Tokyo nor Jakarta seeks confrontation. Their policies reflect an understanding that China is both a strategic competitor and an indispensable economic partner. Managing this duality requires diplomatic

dexterity. Japan has maintained high-level engagement with Beijing even as it strengthens deterrence. Indonesia, for its part, has welcomed Chinese investment while insisting on sovereignty and non-interference. This calibrated approach underscores a broader regional preference for stability over zero-sum rivalry. Climate change and disaster resilience offer another arena for collaboration. The Indo-Pacific is acutely vulnerable to rising sea levels, extreme weather and environmental degradation. Japan's technological expertise and Indonesia's ecological stewardship can converge in projects that address sustainability. From renewable energy to coastal protection, such cooperation carries both humanitarian and strategic dividends, reinforcing resilience in a volatile region.

Importantly, the partnership between Japan and Indonesia reflects a broader shift in regional order. The Indo-Pacific is no longer shaped solely by great-power competition. Middle powers are asserting agency, crafting flexible coalitions and championing multilateral norms. Japan's outreach to Southeast Asia and Indonesia's insistence on ASEAN centrality exemplify this trend. Together, they illustrate how strategic autonomy and principled engagement can coexist. For Pakistan and other South Asian states observing these dynamics, the lesson is instructive. The Indo-Pacific's future will not be determined by rivalry alone but by the capacity of regional actors to uphold inclusive frameworks. Economic connectivity, maritime cooperation and adherence to international law remain essential pillars of stability. Japan and Indonesia, in their respective ways, are investing in these pillars.

Looking ahead, the durability of their roles will depend on domestic resilience as much as external alignment. Japan faces demographic pressures and fiscal constraints, while Indonesia must balance growth with governance reforms and social cohesion. Yet both possess political capital and diplomatic credibility that enable them to punch above their weight. The Indo-Pacific stands at a crossroads. Whether it evolves into a theatre of managed competition or hardened confrontation will hinge on the choices of its principal actors. In charting a course that blends strategic caution with proactive engagement, Japan and Indonesia are helping to shape an order that prizes openness, balance and cooperation. Their partnership, though understated, may well prove to be one of the quiet determinants of regional stability in the years to come.

Briefs

Pakistan will support Saudi Arabia 'whenever..'

FROM PAGE 01
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APNS for release of dues...

FROM PAGE 01
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Iran threatens to target...

FROM PAGE 01
has threatened intensified strikes on U.S. targets in the Middle East, signaling no de-escalation amid ongoing missile barrages against Israel and Gulf states. Amid these developments, Iran has refuted reports of serious injury to its newly appointed Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes on February 28. Iranian state television referred to him as a "jaanbaz" (wounded war veteran) of the "Ramadan War," but officials denied significant harm, emphasizing his active leadership role despite limited public appearances. Contrasting this, Israel claims Khamenei was lightly wounded in the initial airstrikes. A senior Israeli official told Reuters that intelligence assessments indicate he sustained minor injuries—possibly to the legs—explaining his absence from public view.

Hormuz disruptions heighten risks for vulnerable economies

The agency notes that recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, demonstrated how quickly disruptions in energy, transport, and agricultural inputs can cascade across global markets

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: Disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz are raising alarm across global energy, shipping, and agricultural markets, with the potential to hit developing economies particularly hard, according to a new analysis released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on Tuesday. The report, titled 'Strait of Hormuz Disruptions - Implications for Global Trade and Development', examines the economic ripple effects of escalating tensions in the region and the resulting disruption to maritime traffic through one of the world's most critical trade corridors. The Strait of Hormuz carries roughly one-quarter of global seaborne oil trade, along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas and fertilizers. The narrow passage between

Iran and Oman connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, making it one of the most strategically important chokepoints in global shipping. According to the analysis, the impact on markets was immediate. Brent crude prices quickly surged above US \$ 90 per barrel, while tanker freight rates and war-risk insurance premiums climbed sharply as shipowners and insurers reassessed the growing security risks. Rising marine fuel costs are also pushing up shipping expenses across global supply chains.

The disruption is also raising concerns about agricultural inputs, a risk that often receives less attention than energy markets. UNCTAD estimates that around one-third of global seaborne fertilizer trade, about 16 million tonnes annually, passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making the corridor a critical artery for fertilizer supplies bound for emerging and developing economies. Supply disruptions could there-

fore ripple far beyond energy markets, potentially affecting food production and food prices in vulnerable regions.

"Disruptions in this corridor could impact energy and agricultural supply chains and drive up costs for shipping and insurance," the report warns, adding that fertilizer availability could become a major concern for countries already struggling with food insecurity. UNCTAD cautions that developing economies may face the greatest exposure to the shock. Many already carry high debt burdens and limited fiscal space, reducing their ability to absorb rising import costs for energy and agricultural inputs. The agency notes that recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, demonstrated how quickly disruptions in energy, transport, and agricultural inputs can cascade across global markets. Those earlier shocks triggered sharp increases in energy prices, fertilizer shortag-

es, and rising food costs that disproportionately affected lower-income countries.

The Hormuz disruption highlights the fragility of global supply chains when critical maritime chokepoints are affected, it was pointed out. With such a large share of global energy and fertilizer trade concentrated in a single corridor, even temporary disruptions can reverberate across multiple sectors of the global economy. UNCTAD says the latest disruption underscores the need for resilience in global trade networks and the importance of safeguarding maritime corridors that underpin the flow of energy, food, and essential commodities. Founded in 1964, UNCTAD serves as the United Nations' leading body on trade and development, supporting 195 member states with economic analysis, policy advice, and technical assistance aimed at promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Chinese-trained Pakistani agricultural started transforming their skills

DNA

FAISALABAD: Pakistani agricultural scientists who recently completed advanced training in China have started transferring their newly acquired knowledge and modern techniques to colleagues and researchers at home. It marks the next phase of the Prime Minister's China Capacity Building Program aimed at modernizing Pakistan's agriculture sector, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Wednesday. Across research institutes and universities, returning experts have begun holding knowledge-sharing sessions, briefings and technical discussions to disseminate the practices and technologies they learned during six months of intensive training at leading Chinese universities and institutions. One such knowledge-sharing session was held on Tuesday at the Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) in Faisalabad, where about a dozen scientists who had returned from Chi-

na presented their training experiences and research insights to fellow researchers, students and interns. "The scientists who trained in China have returned with valuable expertise in modern agricultural research and technologies," said Dr. Sajid-ur-Rahman, Director General of Agricultural Research Punjab. "Now the focus is on transferring that knowledge to other researchers, students and field experts so that it can benefit Pakistan's farming sector." Returning participants say the training exposed them to advanced laboratories, modern agricultural technologies and innovative research approaches that could help address key productivity challenges in Pakistan.

"The experience in China allowed us to observe cutting-edge research and practical applications of technology in agriculture," said Rahil Shahzad, a scientific officer who participated in the program. "Our responsibility now is to share those techniques with fellow scientists and trans-

late them into practical solutions for Pakistani farmers." Researchers also highlighted China's strong emphasis on technology integration and data-driven agriculture. "Precision agriculture, smart farming technologies and collaborative research were key aspects of the training," said Wajeeha Khan, another participant. "We are now working to adapt these approaches to local conditions and share them with colleagues and young researchers."

Dr. Javed Ahmad, chief scientist at the Wheat Research Institute (WRI), Faisalabad, said the return of internationally trained scientists would play a key role in strengthening Pakistan's agricultural research capacity. "The real success of such training programs lies in knowledge sharing," he said. "When these scientists pass on their experience and techniques, it creates a multiplier effect that benefits the entire research system." Under the Prime Minister's Initiative for Capacity

Baseball: Japan fires late to beat Czech Republic

TOKYO: Munetaka Murakami hit a grand slam as Japan's bats exploded late in a 9-0 win against the Czech Republic that brought down the curtain on Pool C action at the World Baseball Classic the other day. The new Chicago White Sox signing's bases-loaded blast came amid a nine-run eighth inning after the Czech part-timers shut out the defending champion through seven-plus frames at Tokyo Dome. Czech starting pitcher Ondrej Satoria, who makes his living as an electrical worker and famously struck out Shohei Ohtani at the 2023 tournament, stood tall in his WBC farewell performance, tossing 4-2/3 scoreless innings. He did not get a rematch against Ohtani, however, with Samurai Japan skipper Hirokazu Ibatani resting the Los Angeles Dodgers superstar and Chicago Cubs slugger Seiya Suzuki after securing first place in the pool with Sunday's win over Australia. Pinch-hitter Kenya Wakatsuki's double led to Japan's first run, with a throwing error enabling Teruaki Sato to come home.

Ukyo Shuto made it 4-0 with his first WBC home run, a three-run homer to right-center field. Shugo Maki drew a bases-loaded walk before Murakami also uncorked his first homer of the tournament. The 26-year-old infielder, who joined the White Sox from the Yakult Swallows in the off-season, crushed a 425-foot shot to center field in his second at-bat of the inning. "It felt really good," Murakami said. "We were struggling to score runs, and then my turn came once we were scoring, so I was glad I was able to hit it." Japan starter Hiroto Takahashi struck out five and scattered two hits and a walk over 4-2/3 innings. Ibatani's men will continue their bid for a record-extending fourth WBC crown in Miami, where they will meet the second-place team in Pool D, either Venezuela or previous champion, the Dominican Republic, in the quarterfinals on Saturday. - Agencies

Ukraine says it has hit Russian 'missile..'

FROM PAGE 01
the "terrorist missile attack". President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said it was "obvious that the launch of these missiles was impossible without British specialists". "In order to prevent such barbaric actions by the Kyiv regime from continuing, the special military operation is being conducted," Dmitry Peskov said, using the Russian description for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that Putin ordered on 24 February 2022. Peskov said one of the goals of the Russian operation was to demilitarise Ukraine. Putin himself has often stated that demilitarisation is a central objective of the war. But it is due to the Russian invasion that Ukraine has been receiving Western support - including sophisticated weapons aimed at defending its territories. Russia, for its part, has also been receiving help from its allies, including Shahed drones supplied by Iran and soldiers sent by North Korea.

Trump unveils US refinery...

FROM PAGE 01
offset \$300 billion in the trade deficit with India, startup America First Refining said in a statement. Reliance did not respond to an emailed request for comment. "For the first time in half a century, the United States will build a new refinery designed specifically for American shale oil," said America First's chairman and founder, John V Calce. Many Gulf Coast refineries are unable to process light, sweet crude oil from fracking shale fields because they were configured in the last 40 years to run lower-cost heavy, sour crude, which has higher density and contains more sulfur. A "global supermajor" has provided a "9-figure investment" at a "10-figure valuation," America First said. Trump named the investor as Reliance, India's largest private-sector company.

Three vessels hit by drone...

FROM PAGE 01
that there was no environmental impact, a report by the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said later, referring to the incident. Necessary crew remained on the vessel. Earlier, a container ship and a bulk carrier were hit off the coast of the UAE by unknown projectiles, UKMTO also said. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a key artery accounting for about 20% of global oil and gas supply, has dropped rapidly since the Iran conflict began on February 28. The latest incidents increase the number of ships that have been attacked since the conflict began to at least 14.

Bangladesh crush Pak in Ist ODI

FROM PAGE 01
during the 1999 World Cup. The 23-year-old Nahid ripped through Pakistan's top order, becoming the first Bangladeshi bowler to dismiss the opposition's top five batters in an ODI innings. Nahid removed Sahibzada Farhan (27), Shamyul Hussain (4), Maaz Sadaqat (18), Mohammd Rizwan (10) and Salman Agha (5) as Pakistan slumped to 69-5. He was ably supported by captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who took 3-29 with his off-spin. Senior quizzers Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman took one wicket each.

APNS for release of...

FROM PAGE 01
long outstanding dues of newspapers, which has already recommended by the Economic Coordination Committee in early this month. The APNS is confident that the Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif would look in to the matter personally and ask the cabinet to approve the payment of dues to ease the plight of newspaper workers before Eid.

Sahibzada Farhan named in ICC T20 World Cup 2026 Team of the Tournament

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday announced its Team of the Tournament for the T20 World Cup 2026, with Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan among the standout performers named in the lineup. The side was selected by a distinguished panel of experts, comprising West Indies great Ian Bishop, former England captain Eoin Morgan, coach-turned-commentator Natalie Germanos, ICC representative Gaurav Saxena and senior Sri Lankan sports journalist Rex Clementine. Despite Pakistan's inconsistent campaign, which ended in the Super Eight phase, opener Farhan was a model of consistency. His remarkable tally of 383 runs across seven matches set a new record for the most runs by a batter in a single edition of the T20 World Cup. The 29-year-old also created history by becoming the first player to score two centuries in one T20 World Cup. His magnificent hundred against Sri Lanka in the final Super Eight fixture was the cornerstone of a crucial five-run victory for his side. Sanju Samson proved instrumental in India's triumphant campaign and was deservedly named Player of the Tournament. Initially unable to break into the star-studded Indian starting XI, Samson seized his opportunity spectacularly when it mattered most. The right-hander ignited his run spree with a blistering, unbeaten 97 against the West Indies in a virtual knockout Super Eight clash. He maintained his sublime form with 89 against England in the semi-final and followed it up with another crucial 89 in the final against New Zealand. In doing so, he became only the third batter to register half-centuries in both the semi-final and final of a T20 World Cup, and just the second to notch three consecutive scores of 80 or more in the tournament's history. Ishan Kishan made a powerful impact with his re-



lentless aggression at the top of the order. His three half-centuries were standout contributions, but he also provided vital quick-fire knocks of 38 against Zimbabwe and 39 against England. His finest performance, however, came against arch-rivals Pakistan. - APP

ICC denies unfair treatment of squads

Airlines cancelling or rerouting flights due to US-Israel-Iran war in the region, throwing int'l travel into chaos

CRICKET'S governing body on Wednesday rejected suggestions of unequal treatment after the West Indies and South Africa squads were stranded in India for more than a week following the T20 World Cup. Airlines have cancelled or rerouted flights because of the war in the Middle East, throwing international travel into chaos. Cricket West Indies said on Tuesday its squad had waited nine days for a charter flight that was "repeatedly delayed", calling the uncertainty "increasingly distressing". Former England captain Michael Vaughan also criticised the situation, noting on social media that England departed 36 hours after their semi-final exit last week while the West Indies and South Africa remained in Kolkata more than a week after being knocked out of

the tournament. The International Cricket Council (ICC) said it "rejects any suggestion that these decisions have been driven by anything other than safety, feasibility and welfare". "We understand that players, coaches, support staff and their families who have completed their ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 campaigns are anxious to return home," it said in a statement. "That they have not yet been able to do so is a source of genuine frustration, and the International Cricket Council shares that frustration." It also said there was no comparison between arrangements for South Africa and the West Indies and those made for England, "which arose from separate circumstances, routing options and different travel conditions". - APP

PCB announces complete schedule for PSL 11

Faisalabad, Peshawar to host PSL matches for the first time, per PSL schedule

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday unveiled the complete fixtures for Pakistan Super League (PSL) 11, scheduled from March 26 to May 3. The 11th edition of the tournament league will see eight teams, including two new entrants, Pindiz and Hyderabad Houston Kingsmen, playing a total of 44 matches in the 39-day event. The tournament will commence with defending champions Lahore Qalandars taking on Hyderabad Houston Kingsmen at their home ground on March 26. As per the schedule, each team will play a total of 10 matches, with the top four qualifying for the playoffs, comprising Qualifier 1, Eliminator, Qualifier 2, followed by the final, scheduled to be played at the Gaddafi Stadium on May 3. Furthermore, the PCB has also allotted a reserve day for the final on May 4. The PSL 11 will also feature six double-headers, out of which three will be played at the Gaddafi Stadium. The landmark 11th edition will be played across six venues in Pakistan, with Faisalabad and Peshawar to host PSL matches for the first time, joining Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. Among the six venues, Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium will host the most number of matches (15), followed by Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium with 11, while Faisalabad's Iqbal Stadium will host seven.

The iconic National Bank Stadium in Karachi will host six matches, while four matches will be played at the Multan Cricket Stadium. Peshawar's Imran Khan Cricket Stadium to host one match - a day fixture between home side Peshawar Zalmi and Pindiz on March 28.

PSL 11 match schedule

March 27 - Quetta Gladiators vs Karachi Kings at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
March 28 - Peshawar Zalmi vs Rawalpindi Pindiz at Imran Khan Cricket Stadium, Peshawar
March 28 - Multan Sultans vs Islamabad United at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
March 29 - Quetta Gladiators vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
March 29 - Lahore Qalandars vs Karachi Kings at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
March 31 - Islamabad United vs Peshawar Zalmi at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 1 - Multan Sultans vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan
April 2 - Islamabad United vs Quetta Gladiators at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 2 - Rawalpindi Pindiz vs Karachi Kings at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 3 - Multan Sultans vs Lahore Qalandars at Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan
April 4 - Rawalpindi Pindiz vs Islamabad United at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 5 - Multan Sultans vs Quetta Gladiators at Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan

April 6 - Multan Sultans vs Rawalpindi Pindiz at Multan Cricket Stadium, Multan
April 8 - Hyderabad Kingsmen vs Peshawar Zalmi at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 9 - Lahore Qalandars vs Islamabad United at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 9 - Karachi Kings vs Peshawar Zalmi at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 10 - Quetta Gladiators vs Rawalpindi Pindiz at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 11 - Peshawar Zalmi vs Lahore Qalandars at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 11 - Karachi Kings vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 12 - Hyderabad Kingsmen vs Islamabad United at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 13 - Peshawar Zalmi vs Multan Sultans at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 15 - Peshawar Zalmi vs Quetta Gladiators at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 16 - Hyderabad Kingsmen vs Rawalpindi Pindiz at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 16 - Karachi Kings vs Islamabad United at National Bank Stadium, Karachi
April 17 - Lahore Qalandars vs Quetta Gladiators at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 18 - Lahore Qalandars vs Rawalpindi Pindiz at Iqbal Stadium, Faisalabad
April 19 - Multan Sultans vs Karachi Kings at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 19 - Quetta Gladiators vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 21 - Lahore Qalandars vs Quetta Gladiators at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 21 - Rawalpindi Pindiz vs Multan Sultans at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 22 - Karachi Kings vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 22 - Peshawar Zalmi vs Multan Sultans at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 23 - Rawalpindi Pindiz vs Islamabad United at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 23 - Lahore Qalandars vs Karachi Kings at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 24 - Islamabad United vs Peshawar Zalmi at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 25 - Quetta Gladiators vs Karachi Kings at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 25 - Lahore Qalandars vs Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
April 26 - Rawalpindi Pindiz vs Peshawar Zalmi at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 26 - Islamabad United vs Multan Sultans at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 28 - Qualifier at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi
April 29 - Eliminator 1 at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
May 1 - Eliminator 2 at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore
May 3 - Final at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore. - APP

Briefs

Gold price jumps by Rs 3,700 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat gold per tola increased by Rs 3,700 and was sold at Rs 543,262 on Wednesday compared to its sale at Rs 539,562 on the previous trading day, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 3,172 to Rs 465,759 from Rs 462,587, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs 2,908 to Rs 426,961 from Rs 424,053. The rates of silver, however, remained unchanged in the domestic market as the price of silver per tola stayed constant at Rs 9,354 while that of 10 gram of silver remained stable at Rs 8,019. In the international market, the price of gold increased by \$37 to \$5,205, whereas the price of silver remained unchanged at \$88.70, the association reported.—APP

Machinery imports rise 12.88%

ISLAMABAD: The imports of the overall machinery group increased by 12.88 percent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (July-January) compared to the corresponding period of last year. The increased inflow of machinery is considered a positive indicator for the national economy as it supports productivity enhancement, technology transfer and infrastructure development across multiple sectors. Experts believe that the rising imports align with the government's ongoing policy initiatives aimed at strengthening industrial capacity, boosting exports and accelerating economic growth. According to the official data available with APP, the total imports of the machinery group during July-January of fiscal year 2025-26 were recorded at \$6,117,005 million compared to US \$ 5,419,048 million during the same period of the previous fiscal year, showing an increase of 12.88 percent. The data revealed that imports of agriculture sector machinery and implements grew by 10.51 percent, rising from \$69,532 million to \$76,839 million, which is expected to help improve farm mechanization and enhance agricultural productivity. Similarly, the imports of textile machinery surged by 28.86 percent from US \$ 283,279 million to \$365,040 million, supporting modernization in Pakistan's key export-oriented textile sector and enabling manufacturers to adopt advanced production technologies. Power-generating machinery imports also increased by 9.43 percent from US \$ 434,818 million to US \$ 475,836 million, reflecting continued investment in energy infrastructure to ensure reliable electricity supply for industries and households.—APP

Three vessels hit by projectiles in Strait of Hormuz

DUBAI: Three vessels have been hit by unknown projectiles in the Strait of Hormuz, maritime security agencies and sources said on Wednesday. One of the strikes led to a fire onboard a ship and forced most of its crew to evacuate it. The Thailand-flagged bulk carrier Mayuree Naree was targeted and damaged approximately 11 nautical miles north of Oman, two maritime security sources cited by Reuters have said. The fire had been extinguished and that there was no environmental impact, a report by the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said later, referring to the incident. Necessary crew remained on the vessel. Earlier, a container ship and a bulk carrier were hit off the coast of the UAE by unknown projectiles, UKMTO also said. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a key artery accounting for about 20 percent of global oil and gas supply, has dropped rapidly since the Iran conflict began on February 28. The latest incidents increase the number of ships that have been attacked since the conflict began to at least 14.—APP

Finance Minister for boosting export competitiveness

Finance Minister emphasized that strengthening export-led sectors remains central to Pakistan's economic revival strategy. He noted that improving productivity, encouraging innovation, and enhancing the global competitiveness of key industries are essential to increasing exports, generating employment, and ensuring long-term economic growth

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday met with a delegation of leading textile and apparel exporters and industry stakeholders to discuss measures aimed at strengthening Pakistan's export competitiveness, promoting investment, and supporting industrial growth. The delegation, led by Haroon Sharif, Chairman of the Pakistan Regional Economic Forum, included prominent representatives from the textile and apparel sectors. During the meeting, the Finance Minister emphasized that strengthening export-led sectors remains central to Pakistan's economic revival strategy. He noted that improving productivity, encouraging innovation, and enhancing the global competitiveness of key industries are essential to increasing exports, generating employment, and ensuring long-term economic growth. Aurangzeb reaffirmed the government's commitment to maintaining close engagement with industry stakeholders to ensure that economic policies remain responsive to the needs of the business community while supporting sustainable and inclusive growth. He added that policy frameworks are being refined to promote investment, facilitate reinvestment by established exporters, and remove procedural bottlenecks that hinder industrial expansion while maintaining fiscal discipline and macroeconomic stability. Highlighting the importance of export-oriented industries, the Finance Minister said the government recognizes their strategic role in driving economic activity and expanding Pakistan's footprint in international markets. He stressed that creating an enabling environment for exporters through improved policy coordination, regulatory facilitation, and investment promotion remains a top priority. Aurangzeb also underscored the importance of modernization, technological upgradation, and value addition to enhance Pakistan's export competi-



tiveness. He encouraged industry leaders to adopt new technologies, pursue innovation, and expand into higher-value market segments to benefit from emerging opportunities in global supply chains. Welcoming the delegation, the Finance Minister appreciated the Pakistan Regional Economic Forum for its continued efforts in promoting Pakistan's competitive economic sectors and acknowledged the business community's contribution to export growth, job creation, and industrial development. The delegation briefed the minister on initiatives aimed at promoting joint ventures, attracting foreign investment partnerships, and strengthening technology collaboration across priority industrial sectors. Parti-

cipants emphasized aligning fiscal and regulatory policies with Pakistan's competitive strengths to accelerate export-led growth and enhance industrial productivity. Industry representatives highlighted the strategic importance of value-added textile exports, noting that these segments account for a significant share of Pakistan's export earnings and require focused policy support amid evolving global market dynamics and increasing regional competition. Among those who attended the meeting were Javed Bilwani, Chairman of the Pakistan Apparel Forum; Khurram Mukhtar, Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Textile Exporters Association; Khalid Mansoor; Siddique Bhatti, CEO of US Apparel; Shahzad Asghar Ali, CEO of

Style Textile; and Javed Akhtar, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Finance. Business leaders also stressed the importance of maintaining a streamlined taxation and compliance framework that supports reinvestment, business expansion, and ease of doing business. They highlighted the need for policies encouraging modernization through technology adoption and digital transformation while addressing structural bottlenecks affecting industrial efficiency. Responding to the proposals, Aurangzeb appreciated the constructive input from industry representatives and noted that many of the issues raised are already under active consideration as part of the government's ongoing economic reform agenda.

Airlines hike ticket prices as war against Iran propels fuel costs

CANBERRA, NEW DELHI: Australia's Qantas Airways, Scandinavian's SAS and Air New Zealand announced airfare hikes on Tuesday, blaming an abrupt spike in the cost of fuel caused by the Middle East conflict. Jet fuel prices, which were around \$85 to \$90 per barrel before US-Israeli strikes on Iran, have soared to between \$150 and \$200 per barrel in recent days, New Zealand's flag carrier said as it suspended its financial outlook for 2026 due to uncertainty over the conflict. The war, which disrupted shipping via the world's most vital oil export route, has sent oil prices surging, upending global travel, pushing airline tickets on some routes sky-high, and sparking fears of a deep travel slump that could lead to widespread grounding of planes. "Increases of this magnitude make it necessary to react in order to maintain stable and reliable operations," an SAS spokesperson said in a statement, adding it had implemented a "temporary price adjustment." The largest Scandinavian airline said last year it had temporarily adjusted its fuel hedging policy due to uncertain market conditions and that it had no fuel consumption hedged for the following 12 months. Several Asian and European airlines, including Lufthansa and

Ryanair, have oil hedging in place, securing a part of their fuel supplies at fixed prices. Finnair, which had hedged over 80 percent of its first quarter fuel purchases, warned, however, that even the availability of fuel could be at risk if the conflict dragged on. Qantas said in addition to increasing international fares, it was exploring redeploying capacity to Europe as airlines and passengers seek to evade disruptions in the Middle East airspace restrictions in the Middle East have dealt another blow to Indian airlines, which count the region as a corridor for flights to Europe and the US since Pakistan banned Indian carriers from its airspace last year. As war in the Middle East forces flight rescheduling and re-routing, Indian airlines have limited options because they can't fly over Pakistan either. The country's biggest international carriers Air India and IndiGo did not operate 64 percent of their 1,230 scheduled flights to the Middle East, Europe and North America in the last 10 days, Cirium data shows. "It is a double whammy for Indian airlines which fly international routes," said Amit Mittal, an independent aviation expert.—Agencies

Iran war sends prices in next door Turkmenistan soaring

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: At a market in Turkmenistan's capital Ashgabat, pensioner Shemshat Kurbanova always used to pick the "juiciest" Iranian fruit — but 10 days of war across the border have sent prices soaring and she is now worried how to get by. The Middle East war has tumbled global markets, with the effects being felt almost immediately in some of Tehran's closest neighbors. Iran last week banned all goods and agricultural exports, triggering economic pressure on secretive Turkmenistan and the wider Central Asian region, where Tehran had a growing economic footprint in recent years. With the Iran border only 20 km away, Kurbanova, 62, said she preferred Iranian fruit and juice for their freshness and affordability. But "everything has doubled in price," she told AFP. According to an AFP journalist, mandarins in Ashgabat cost \$1.90, apples more than \$2 and a pack of cigarettes has risen to \$3 — pretty much double what they were. Kurbanova was worried how far her small pension would stretch. "I understand the situation is difficult but I hope the conflict will soon end and the prices will come back to the previous levels," she said. Civil servant Kerim Ballyev — a heavy smoker who mostly bought "cheap Iranian cigarettes" — has been forced to cut down. "The price has almost doubled," he told AFP. "For me, it is expensive. I won't be buying a whole pack, I'll buy them individually." Turkmenistan is one of the most secretive countries in the world. Little information filters through to the public in the tightly controlled state, with the war next door virtually nonexistent in censored state media. Although trade statistics are kept secret by authorities, Tehran is a significant trading partner for Turkmenistan — a trend seen throughout Central Asia — despite Chinese and Russian dominance. A landlocked region the size of the EU, Central Asia is dependent on transit corridors via its neighbors — China, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan. "Iran has for a long time played the role of a window to the south for Central Asia; key transport corridors go through its territory, which give access to the Arabian Gulf and then to the markets of India, the Middle East and Europe," Kyrgyz economist Iskender Sharsheyev told AFP. The war, he said, has "essentially paralyzed these southern corridors." "The consequences for Central Asia are already felt: delays in deliveries and the rising prices of fuel, fertilizer, medicine and electronics," he added. Byashim Ovezov, a 34-year-old businessman trading Iranian food products in Turkmenistan, said "the flow of goods has decreased." "If the war continues, then not only will the prices double, or more, but people like me will lose their jobs," he said. Economist Sharsheyev said Iran is a principal food supplier in the region, traditionally bringing in fruit, vegetables and dairy products. "It is extremely difficult to replace them rapidly," he said. "The alternatives from China or Turkey are more expensive and more complex logistically." Alternative routes — reaching Europe via the Caspian Sea to bypass Russia and Iran — do not have the capacity to absorb a sudden surge in cargo.—Agencies

Iranian women's football team changes mind on asylum in Australia

SYDNEY: An Iranian women's football team member who sought sanctuary in Australia has changed her mind after speaking with teammates, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said Wednesday. Seven members of Iran's visiting women's football team had claimed asylum in Australia after they were branded "traitors" at home over a pre-match protest. One player and one support member sought sanctuary before the side flew out of Sydney to Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday evening in emotional scenes, joining five other athletes who had already claimed asylum. Burke said in parliament on Wednesday that he had since been advised one of the group "had spoken to some of the team mates that left and changed their mind." "She had been advised by her team mates and encouraged to contact the Iranian embassy," he said. "As a result of that it meant the Iranian embassy now knew the location of where everybody was." The remaining players have been moved from a safe house to another location, he said. The traveling squad arrived in Malaysia early Wednesday morning after flying out from Sydney, AFP photos at Kuala Lumpur International Airport showed.—APP

North Korea respects Iran's choice of new supreme leader

SEOUL: North Korea respects Iran's choice of new supreme leader, state media reported Wednesday, as it accused the United States and Israel of destroying regional peace. "With regard to the recent official announcement that Iran's Assembly of Experts elected the new leader of the Islamic Revolution, we respect the rights and choice of the Iranian people to elect their supreme leader," an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesperson was quoted as saying by state news agency KCNA. Defying US President Donald Trump's desire to have a say in who runs Iran, the Islamic republic on Sunday named Mojtaba Khamenei to replace his father, longtime ruler Ali Khamenei, who died in an Israeli airstrike on February 28. North Korea, a longstanding US adversary, has previously condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran an "illegal act of aggression.—APP

Oil falls on report of IEA proposing biggest oil release ever

TOKYO: Oil prices fell further on Wednesday, as reports of the International Energy Agency proposing the largest release of oil reserves in its history due to potential supply disruptions from the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran dragged on sentiment. Brent futures traded down 88 cents, or 1 percent, at \$86.92 a barrel by 7:51 a.m. Saudi time. US West Texas Intermediate traded 35 cents lower, or 0.4 percent, at \$83.1 a barrel. US crude prices leapt 5 percent at the market open after both contracts plunged more than 11 percent on Tuesday, the steepest percentage drop since 2022, a day after Trump predicted a quick end to the war. On Monday, WTI surged to more than \$119 a barrel, its highest since June 2022. The IEA's proposed drawdown would exceed the 182 million barrels of oil that IEA member countries put onto the market in two releases in 2022 when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the WSJ said, citing officials familiar with the matter. A stockpile release of that size would offset 12 days of the investment bank's estimated 15.4 million barrel-per-day Gulf exports disruption, Goldman Sachs analysts said in a note. The US and Israel pounded Iran on Tuesday with what the Pentagon and Iranians on the ground called the most intense airstrikes of the war. The US military also "eliminated" 16 Iranian mine-laying vessels near the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday, the US Central Command said, as US President Donald Trump warned any mines laid in the Strait by Iran must be removed immediately. Trump has repeatedly said the US is prepared to escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz when necessary. However, sources told Reuters the US Navy has refused requests from the shipping industry for military escorts as the risk of attacks is too high for now. "Oil prices continued to normalise lower in a volatile fashion following Monday's sharp spike," said UOB analysts in a client note, adding that markets are expected to keep their focus on developments in the Middle East as investors gauge how long energy prices may stay elevated. G7 officials have since gathered online to discuss a potential release of emergency oil stockpiles to soften the market blow. French President Emmanuel Macron will host a video call with other G7 country leaders on Wednesday to discuss the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on energy and measures to address the situation. Some analysts were sceptical about the IEA's proposal. "No release has yet been formally announced, and there are doubts around the ultimate pace of any drawdowns from those reserves," said Philip Jones-Lux, senior analyst at Sparta Commodities, in a client note, adding that "the core issue is not the size of reserves, it is the achievable draw rates." Abu Dhabi state oil giant ADNOC has shut its Ruwais refinery in response to a fire at a facility within the complex following a drone strike, according to a source, marking the latest energy infrastructure disruption due to the US-Israeli war on Iran. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is seen boosting supplies via the Red Sea, although they are still far below the levels needed to compensate for the drop in flows from the Strait of Hormuz, shipping data showed.—DNA

UK govt bans pro-Palestinian march over alleged Iran support

Mahmood said she was "satisfied" a ban was "necessary" due to "the scale of the protest and multiple counter-protests, in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East

LONDON: The UK government has banned an annual pro-Palestinian march planned for Sunday which London police claim is organized by a group "supportive of the Iranian regime." Interior minister Shabana Mahmood said late Tuesday she had approved the rare police request to prevent "serious public disorder" if the Al-Quds Day march and counter-protests had gone ahead. It is the first time a protest march has been banned since 2012 but a static demonstration will be permitted, according to London's Metropolitan police. Mahmood said she was "satisfied" a ban was "necessary" due to "the scale of the protest and multiple counter-protests, in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East." The minister added that she expected to see "the full force of the law applied to anyone spreading hatred and division." The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), an NGO which organizes the annual

Al-Quds Day march, said it "strongly condemns" the decision, which it called "politically charged." "We are seeking legal advice and this decision will not go unchallenged," it added, accusing the Met of having "brazenly abandoned their sworn principle of policing without fear or favor." It said the London force "unashamedly regurgitate Zionist talking points about the IHRC 'without a shred of evidence.'" The group describes the day and march as an "international demonstration ... in support of Palestinians and all the oppressed around the world." Al-Quds day, which takes its name from the Arabic for Jerusalem, originated in Iran in 1979 in support of the Palestinian people, and is now marked annually in various countries, notably in the Muslim world. It aims to protest Israel's occupation of east Jerusalem. But the Met's Assistant Commissioner Ade Adelekan said it was "uniquely contentious having originated in Iran and in

London is organized by the Islamic Human Rights Commission." He claimed that the organization was "supportive of the Iranian regime." "The threshold to ban a protest is high and we do not take this decision lightly," Adelekan said. He noted the Met has "a proven track record" of permitting free speech and protest rights at dozens of major pro-Palestinian and other demonstrations in recent years. "But in our assessment this march raises unique risks and challenges," he said. "We must consider the likely high numbers of protesters and counter protesters coming together and the extreme tensions between different factions." "We have taken into consideration the likely impact on protests of the volatile situation in the Middle East, with the Iranian regime attacking British allies and military bases overseas." The ban on the march and any associated counter-protest marches is valid for a month from Wednesday.—APP

Briefs

Pakistan Army targets Afghan Taliban Posts

QUETTA: Pakistan Army continued its retaliatory actions against the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khwarji, targeting Afghan Taliban Posts No. 2 and 3 in the Zhob sector along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Security sources said that as a result of the timely and effective response by the Pakistan Army, the Afghan Taliban fled the posts, abandoning their positions and weapons. They said Pakistan Army also seized Russian-made 73mm HGL-9 heavy grenade launchers from the posts. The powerful retaliatory actions by Pakistan Armed Forces are forcing the Indian proxy Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khwarji to flee, the sources said. Security sources further stated that Operation Ghazab Lil Haq would continue until achieving its objectives. - APP

MNAs' salaries cut by 25pc

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Secretariat has implemented comprehensive austerity and fuel conservation measures aimed at ensuring prudent utilisation of public resources, reducing energy consumption, and supporting the government's national austerity drive. Under the measures, the salaries of MNAs has been cut by 25 per cent. According to a notification issued on Wednesday, only 20pc of staff will perform their duties in person, while the remaining 80pc will work virtually from home through a rotational roster. It stated that employees working from home would remain available through telephone, email, WhatsApp, and other communication tools, and would be required to report to the office within one hour's notice if directed by their reporting officers. It added that employees working from home would not be entitled to diet allowances or overtime charges, and no employee would be permitted to leave their station without prior approval of the competent authority. The secretariat further said that a four-day work week would be observed in accordance with the government's announcement on Monday, except when the National Assembly was in session. The notification said that as part of broader austerity measures, a 25pc reduction in the salaries and allowances of all members of the National Assembly would be implemented for a period of two months. Officers of the National Assembly Secretariat in BPS-20 and above (or equivalent), or those drawing a monthly salary of Rs300,000 or more, would forgo two days' salary as a contribution to the national exchequer.

US lawmakers warn of Trump's 'incoherent' Iran war strategy

Representative Nancy Mace of South Carolina also warned against sending American troops into another Middle East conflict, saying she does "not want to send South Carolina's sons and daughters into war with Iran"

DNA

WASHINGTON: United States lawmakers from both parties raised concerns on Tuesday about the strategy and potential consequences of the US-Israeli war against Iran following a classified congressional briefing. Democratic Senator Chris Murphy said the Trump administration's plans for the war appear "incoherent and incomplete" following the two-hour closed-door briefing. "So they are going to spend hundreds of billions of your taxpayer dollars, get a whole bunch of Americans killed, and a hardline regime - probably a MORE anti-American hardline regime - will still be in charge," Murphy said on X following the briefing. Murphy said he could not disclose classified information but that the plans discussed left him deeply concerned about the administration's strategy. He said the briefing suggested that destroying Iran's nuclear weapons program is not among the listed war goals. He also said regime change in Tehran is not

part of the strategy, raising questions about what the administration ultimately hopes to achieve through the strikes. According to Murphy, the briefing indicated the primary focus is targeting Iranian missiles, boats and drone factories. "But the question that stumped them: what happens when you stop bombing and they restart production? They hinted at more bombing. Which is, of course, endless war," he said. Murphy also warned that officials did not present a clear plan for reopening the Strait of Hormuz after Iran disrupted the key global oil shipping route. Other Democrats expressed similar concerns following the closed-door briefing by senior officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense

Secretary Pete Hegseth, about the joint attacks launched by the US and Israel on Feb 28.

Senator Richard Blumenthal said he left the briefing "dissatisfied and angry", warning that the conflict could lead to the deployment of US ground troops in Iran. "We seem to be on a path toward deploying American troops on the ground in Iran to accomplish any of the potential objectives," Blumenthal told reporters. Senator Elizabeth Warren questioned the financial burden of the war, saying the government appears willing to spend massive sums on the military campaign. "The one part that seems clear is that while there is no money for 15 million Americans who lost their healthcare, there's a billion dollars a day to spend on bombing Iran," Warren said.

Some Republicans have also voiced reservations about the war. Senator Rand Paul said he doesn't think there was an "imminent threat" of attack from Iran. "We're also told we're going to free the oppressed people of Iran. I hope and wish for them to have freedom, but if our foreign policy is to free oppressed people, the wars would never end," Paul said. "I'm going to continue to advocate for the Donald Trump who didn't advocate for regime change."

Representative Nancy Mace of South Carolina also warned against sending American troops into another Middle East conflict, saying she does "not want to send South Carolina's sons and daughters into war with Iran". Her remarks came as South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham said he is asking South Carolina to send its "sons and daughters" to the Middle East. Tensions in the Middle East escalated after Israel and the US launched a joint attack on Iran on Feb 28 and to date have killed more than 1,200 people, including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was the country's supreme leader.



Pak, IMF near consensus to slash FBR tax target

It is projected that FBR's tax collection in terms of tax-to-GDP ratio will go up to 10.6% by end of June 2026

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are nearing a consensus on the revised macroeconomic and fiscal framework for the current fiscal year, under which the FBR's tax collection will be revised downward to Rs13.45 trillion by the end of June 2026. The IMF and Pakistani sides are holding virtual talks to strike a staff-level agreement under the \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The FBR will fail in achieving the tax-to-GDP ratio of 11% envisaged under the target agreed with the IMF for 2025-26. The FBR has faced a revenue shortfall of Rs428 billion in achieving the revised target in the first eight months of the current fiscal year. Now it is projected that the FBR's tax collection in terms of tax-to-GDP ratio will go up to 10.6% by the end of June 2026 against 10.3% achieved by June 2025. The IMF and Ministry of Finance have worked out that 1% of GDP hovers around Rs1,269 billion, so the overall FBR's collection is projected to go close to Rs13.45 trillion till the end of June 2026 if it materialises at 10.6% of GDP.

The government had envisaged FBR's tax collection target of Rs14,130 billion with the approval of parliament, but with the consent of IMF, the FBR's target was revised downward to Rs13,979 billion. The second time, the FBR's target will be revised downward from Rs13.97 trillion to Rs13.45 trillion for the ongoing fiscal year. The Ministry of Finance will have to re-adjust the expenditure side to keep the fiscal deficit and primary surplus target in line with the IMF agreement. So far, both the sides revised the macroeconomic framework, as the Pakistani side argued that the real GDP growth was projected to touch the original target of 4% of GDP for the current fiscal year, with improved performance in the first quarter of the current fiscal year. Earlier, the IMF had revised downward the GDP growth rate at 3.2% for Pakistan in the aftermath of last super floods. The CPI-based inflation is projected to stand at around 7% to 7.5% for the current fiscal year. Earlier, the Ministry of Finance had projected the CPI inflation in the range of 5% to 7%, but in the aftermath of geopolitical tensions and the ongoing war in the Gulf region, the price of fuel has gone up, so the inflationary pressures are expected to increase in the remaining months of the current fiscal year.

Iran war deals double blow to Indian airlines

As ME war forces flight rescheduling and re-routing, Indian airlines have limited options due to Pakistan ban

NEW DELHI: Airspace restrictions in the Middle East amid the Iran war have dealt another blow to Indian airlines, which count the region as a crucial corridor for flights to Europe and the US since Pakistan banned Indian carriers from its airspace last year. As the war in the Middle East forces flight rescheduling and re-routing, Indian airlines have limited options because they can't fly over Pakistan either. The country's biggest international carriers Air India and IndiGo did not operate 64% of their 1,230 scheduled flights to the Middle East, Europe and North America in the last 10 days, Cirium data shows. "It is a double whammy for Indian airlines which fly international routes," said Amit Mittal, an independent aviation expert. Pakistan has banned Indian carriers from its airspace since last April, following military tensions between the two neighbours. Last week, HSBC said that current geopolitical tensions in the Middle East will lead to a "significant burden" on the cost and profitability of Indian airlines. HSBC estimated that seven days of cancellations to the affected regions could shave 1.2% off its estimate for the airline's annual profit-before-tax. - APP

US military spending on Iran conflict

WASHINGTON: The US military's operations against Iran have already cost billions of dollars, with munitions expenditure reaching \$5.6 billion to \$6bn in just the opening days of the conflict, multiple news outlets reported. According to reports, these estimates were shared with Congress on Monday, though the Pentagon declined to comment publicly on the figures. The New York Times reported that Pentagon officials informed lawmakers that the first week of operations cost roughly \$6bn, with around \$4bn spent on munitions and missile interceptors. CBS News noted that the \$5.6bn figure covers only the first 48 hours of the conflict, while The Washington Post confirmed a similar cost for the same period. The Hill also verified that the Pentagon had provided these figures to congressional members. Reuters, citing US administration sources, reported \$5.6bn in munitions costs during the initial days of the conflict. Analysts warn that total operational costs could exceed \$10bn within 10 days, driven by high-intensity strikes and the use of expensive, high-precision weapons. While Pentagon officials have not commented publicly on the 10-day projections, the steep early expenditure has raised concerns among lawmakers over the rapid depletion of munitions stockpiles and the broader budgetary impact of prolonged operations. The conflict, which began on February 28, has already placed historic financial pressures on US military resources, highlighting the high cost of modern, technology-intensive warfare. - APP

Muslim Brotherhood declared a terrorist organization

NEWS DESK

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan has welcomed the US government's decision to designate the Sudan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. The minister expressed his support for the decision during a phone call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, according to a statement issued by the Kingdom's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday. During the call, Prince Farhan said the Kingdom supports Washington's measures that strengthen regional stability and security. Rubio issued a press statement on March 9 announcing that the Department of State was "designating the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist and intends to designate the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, effective March 16, 2026." He also claimed, without providing evidence in the statement, that the "Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood uses unrestrained violence against civilians to undermine efforts to resolve the conflict in Sudan and advance its violent Islamist ideology."

PSX gains over 2,000 points as bulls maintain firm grip

KSE-100 index reaches 158,189.66 points after gaining 2,012.54 points or 1.29%

NAZIR SIYAL

KRACHI: Stocks at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) extended their rally on Wednesday, with the benchmark index gaining more than 1,900 points on the back of falling oil prices and improving investor sentiment. The KSE-100 index has reached 158,189.66 points after gaining 2,012.54 points or 1.29%, up from the previous session's close of 156,177.12 - when the market registered its second-highest single-day increase. The rally follows the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) decision to keep the policy rate unchanged at 10.5%, which reassured investors and revived risk appetite. Sentiment was further lifted by improving global markets, while declining oil prices - after comments from President Donald Trump suggesting the Middle East conflict may ease soon - helped calm fears of prolonged energy supply disruptions. Ahfaz Mustafa, CEO of Ismail Iqbal Securities, told Geo.tv: "Easing of oil prices, pro-active measures by the government and attractive valuations are getting investor attention."

IHC fines NAB Rs100,000 for employing 'delaying tactics'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday imposed a fine of Rs100,000 on the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for employing "delaying tactics" in the £190 million Al-Qadir Trust corruption case against former premier Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi. The development came as a division bench comprising IHC Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Asif presided over the hearing on pleas filed by the couple seeking the suspension of their sentences and appeals against their convictions. Prior to the hearing, the anti-graft watchdog, in a sharp legal response submitted to the court, had raised a preliminary jurisdictional objection, arguing that the appellants' application under Section 426 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) was premature. The bureau contended that the appeals filed by Imran and Bushra had not yet been formally admitted for regular hearing by the high court. Citing legal precedents, it maintained that the phrase "pending appeal" in Section 426 of the CrPC was authoritatively construed to mean an appeal that had been formally admitted for regular hearing. Therefore, until such admission, the court's supervisory and interlocutory powers - including the power to suspend sentence - do not stand activated, it said.



However, Wednesday's hearing was marked by sharp exchanges between the defence and prosecution, with Imran's legal team raising serious concerns about access to their client and the sluggish pace of judicial proceedings. Imran's counsel Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan opened his arguments by detailing the difficulties he faced in obtaining the power of attorney from the incarcerated former premier. He informed the court that access to his client had been effectively curtailed for four months, a situation he branded a direct violation of constitutional provisions. "It is a fundamental right of an accused to have unimpeded access to legal counsel," he argued, demanding action against the Adiala jail administration for obstructing this right.

Pak welcomes Syria's pledge to implement Weapons Convention

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has underscored the need to address foreign military occupation of parts of Syria, air strikes and terrorism to "enable a conducive environment for resolution of chemical-weapons-related issues" in the country. "The risk of terrorism and presence of foreign terrorist fighters also pose a challenge to the country's security and affect the verification activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)," Ambassador Usman Jadoon, deputy permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told the UN Security Council, which discussed the situation in the Middle East (Syria/Chemical Weapons). Syria has been mired in conflict since 2011, when protests during the wider Arab Spring escalated into a civil war involving the Government of Bashar al-Assad, opposition groups and various foreign actors. After more than a decade of fighting, the Assad Government collapsed in late 2024, ending his family's decades-long rule. Meanwhile, the international community continues to press the new authorities in Damascus for clarity over the country's past

chemical weapons programme under the oversight of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the body responsible for implementing and enforcing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). In his comments, the Pakistani envoy appreciated Syrian authorities' commitment to fully implement the CWC and its cooperation to secure suspected chemical weapons sites and address outstanding issues. The OPCW Technical Secretariat must continue to be enabled to carry out its independent verification to eliminate suspected chemical weapons in Syria and any risks of proliferation, in compliance with the CWC. Enhancing the capacity of Syrian authorities would contribute to the work of the OPCW including in declaration, investigation, analysis and verification on expedited basis, Ambassador Jadoon said. "We hope that the continued engagement between the Technical Secretariat and Syrian authorities will further build on the positive momentum to resolve all outstanding issues at the earliest." At the same time, Ambassador Jadoon strongly supported Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, noting that important opportunities have come up to advance reconciliation, recovery, peace and stability in the country.

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