



# Islamabad POST

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**All US bases in the region should be close: Mojtaba**

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**Nehal Hashmi to be the new Sindh governor**

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## Iranian Supreme Leader says

# All US bases should be closed immediately

Khamenei says "The vengeance we have in mind is not limited to the martyrdom of the great leader of the revolution; rather, every member of the nation who is martyred by the enemy constitutes an independent subject in the file of vengeance"

DNA

TEHEAN: Iran's Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, said Iran will seek compensation from enemies or destroy their assets accordingly. In his first message after assuming the office as supreme leader, he said that the 'resistance front' is an inseparable part of the Islamic revolution's values. Iranian supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei has said that Tehran is "is fully prepared for unity and warm, cordial mutual relations with all its neighbours", adding that it is not seeking to establish domination or colonialism in the region. "I assure everyone that we will not forgo vengeance for the blood of your martyrs," he has been quoted as saying on X. "The vengeance we have in mind is not limited to the martyrdom of the great leader of the revolution; rather, every member of the nation who is martyred by the enemy constitutes an independent subject in the file of vengeance." Meanwhile, On the 13th day of the US-Israel war against Iran, the conflict appeared to be entering a more volatile phase in which the battlefield could gradually extend beyond conventional air and missile exchanges into attempts to weaken Iran from within; the maritime confrontation in

the Gulf continued to tighten pressure on global energy markets and reinforce the centrality of oil flows in shaping the strategic calculations of the belligerents. Reports circulating among Iranian observers and security analysts suggested that Washington and Tel Aviv may now be testing a strategy aimed at fomenting internal dissent while maintaining external military pressure, with recent drone strikes on Basij security infrastructure inside Tehran. This was widely interpreted as an attempt to erode the regime's internal control mechanisms and probe whether domestic instability could complement the ongoing military campaign. The approach bears resemblance to the strategy pursued during the 12-day war of June 2025 when provoking an internal uprising formed a core pillar of Israeli planning, with precision strikes and coordinated information operations designed to fracture regime cohesion and trigger street-level dissent. That attempt had then failed to generate the expected cascade of unrest. In another development, US President Donald Trump has said that stopping Iran from getting nuclear weapons was more important to him than controlling oil prices. Meanwhile, Iran's FM Araghchi has said Israel bombing historic sites amid Middle East war. He added, his country would settle scores come what may.

## Briefs

### IHC orders formation of medical board

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday directed the formation of a medical board in its verdict on a plea seeking the transfer of PTI founder Imran Khan to Shifa International Hospital for medical treatment. A division bench, comprising Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro, presided over the hearing. IHC directed Islamabad Chief Commissioner Muhammad Ali Randhawa to constitute a medical board and ordered that Dr Muhammad Arif and Dr Nadeem Qureshi be included. Dr Qureshi, who is a retina specialist from Shifa Eye Hospital, is also part of the medical board constituted on the orders of the Supreme Court. Dr Arif is the head of the ophthalmology department at PIMS, Islamabad. In its verdict, the court also directed the authorities to ensure Imran's meetings with his lawyers and family.

### RLNG prices hiked

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Less than a week after the government hiked the prices of petroleum products by a whopping Rs55, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) on Thursday notified a massive 19-22 per cent increase in the price of regasified liquefied natural gas (RLNG) for sales at the distribution stage by the two Sui gas companies for the month of March. The increase was mainly because of increase in terminal charges amid lower import molecules and minor increase in import price, the dataset from the authority showed. The rare increase (19-22pc) in RLNG price for March has come following a minor 0.5pc increase in February and two consecutive monthly reductions in December (6pc) and January (5pc).

## Security threats US to permanently close its Peshawar consulate: reports

According to the British publication, the consulate is the US' closest diplomatic mission to the Afghan border and was a primary operations and logistics point at the time of its invasion of Afghanistan in 2001

NEWS DESK / DNA

PESHAWAR: The United States has announced that it will permanently close its consulate in Peshawar, media reported on Thursday. According to the British publication, the consulate is the US' closest diplomatic mission to the Afghan border and was a primary operations and logistics point at the time of its invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The US State Department notified Congress of its intent to close the consulate, saying that it would save \$75 million per year without undermining the advancement of US national interests in Pakistan. According to The Independent, a copy of the notification was obtained by The Associated Press on Wednesday. "The move has been under consideration for more than a year since the Trump administration began downsizing nearly all federal agencies and is not related to the Iran war," The Independent said.

The joint US-Israeli war against Iran, launched on Feb 28, sparked protests in various cities, and caused the US Consulate in Karachi to suspend its operations after an incident where 11 people were killed. According to the notification, of the \$3m the State Department will spend to close down the Peshawar consulate, more than half will pay for the relocation of armoured trailers that had served as temporary office space. The rest will go toward moving equipment and furniture, as well as the consulate's motor pool fleet, to the US Embassy in Islamabad and the Karachi and Lahore consulates, it added. "Because of its proximity to the Afghan border and Kabul, the Peshawar consulate had been a key jumping-off facility for overland travel into Afghanistan, as well as a point of contact for American citizens in northwestern Pakistan and Afghan nationals seeking US assistance,"

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## Pak faces pressure to pick side in Saudi-Iran standoff

Sources indicate Saudi Arabia is pressing Pakistan to take a more meaningful stance in support of the Kingdom, urging Islamabad to align clearly rather than remain neutral. Riyadh seeks assurances that Pakistan will stand firmly on its side amid the broader conflict involving Iran, following US-Israeli strikes that have widened the regional crisis

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has departed for a short, few-hour trip to Saudi Arabia, where discussions are expected to focus on bolstering bilateral ties and addressing the escalating security challenges posed by ongoing Iranian threats to the Kingdom. The visit comes at a critical juncture for Pakistan, which finds itself navigating complex alliances in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, perceiving persistent dangers from Iran including recent drone and missile strikes on its oil facilities and infrastructure - has invoked elements of the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed with Pakistan in September 2025. That pact treats aggression against one nation as an attack on both, formalizing long-standing defense cooperation. Just last week, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, visited Riyadh and met with Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman. The talks centered on joint

measures to counter Iranian attacks and implement the defence pact effectively. Notably, Field Marshal Munir did not secure an audience with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during that trip, underscoring the urgency now placed on the prime minister's engagement. Sources indicate Saudi Arabia is pressing Pakistan to take a more meaningful stance in support of the Kingdom, urging Islamabad to align clearly rather than remain neutral. Riyadh seeks assurances that Pakistan will stand firmly on its side amid the broader conflict involving Iran, following US-Israeli strikes that have widened the regional crisis. Pakistan, however, remains in a precarious position - caught between deep fraternal and economic ties with Saudi Arabia, and shared borders, trade, and diplomatic channels with Iran. Islamabad has repeatedly called for de-escalation, urging Iran to halt attacks on Saudi installations to avoid forcing Pakistan into compliance with its defence obligations.

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## SAUDI ARABIA SOJOURN



JEDDAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is being received by His Royal Highness Prince Saud bin Mashaal bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Governor of Makkah region, at the royal terminal of Jeddah International airport. - DNA

### Nehal Hashmi becomes Sindh governor

KP governor may also be changed

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has forwarded a summary to President Asif Ali Zardari for appointing Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Nehal Hashmi as the Sindh governor. The President has approved the appointment. According to the PM's Office, the prime minister has sent the summary for Hashmi's approval as the Sindh governor to President Asif Ali Zardari. The statement added that PM Shehbaz met Hashmi in Islamabad and congratulated

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### Govt may not increase petrol prices

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has banned the export of all petroleum products and is considering not hiking prices further despite a continuous increase in the global market and the drawdown of about Rs389bn in budget allocations for emergencies to absorb the future price shock as much as possible. The decision comes after the latest estimates, based on existing tax rates and pricing formula, suggest that the price of high-speed diesel (HSD) going up by Rs56 per litre and that of petrol by Rs41. Petrol and HSD are currently sold on the higher side of Rs322 and Rs337 per litre, respectively, at retail.

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### Foreign Office says

## Pak playing role of 'bridge builder' in ongoing Middle East

"We are playing the role of a bridge builder. Our principal position on issues regarding sovereignty, international law and the UN Charter, and on dialogue and diplomacy, is respected in all regional capitals. So, this allows us to exercise a channel of communication between the relevant capitals"

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said on Thursday that Pakistan was playing the role of a "bridge builder" during the ongoing US-Israeli war on Iran. The war began as the US and Israel launched strikes on Tehran on February 28, which also resulted in the assassination of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In retaliatory strikes, Iran has targeted US assets and bases in Gulf countries, against which a

resolution was adopted in the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Pakistan has been calling for de-escalation, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar holding phone calls with dignitaries from relevant countries over the past few days. On Thursday, Andrabi gave a round-up of the phone calls during his weekly press briefing. During the question-answer bit, a reporter mentioned that Dar had previously spoken about Islamabad

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## 60% KP govt vehicles grounded for two months

PESHAWAR: In view of the regional situation, the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to ground 60 percent of government vehicles for two months. According to an official notification issued by the provincial administration on Thursday, the decision has been taken to reduce fuel consumption due to possible pressure on petroleum supply and foreign exchange reserves amid the evolving regional circumstances. The notification states that Principal Accounting Officers will ensure strict implementation of the order. However, the restriction will not apply to police operational duties, law-enforcement agencies, rescue services, emergency services and field enforcement units.—APP

## ASI succumbs to injuries after foiling robbery

PESHAWAR: An Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) who bravely attempted to foil a major bank robbery near Machni Gate in the provincial capital succumbed to his injuries on Thursday. According to police, ASI Bahar Ali sustained critical gunshot wounds when armed robbers opened fire during the attempted heist at a bank where nearly Rs 25 million were reportedly present. The injured officer was immediately shifted to a hospital in critical condition and remained under treatment for some time. However, he could not survive and passed away. Police said the incident occurred when robbers attempted to carry out the bank robbery near Machni Gate. ASI Bahar Ali confronted the suspects in an effort to thwart the crime, during which the assailants opened fire, leaving him severely injured. Police authorities paid tribute to the fallen officer, describing his sacrifice as an act of bravery in the line of duty while protecting public property and maintaining law and order.—APP

## Crop-wise agri policy on cards

FAISALABAD: Regional Agricultural Forum meeting is mapping out a comprehensive plan to devise crop-wise agricultural policy, jointly work on climate-resilient agriculture, establish demonstration sites, agro ecological zone and value addition in order to raise productivity and make agriculture a profitable sector. Vice Chancellor (VC) University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) Prof Dr Zulfiqar Ali presided over the meeting while Chief Scientist Wheat Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) Dr Javed Ahmad, Chief Scientist Pulses AARI Dr Khalid Hussain, Director Agriculture Extension Faisalabad Khalid Mehmood, UAF Dean Agriculture Dr Ghulam Murtaza, Director Institute of Agriculture Extension UAF Dr Babar Shahbaz, Director Research Dr Sultan Habib Ullah, Chair Agriculture Policy Dr Asif Kamran.—APP

# Tahir lauds CC Inland Revenue for addressing industry concerns

Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Tahir Mehmood highlighted the challenges being faced by the flour mills sector in the region, stating that the industry plays a vital role in ensuring the steady supply of flour and supporting food security in the country

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has appreciated the efforts of Chief Commissioner Inland Revenue Ms. Ayesha Farooq and her team for their professional approach and commitment to addressing the issues of the business community in a constructive and amicable manner. He said that such cooperation between tax authorities and the private sector is essential for promoting economic activity and ensuring a conducive business environment in the region. He expressed these views during a meeting with the Chief Commissioner Inland Revenue at the Regional Tax Office (RTO) Islamabad on Thursday while leading a delegation of the Islamabad Flour Mills Association. The delegation included Patron-in-Chief of the Flour Mills Industry and Chairman ICCI Founder Group Sheikh Tariq Sadiq, ICCI Executive Member Sanaullah Durrani, former Senior Vice President Chaudhry Mukhtar, former Executive Member Dr. Muhammad Usman, along with other representatives of the flour milling sector. Commissioner Income Tax Naveed Tareen, Additional Commissioner HQ Shakil Anwar, Assistant Commissioner Muhammad Osama Abbasi and RAFAQAT Hussain Warsi IRO were also present on the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Tahir Mehmood highlighted the challenges being faced by the flour mills sector in the region, stating that the industry plays a vital role in ensuring the steady supply of flour and supporting food security in the country. He appreciated that the Chief Commissioner and her team listened to the concerns of the delegation with patience and assured full cooperation in resolving the genuine issues of the industry. He expressed hope that such positive engagement would further strengthen confidence between the business community and the tax authorities, ultimately contributing to economic growth and stability. Sardar Tahir Mehmood emphasized



that ICCI will continue to play its proactive advocacy role by serving as an effective bridge between the public and private sectors. He said that constructive dialogue and mutual understanding are key to developing business-friendly policies and promoting sustainable economic development. On the occasion, Sheikh Tariq Sadiq, Patron-in-Chief of the Flour Mills Industry and Chairman Founder Group ICCI, along

with Chaudhry Mukhtar, Sanaullah Khan Durrani, Dr. Muhammad Usman, and other members of the delegation, also appreciated the cooperative attitude of the Chief Commissioner and her colleagues. They expressed confidence that continued coordination with the tax authorities would help resolve industry-related issues and facilitate smoother business operations for the flour milling sector.

## PMYP chief terms 5G spectrum digital revolution

Under PM Shehbaz Sharif's Digital Pakistan vision, it unlocks high-speed internet, e-commerce, online learning, IT exports, and new avenues for youth. Thanks to Shehbaz Sharif, Rana Mashhood concluded

ISLAMABAD Chairman of Prime Minister Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan on Wednesday celebrated the completion of Pakistan's 5G spectrum auction across 600 MHz bands, which generated \$ 507 million and fast-tracks a digital revolution, praising Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's vision for ultra-fast 10 Gbps speeds, 1ms latency, and IoT-powered smart ecosystems, highlighting PML-N's April 2014 4G launch versus PTI's stagnation, as the world advances toward 6G. Rana Mashhood extended heartfelt thanks to PM Shehbaz, noting how this under his Digital Pakistan initiative would boost e-commerce, online education, IT exports, and youth prospects, transforming healthcare with remote surgeries, industries with automation, and agriculture with smart sensors. Chairman PMYP said the PML-N government first ignited Pakistan's digital journey in April 2014 by launching 4G networks, turbocharging internet access and growth. Over the subsequent 12 years, including the PTI's tenure of self-proclaimed "educated" leaders progress stalled, leaving Pakistan without 5G even as the world completes early 6G groundwork. Today, under PML-N government once more, the 5G spectrum auction concludes successfully. It appears merely as faster internet, but 5G will transform the entire digital ecosystem. The core differences start with speed. 4G typically delivers 20-100 Mbps, while 5G reaches 1-10 Gbps. In simple terms, downloading a large movie takes minutes on 4G but seconds on 5G, making videos, online games, and big files instantly accessible without waits, Rana added. Next is latency, he said, the delay in data transmission. 4G averages 30-50 milliseconds; 5G drops to 1-10 ms. This seems minor but revolutionizes tech enabling self-driving cars, remote surgeries, and real-time robot control. Third, capacity. 4G handles limited devices per area; 5G connects millions simultaneously. This powers smart cities, homes, sensors, cameras, and massive IoT networks without hiccups. Beyond mobiles, 5G sparks innovation across sectors, Rana explained. According to Rana Mashhood with the help of 5G in healthcare, distant doctors can perform robot-assisted operations. Industries gain efficient automated factories. Agriculture improves via crop-monitoring sensors and optimized irrigation. Education embraces VR and 3D classrooms. By securing nearly US \$ 507 million through this auction, Pakistan takes a historic step toward a digital economy. Under PM Shehbaz Sharif's Digital Pakistan vision, it unlocks high-speed internet, e-commerce, online learning, IT exports, and new avenues for youth. Thanks to Shehbaz Sharif, Rana Mashhood concluded.—DNA

## Plan to revive model schools in KP

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to revive the defunct Model Schools and Institutes across the province to restore their past glory and improve the quality of education. The decision was taken during a meeting of the Primary and Secondary Education Department chaired by Chief Minister Mohammad Sohail Afridi in Peshawar on Thursday. The meeting focused on a comprehensive strategy to upgrade the educational standards in the province. Presiding over the meeting, the Chief Minister directed the authorities to formulate a comprehensive plan for the revival of these institutions. To this end, a working group has been constituted under the stewardship of the Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Education. The group has been tasked with reviewing the current issues plaguing the model institutions, including faculty shortages, human resources, and infrastructure deficiencies, and subsequently submit a detailed report. Chief Minister emphasized that the government was committed to restoring the past prestige of the model institutes and transforming them into exemplary educational hubs. "Reforms aligned with modern requirements will be introduced in these institutes," he stated, adding that the provincial government is undertaking practical measures to elevate the standard of education.—APP

## Jazz announces \$1b investment to support 5G rollout

ISLAMABAD: Jazz has announced plans to invest \$1 billion over the next three years to strengthen its network and digital infrastructure, supporting the gradual rollout of 5G services and meeting Pakistan's rapidly growing demand for mobile data and digital connectivity. The investment will focus on expanding network capacity, modernizing infrastructure, and improving service quality as Pakistan's digital ecosystem continues to evolve. With mobile connectivity increasingly underpinning services ranging from digital payments and online commerce to cloud-based enterprise platforms and digital entertainment, continued investment in telecom infrastructure remains essential to sustaining the country's digital growth. According to Jazz, the investment reflects the company's long-term com-

mitment to strengthening Pakistan's connectivity foundation while preparing its network for next-generation technologies. "Pakistan's digital future depends on strong and resilient connectivity infrastructure," said Aamir Ibrahim, CEO JazzWorld. "This investment will allow us to support the rollout of 5G services, strengthen our network, and continue expanding reliable connectivity to millions of Pakistanis." Industry estimates indicate that around 40 percent of mobile subscribers in Pakistan still lack access to 4G services, while nearly a quarter of the population remains outside mobile broadband coverage, highlighting the scale of the connectivity gap and the need for continued infrastructure development. Mobile connectivity now plays a central role in Pakistan's digital economy,

enabling financial services, e-commerce, freelancing, online education and enterprise solutions. Strengthening telecom infrastructure is therefore considered a key component of the country's broader digital transformation. Jazz recently secured 190 MHz of additional spectrum in Pakistan's latest spectrum auction across four newly introduced bands, taking its total spectrum holding to over 284 MHz. The additional capacity will complement the planned infrastructure investment and strengthen Jazz's ability to begin a phased 5G rollout while expanding nationwide connectivity and improving network performance. Industry analysts say sustained investment by telecom operators will be critical to supporting Pakistan's next phase of digital development as the country prepares for the introduction of 5G technologies.—DNA

## Indonesian Consul General meets Sindh IGP

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on strengthening relations and enhancing cooperation in areas related to security and law enforcement

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Inspector General of Police Sindh, Javed Alam Odho, met Indonesian Consul General Mr. Mudzakir at the Central Police Office (CPO) Karachi, to discuss matters of mutual interest and bilateral cooperation. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on strengthening relations and enhancing cooperation in areas related to security and law enforcement. The Indonesian Consul General expressed satisfaction over the overall law and order situation in the province and appreciated the security arrangements in place. He also commended the professional capabilities of Sindh Police and acknowledged the measures taken to maintain peace and stability, while thanking the department for providing security to the Indonesian diplomatic mission. IGP Sindh briefed the visiting diplomat on steps taken by the police to further improve security and maintain law and order across the province. DIG Headquarters and AIG Operations were also present at the meeting. At the conclusion of the visit, Sindh Police presented a commemorative shield to the Indonesian Consul General.



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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### MARCH

March 01/Bosnia National Day

March 03/Bulgaria National Day

March 06/ Ghana Independence Day

March 12 /Mauritius National Day

March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day

March 20/Tunisia Independence Day

March 21/Namibia National Day

March 25/Greece National Day

March 26/Bangladesh National Day

March 27/Myanmar Armed Forces Day

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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RGH.....9290301-7

Holy Family.....9290322-7

PIMS.....9261170-79

Polyclinic.....9218300-09

Shifa International 4603666



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Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3



### Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## Fibre infrastructure to improve internet quality: Shaza

Shaza Fatima said effective execution of these policies would significantly expand internet access and enhance service quality across the country.

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Thursday said the government was prioritising the expansion of fibre infrastructure to improve the reliability and quality of internet services across Pakistan. Speaking at the second round of the spectrum auction, she said a major challenge facing the country's digital connectivity was the lack of fibreisation, noting that most people currently rely on wireless broadband and mobile networks for internet access. "Our second big plan is fiberisation," the minister said, adding that the government was working to implement policies aimed at strengthening the national fibre backbone. She said the plan also focuses on improving last-mile connectivity through fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) so that households can directly benefit from high-speed and reliable internet services.

Shaza Fatima said effective execution of these policies would significantly expand internet access and enhance service quality across the country.

Shaza Fatima Khawaja said Pakistan has taken a major step toward digital transformation after completing the first round of the latest spectrum auction, which generated \$507 million for the government. The minister said 480 MHz of spectrum had been acquired by the country's three telecom operators, with Jazz securing the largest share, followed by Ufone and Zong. The minister noted that the auction marked a historic milestone, as such a large amount of spectrum had never been auctioned in Pakistan before. "Since the beginning of mobile and internet services in the country, Pakistan has been operating on only 274 MHz of spectrum, which led to it being described as a spectrum-starved country in the region," she

said. According to the minister, the newly allocated spectrum has significantly improved Pakistan's position globally, increasing the total available spectrum to 750 MHz. "With this development, Pakistan has moved from being among the lowest in spectrum availability to an above-average country in global comparisons," she added. Shaza Fatima said the development comes at a crucial time when artificial intelligence and emerging technologies are rapidly transforming economies and societies. She said a fast, resilient, and reliable internet infrastructure was essential for economic growth, social development, and national security, adding that the auction had strengthened the foundation of the government's Digital Pakistan Vision. The minister said the move would not only improve 4G services but also mark Pakistan's entry into the 5G era, opening new opportuni-

ties for innovation and technological advancement. She particularly highlighted the benefits for young people growing up in a digital-first society, noting that faster connectivity would support education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Shaza Fatima said digital connectivity would also enhance productivity in sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and industry, especially for people living in remote areas who face limited access to essential services. "In agriculture, technology can help improve crop yield per acre and strengthen food security, while in healthcare and education it can expand access for people living far from urban centres," she said. She also emphasised the growing importance of technology in national security, noting that cyber capabilities had become a critical component of modern warfare.



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner Jane Marriott called on Federal Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif.

## Islamic University student murder case Court defers hearing

ISLAMABAD: The District and Sessions Court of Islamabad on Wednesday postponed proceedings in the murder case of 22-year-old Islamic University student Iman Afroz, who was killed in a hostel. The court could not record witness statements due to the absence of the accused. The hearing has now been rescheduled for March 31, and witnesses have been directed to appear again on the next date. The case was heard by Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka. During the hearing, state counsel Naveed Hussain Kiani appeared before the court on behalf of the prosecution. However, the proceedings could not move forward because the accused, Feroz, was not present in court. Due to his absence, the court did not record the statements of the witnesses who were scheduled to testify. The judge directed that the witnesses should appear again at the next hearing so their statements should be recorded as part of the trial process. After brief proceedings, the court adjourned the hearing until March 31. According to the case record, the murder case of Iman Afroz, a 22-year-old student of the International Islamic University, was registered at Ramna Police Station in Islamabad. The case relates to the killing of the student inside a university hostel.—DNA

## Webinar on quality management systems for SMEs

ISLAMABAD: The National Productivity Organization (NPO) is going to organize an online training course titled "ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems for SMEs" on March 26 to help small and medium enterprises improve operational efficiency and adopt internationally recognized quality standards. The workshop aimed at equipping participants with practical knowledge of quality management principles and the implementation of ISO 9001 standards in organizational processes, said an NPO document shared here on Thursday. The course will introduce participants to key terminologies in quality management, the fundamental principles of ISO 9001 and Quality Management Systems (QMS), and the requirements necessary for implementing the standard in organizations. It will also highlight strategies for maximizing the effectiveness of ISO 9001 to enhance productivity and overall organizational performance. The document revealed that ISO 9001 is an internationally recognized standard for quality management systems designed to help organizations consistently meet customer and regulatory requirements while enhancing customer satisfaction. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), adopting ISO 9001 provides a structured approach to improving processes, increasing efficiency and boosting credibility.

## Speed limits lowered on motorways, highways

ISLAMABAD: In accordance with the directives of the Government of Pakistan, the speed limits for vehicles on motorways and national highways have been reduced to promote austerity measures and fuel conservation. This step has been taken in light of the instructions of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to ensure efficient use of energy and to encourage fuel savings, said a press release issued here on Thursday. Under the new directives, the speed limit for cars and Light Transport Vehicles (LTV) on motorways has been reduced from 120 km/h to 100 km/h. Similarly, the speed limit for Passenger Service Vehicles (PSV) and Heavy Transport Vehicles (HTV) on motorways has been reduced from 110 km/h to 90 km/h. Likewise, on national highways, the speed limit for cars and Light Transport Vehicles (LTV) has been reduced from 100 km/h to 80 km/h.—APP

## Over 18,825 tractors assembled in 08 months

ISLAMABAD: Tractor production in the country during the first 08 months of the current financial year was recorded at 18,825 as compared to the production of 22,554 tractors of the same period of the corresponding period of the last year. Meanwhile, the sales of tractors during the period from July-February 2025-26 were recorded at 17,151 as compared to the sales of 21,692 tractors of the same period of the last year. According to the data of the Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association, the output of FIAT Al-Ghazi during the period under review stood at 6,798 tractors in eight months of the current financial year as compared to the production of 8,513 tractors. On the other hand, the sale of the FIAT tractors was recorded at 5,587 during the period under review, as compared to the sale of 8,111 tractors of the same period of the last year. Massay Ferguson produced about 12,027 tractors during the eight months of the current financial year as compared to the output of 14,041 tractors of the same period of the last year, whereas the sale of the tractors was recorded at 11,584 as compared to the sales of 13,581 tractors of the same period of the last year.—APP

## Public dialogue on youth entrepreneurship hosted

ISLAMABAD: Freedom Gate Prosperity (FGP), in collaboration with Accountability Lab Pakistan and Hamdard University Islamabad Campus, has hosted a public dialogue on the youth employment crisis and the role of entrepreneurship, bringing together policymakers, academics, development practitioners and young participants to explore practical pathways for empowering youth and creating sustainable economic opportunities in Pakistan. On the sidelines of the dialogue, participants were also briefly introduced to the book From Idea to Impact by Dr. Shahbaz Tariq, which highlights practical approaches for turning ideas into entrepreneurial initiatives. Chairperson of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), Gulmina Bilal Ahmad, delivered the keynote address and emphasized the importance of equipping young people with practical knowledge and skills to navigate the country's challenging economic environment. She noted that strengthening technical and vocational education, along with encouraging entrepreneurship, can open new avenues for youth employment and enable young people to become job creators rather than job seekers. Rahmat Hindiarta Kusuma, Minister Counsellor for Information, Social and Cultural Affairs at the Indonesian Embassy in Pakistan, shared examples from Indonesia's experience in promoting youth entrepreneurship through supportive public policies, skills development programmes and innovation-driven collaboration. He highlighted the importance of cross-cultural partnerships, innovation ecosystems and institutional cooperation in enabling young entrepreneurs to transform ideas into viable businesses. Earlier, Muhammad Anwar, CEO of Freedom Gate Prosperity (FGP), set the context for the dialogue by highlighting the growing urgency of addressing youth unemployment through innovation and enterprise. He stressed that creating an enabling ecosystem for entrepreneurship requires collaboration between government institutions, universities, development organizations and the private sector. Shahzad Afzal Kayani, Director Quality Enhancement Cell at Hamdard University, appreciated the collaborative initiative and emphasized the importance of academia-industry-development sector partnerships in building an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship. Syed Raza Ali, Program Manager at Accountability Lab Pakistan, welcomed the participants and underscored the importance of partnerships that promote transparency, innovation and youth engagement in development initiatives. He said Pakistan today stands at a critical demographic moment. Nearly two-thirds of our population is under the age of 30, making Pakistan one of the youngest countries in the world. According to the most recent census data, we have over 44 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24. This youth bulge represents an enormous national asset, but only if we are able to create pathways for meaningful employment and opportunity. Providing thematic insights, Dr. Shahbaz Tariq, Head of Research at FGP, spoke about the relevance of entrepreneurial thinking for Pakistan's youth and the importance of translating ideas into practical impact through knowledge, mentorship and supportive institutional frameworks. During the expert reflections session, Dr. Ansar Abbas, Associate Dean at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Hamdard University, highlighted the role of universities in nurturing entrepreneurial thinking and providing students with the research, skills and mentorship required to innovate and launch sustainable ventures. The event also featured a practical case study of entrepreneurship by Waqas Khaleeq, CEO of Smart Solar, Lahore, who shared his journey of building a clean energy business and encouraged young participants to pursue innovation-driven solutions to address emerging development challenges.—DNA

## Hormuz crisis Fuel stock monitoring urged to reduce energy risks

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) on Thursday released a new "Policy Viewpoint," warning that escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East could trigger a sharp increase in global oil prices, posing serious risks to Pakistan's inflation outlook, external balance and overall economic stability. The study, authored by Dr. Abida Naurin, assistant professor and member of the Macro Policy Lab at PIDE, highlights Pakistan's structural vulnerability due to its heavy dependence on imported petroleum and limited strategic reserves, according to a news release. The report noted that rising geopolitical risks surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime corridor that carries about 20% of global seaborne oil trade, have already pushed crude oil prices upward in early 2026. As tensions linked to the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict intensify, the resulting un-

certainty has added a significant geopolitical risk premium to global energy markets, increasing volatility in oil prices. The study warned that, in a worst-case scenario, such as a three-month disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, global oil prices could surge to between \$120 and \$150 per barrel. Under such circumstances, Pakistan's monthly petroleum import bill could rise sharply, while consumer inflation could also increase. The Policy Viewpoint cautioned that even moderate increases in oil prices could widen Pakistan's current account deficit and intensify macroeconomic pressures. Rising shipping insurance, freight costs and supply delays could further increase import expenditures and weaken foreign exchange reserves, raising the risk of broader economic instability. To mitigate these risks, the study recommends a combination of immediate and long-term policy measures. In the short term,

it calls for strengthened monitoring of fuel stocks, diversification of import routes and suppliers, and the exploration of oil hedging strategies to protect against price volatility. In the medium to long term, the report stresses the importance of expanding strategic petroleum reserves, diversifying energy imports, and accelerating investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency to reduce Pakistan's vulnerability to global oil shocks. The study concludes that timely and coordinated policy action could help Pakistan navigate global energy volatility while strengthening its long-term energy security and macroeconomic resilience. With proactive reforms and diversification strategies, Pakistan can transform current vulnerabilities into an opportunity to build a more stable and sustainable energy framework for the future, it added.—DNA

## HEC set to launch degree attestation system

The HEC anticipates that the first phase of the blockchain-enabled degree attestation system will be launched by June 30, 2026, marking a major step toward digitizing and strengthening Pakistan's higher education credential ecosystem

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) is set to launch first phase of blockchain-based degree attestation system in June 2026 to ease the attestation process and make it more secure and accessible online.

According to documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the HEC has reaffirmed its commitment to leveraging advanced technologies to enhance transparency, efficiency, and service delivery in the degree attestation and equivalence processes. The new system, currently under development, will introduce a secure and robust blockchain-based framework designed to integrate and connect academic records

of all universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on a centralized platform. The initiative aims to eliminate the need for applicants to visit universities in person for verification and attestation. Under the proposed system, universities and HEIs will be provided with dedicated dashboards enabling them to securely verify and validate applicants' academic data. Once verification is completed at the university level, the cases will automatically be forwarded to the HEC for further processing. Upon the HEC's verification and attestation, the students' academic records will be stored in the form of tamper-proof, verifiable digital credentials on the

blockchain. The students will have direct access to their academic achievements in digital form, which can be securely shared and validated anytime, anywhere, by employers, institutions, or relevant authorities. The blockchain framework is expected to significantly reduce fraud, document forgery, and verification delays while ensuring data integrity, immutability, and real-time credential authentication. The HEC anticipates that the first phase of the blockchain-enabled degree attestation system will be launched by June 30, 2026, marking a major step toward digitizing and strengthening Pakistan's higher education credential ecosystem.—DNA

## Briefs

## Pakistan indispensable pillar of regional stability

ISLAMABAD: Prof Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow at the Charhar Institute said on Wednesday that the primary security challenge confronting Pakistan stems from cross-border terrorist attacks emanating from Afghan territory, which continuously threaten its national sovereignty and the safety of its innocent civilians. Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations are strictly lawful defensive measures aimed at protecting its people. As a frontline state in the global fight against terrorism, Pakistan has sacrificed countless lives and enormous resources over the years, and its unwavering commitment to border security directly underpins lasting regional stability, he said in a statement. The Chinese scholar said that unbalanced international travel advisories often overlook the remarkable improvements in Pakistan's overall security situation, unfairly undermining its economy and international reputation. Despite frequent external shocks, soaring security costs, and lingering global economic uncertainties, Pakistan has achieved steady economic stabilization with the support of friendly countries and international financial organizations, and remains firmly dedicated to structural reforms to foster sustainable development. A stable and prosperous Pakistan is not only in its own national interest but also essential for advancing regional development, trade and connectivity.

He said that regionally, amid escalating tensions in the Middle East and South Asia, Pakistan has actively advocated dialogue, de-escalation and respect for national sovereignty. Adhering to a path of peaceful diplomacy, it avoids provocative actions and proactively promotes mutual understanding among nations, repeatedly proving itself a reliable and constructive force for peace. Looking ahead, Pakistan will continue to firmly defend its national security, remain open to diplomatic solutions for resolving regional disputes, and push forward economic reforms to enhance people's well-being. In conclusion, Pakistan has demonstrated extraordinary resilience and an unwavering commitment to peace amid a multitude of challenges. As an indispensable pillar of regional stability, its security and prosperity are crucial not only to the region but also to global peace and harmony, he said.—DNA

## Veteran actor Asim Bukhari dies

ISLAMABAD: Veteran Lollywood actor Asim Bukhari passed away early on Thursday after being hospitalized for the past fifteen days due to prolonged health complications. Family sources confirmed that he lapsed into coma on Wednesday night before passing away. His death has left fans and the showbiz industry deeply saddened. The senior actor, known for his work across television, stage and films had been under treatment at a hospital for the past 15 days due to complications related to his illness, private media channels reported. Asim Bukhari enjoyed a long and distinguished career in Pakistan's entertainment industry. He earned recognition for his performances in numerous television dramas, stage productions and films and was widely regarded as a versatile performer. In addition to acting, he also served as an acting teacher, mentoring many aspiring artists and contributing to the development of new talent in the industry. Members of the showbiz fraternity paid glowing tributes to the veteran actor, remembering his dedication to the craft and his contributions to Pakistani entertainment. Meanwhile, his son, Jalal Bukhari, is currently undergoing treatment for gallstones at a hospital in London. The timing of the actor's funeral has not announced yet.—APP

## Regional Conflicts

## Speakers highlight shared Pakistan-China perspectives

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, hosted a roundtable discussion titled "Pakistan and China: Shared Perspectives on the Contemporary Regional Security Environment." The event brought together prominent speakers Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Moin ul Haque, and IRS President Jauhar Saleem to discuss evolving geopolitical challenges and the convergence of Pakistani and Chinese perspectives on regional security. The discussion examined the implications of the ongoing confrontation involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, as well as tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan amid the resurgence of terrorism in Pakistan. Ms. Nabila Jaffer, Lead of the China Program at IRS, introduced the speakers and highlighted the far-reaching consequences of the escalating conflict in West Asia. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem stressed that the ongoing conflict in West Asia has already sent shockwaves across the global political and economic landscape, warning that further escalation could trigger a significant economic shock. He delineated Pakistan's principled position on the issue and underlined the need for resolving the widening conflict through peaceful dialogue. Referring to ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he noted that the current situation reflects Kabul's failure to respond positively to repeated diplomatic initiatives, through bilateral, regional, and international channels. He also drew attention to India's role in fomenting terrorism in Pakistan and obstructing constructive engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ambassador Saleem emphasized that the Pakistan-China partnership has remained



an 'important pillar of regional stability' and highlighted the shared stance of Islamabad and Beijing in advocating dialogue and peaceful means to resolve conflicts. Speaking on the occasion, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed described the current geopolitical situation as an "arc of conflict stretching from Israel to India." Drawing attention to what he termed ideological parallels between Zionism and Hindutva, he remarked that "Modi and Netanyahu, Akhand Bharat and Eretz Israel, are two sides of the same coin," arguing that both states have acted as "flagrant violators of international law, the United Nations Charter, and human rights." He suggested that the recent actions by the United States and Israel against Iran were based on miscalculations, warning that such actions often prolong conflicts rather than resolve them. He also noted that Iran has demonstrated resilience despite mounting pressure, main-

taining its political structure. Describing Iran and China as civilizational states with deep historical roots, he argued that such societies possess the endurance necessary for prolonged geopolitical competition. He also emphasized that developments across the Middle East, South Asia, and Afghanistan should be viewed as interconnected theatres shaping the broader regional security environment and added that Pakistan and China share closely aligned perspectives on regional peace and consistently advocate diplomatic solutions to conflicts. Ambassador Moin ul Haque observed that the ongoing conflict carries implications far beyond geopolitics, affecting energy markets, trade routes, economic stability, and the livelihoods of millions of people. Referring to broader regional dynamics and the close strategic alignment between Israel and India, he characterized them as "expansionist, revisionist, and occupying powers," with serious implications for Pakistan's security environment. He emphasized that China has consistently stood by Pakistan in challenging times and noted that defence and security cooperation between the two countries plays an "irreplaceable and critical role in maintaining peace, stability, and strategic balance in the region." Ambassador Moin also stressed that both Pakistan and China remain committed to international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter, advocating "dialogue over confrontation, partnerships over alliances, multilateralism over unilateralism, and an equal and orderly international system." Both countries, he noted, have condemned the attack on Iran as a violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity and called for ceasefire, dialogue, and de-escalation. He also cautioned that the conflict could escalate into wider regional involvement or other dangerous scenarios.

## Govt standing with public through austerity measures: Qaiser

ISLAMABAD: Investment Minister Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh on Thursday said the government is standing with the public and has taken steps to manage the economic impact of rising global oil prices, adding that the recent increase in fuel prices was necessary to prevent shortages and ensure uninterrupted supply in the market.

While speaking to a local news channel, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh explained that the government made a timely decision to raise fuel prices, warning that if prices had not been adjusted, some elements could have started hoarding oil, which might have led to an artificial shortage across the country. He added that the government is also implementing austerity measures and sharing the burden with the public, expressing hope that fuel prices will decrease once the war situation ends and global oil markets stabilize. He warned that war brings serious consequences for the region, including economic instability, rising inflation and disruption in global energy supplies, adding, prolonged conflict could further increase oil prices and create additional pressure on developing economies.—APP

## IRSA releases 114,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 114,000 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 54,500 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1453.28 feet which was 53.28 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 20,500 cusecs and 48,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1149.35 feet, which was 99.35 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 18,000 cusecs and 50,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 57,000, 30,900, 29,600, and 14,300 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 9,500 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 900 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

## Hormuz crisis could triple Pakistan's Oil import bill

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: A new Policy Viewpoint released by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) warns that escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East could trigger a sharp increase in global oil prices, posing serious risks for Pakistan's inflation outlook, external balance, and overall economic stability. The study, authored by Dr. Abida Naurin, Assistant Professor and member of the Macro Policy Lab at PIDE, highlights Pakistan's structural vulnerability due to its heavy dependence on imported petroleum and limited strategic reserves. The report notes that rising geopolitical risks surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime corridor that carries about 20 percent of global seaborne oil trade, have already pushed crude oil prices upward in early 2026. As tensions linked to the US-Israel-Iran conflict intensify, the resulting uncertainty has added a significant geopolitical risk premium to global energy markets, increasing volatility in oil prices. Pakistan remains particularly exposed to these developments because petroleum products account for nearly 30 percent of its total imports. According to the analysis, every \$10 increase in global

oil prices could raise Pakistan's annual petroleum import bill by approximately \$1.8-2.0 billion, while also transmitting inflationary pressures across the economy through higher transport, energy, and food costs. The study warns that in a worst-case scenario—such as a three-month disruption in the Strait of Hormuz—global oil prices could surge to between \$120 and \$150 per barrel. Under such circumstances, Pakistan's monthly petroleum import bill could rise sharply to between \$3.5 and \$4.5 billion, while consumer inflation could climb from around 7 percent to as high as 15-17 percent. The research further highlights Pakistan's structural exposure to energy shocks. The country imports nearly 80-85 percent of its petroleum requirements, with most shipments passing through a single maritime route via the Strait of Hormuz before reaching Karachi and Port Qasim. With petroleum reserves covering only about 10-14 days of consumption, Pakistan has limited buffers to absorb supply disruptions compared to regional peers such as India, which maintains significantly larger strategic reserves. The Policy Viewpoint emphasizes that even moderate increases in oil prices can widen Pakistan's current account deficit and intensify macroeconomic pressures. Rising shipping insurance, freight costs, and supply delays could further raise import expenditures and weaken foreign exchange reserves, increasing the risk of broader economic instability. To mitigate these risks, the study recommends a combination of immediate and long-term policy measures. In the short term, it calls for strengthened monitoring of fuel stocks, diversification of import routes and suppliers, and the exploration of oil hedging strategies to protect against price volatility. In the medium to long term, the report stresses the importance of expanding strategic petroleum reserves, diversifying energy imports, and accelerating investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency to reduce Pakistan's vulnerability to global oil shocks. The study concludes that timely and coordinated policy action can help Pakistan navigate global energy volatility while strengthening its long-term energy security and macroeconomic resilience. With proactive reforms and diversification strategies, Pakistan can transform current vulnerabilities into an opportunity to build a more stable and sustainable energy framework for the future.

## Colourful Eidi envelopes, gift boxes attract online buyers

ISLAMABAD: As Eid al-Fitr approaches, many women entrepreneurs have launched online businesses selling beautifully designed Eidi envelopes and gift boxes along with mehndi, bangles and festive accessories, attracting customers who want creative and stylish ways to present Eid gifts. As digital marketplaces expand, many traditional vendors are moving their businesses online, presenting a colorful variety of Eidi envelopes, gift boxes, mehndi and bangles to capture the festive demand before Eid al-Fitr. Media reports say that these creatively designed Eidi envelopes and decorative gift boxes are particularly attracting the youth, who prefer stylish and colorful options for presenting gifts during Eid al-Fitr. According to online women sellers, the prices of Eidi envelopes generally start from Rs 200 to Rs 500, while decorative gift boxes with accessories range from Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000, depending on the design and items included for Eid al-Fitr gifting. "Buying Eidi envelopes online has become so fun! I love the colorful designs and all the little accessories, they make gifting more special," a student shared her comments. "I always used to get plain envelopes from the market, but now I can choose from so many trendy options online. It is exciting to show off to my friends," shared another young high school student. "Gift boxes with bangles and kashmiri mehndi are my favorite! They are perfect for Eid celebrations and I think everyone my age enjoys giving and receiving them. This trend is definitely catching on fast," added Zara, a university student. Many young buyers are discovering these Eidi envelopes and gift boxes through social media platforms like TikTok, facebook and Instagram where sellers showcase their vibrant designs and creative gift sets.—DNA

## Report on confiscated gold and cigarette theft

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Interior and Narcotics Control was held under the convensorship of Senator Saifullah Abro. The meeting was attended by Member Committee Senator Muhammad Talha Mahmood. The Sub-Committee deliberated on the matter regarding the theft of 2,828 cartons of cigarettes from the go-downs of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in Swabi and Mardan. During the meeting, the Member FBR assured the Committee that the directives issued in the previous meeting would be complied with. He further suggested that the case may be handed over to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for further investigation and necessary legal action. Officials of the FIA briefed the Committee

that the case had been referred to the agency by the Regional Police Headquarters through the Ministry of Interior. The incident involved an embezzlement amounting to approximately Rs. 250 million. During the briefing, several serious administrative lapses were highlighted. It was noted that there was no designated officer in charge of the warehouse, no official logbook or stock register was maintained, and no duty roster of the staff posted at the warehouse was available. Furthermore, there were no CCTV cameras installed, no standard operating procedures (SOPs) for shifting seized items from one go-down to another, no gate pass record of the drivers, and no entry of the mobile squad in the movement register. The FIA informed the Committee that statements of several officers posted at the warehouse had been recorded and that the inquiry was currently underway.

## Pakistan, Qatar boost trade, strengthen food security partnership

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan held a virtual meeting with Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs of the State of Qatar, to discuss ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation, food security coordination and investment opportunities between the two brotherly countries. During the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Qatar relations and agreed to further expand economic engagement and cooperation between the two countries. The Qatari minister emphasized the importance of encouraging greater interaction between the business communities of both countries in order to

further strengthen economic ties, said a release issued here on Thursday. A key focus of the discussion was enhancing Pakistan's exports of rice and other food products to Qatar. Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed highlighted that rice remains an important component of Qatar's food security program and national food strategy, and expressed interest in increasing imports from Pakistan. Minister Jam Kamal Khan assured that Pakistan is taking steps to ensure its exporters remain competitive and responsive to the needs of the Qatari market, adding that new mechanisms are being introduced to facilitate improved pricing and supply arrangements. Both sides agreed that relevant departments and officials will coordinate closely

to facilitate direct engagement between Pakistani exporters and Qatari importers. In addition to food supply cooperation, the two sides discussed investment opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in infrastructure, logistics and energy sectors. Projects such as Karachi port expansion and other strategic initiatives were highlighted as potential areas for collaboration. The Qatari side welcomed the proposals shared by Pakistan and indicated that relevant authorities, including the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), would review them. During the discussion, Minister Jam Kamal Khan also expressed Pakistan's concern over the evolving regional situation and conveyed solidarity with the leadership.—APP

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## A protracted Iran war multiplies risks for Trump

BRIAN KATULIS

US President Donald Trump hinted on Monday that the war against Iran could end soon, saying "we're far ahead of schedule" and joint US military operations with Israel were "very complete, pretty much." On the same day, the Pentagon sent a different message, posting a message on social media saying "no mercy" and "we have only just begun to fight." If the Trump administration's messaging on the Iran war sounds confusing, it is important to keep in mind: this is the point. The mixed messages are intentional, not just the product of incompetence. A key part of Trumpian strategic communications is to leave everyone guessing — the entire world, friend and foe alike — to gain leverage by knocking everyone off balance.

The method to this madness fits with the template the Trump team deployed in the weeks before the war, when it offered a wide range of rationales for war — from regime change to protecting the Iranian people to ending the country's nuclear program and ballistic missile threat. US presidents typically seek to build national consensus to unify the country during war, but that is not how Trump operates. But this strategy appears to be hampering Trump's ability to garner public support for military action because there is no central goal. Public backing is necessary to win approval in Congress for the additional funding necessary to replenish the arms expended in this conflict.

Most Americans oppose the war and how Trump has handled it. The latest NPR/PBS News/Marist poll found that only 36 percent of Americans approve of how Trump is dealing with Iran. Also, a majority of Americans (56 percent) oppose the war in Iran, with 44 percent expressing support. These numbers are quite low compared to historical levels of US public opinion at the start of military campaigns — the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in the 2000s, as well as the fight against Daesh in the 2010s — when the wars had majority support among the American public. Public support for these wars declined over time as the costs in US lives and taxpayer dollars rose.

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US presidents typically seek to build national consensus to unify the country during war, but that is not how Trump operates. He used his State of the Union address last month to divide the country on a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues and he only briefly mentioned Iran toward the end of a long speech. In addition, when America enters a conflict, it often produces a "rally round the flag" approach in the early days, with Americans looking to support US troops in harm's way.

But that was not the case in the opening days of this war on Iran, which may be one of the reasons why Trump and his team might be signaling that they would like to wrap it up sooner rather than later. With midterm elections less than nine months away, the last thing he wants to see is a further erosion of public support, which was already at its lowest point before this unpopular war began, with six in 10 Americans disapproving of the job Trump is doing overall. In a domestic political context, Trump's decision to go to war against Iran alongside Israel could prove to be reckless. For its part, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps says it will be the one to "determine the end of the war," reacting to Trump's comment on Monday. "The equations and future status of the region are now in the hands of our armed forces; American forces will not end the war," the statement added. One potential political liability for Trump with this war is the risk that the spike in gas prices could further weaken US public perceptions about how he has handled the economy and inflation, which remain the top concern among US voters. A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted this past week found that 67 percent of Americans expect gas prices to rise after the Iran strikes. A second vulnerability in this war comes with the risk that more US troops could die in combat.

In this domestic political context, Trump's decision to go to war against Iran alongside Israel, without much of an attempt to build public consensus, could prove to be reckless — especially given the fact that the decision was taken without consulting or support from regional partners, like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt and Jordan. In the end, US public support for the Iran war will be closely linked to how things fare on the battlefield. It may be that the tactical successes of eliminating the Iranian regime's top leaders on Day 1 could serve as the high-water mark of success unless the Trump administration offers a clearer end goal to the US public. The longer this war drags on, the riskier it becomes for Trump.

## Iran's War and the End of American Invincibility

Qamar Bashir



Iran's cost is harder to quantify precisely in credible public reporting, but it is clearly immense. The country has suffered extensive strikes on military, energy, industrial, and civilian-linked infrastructure, alongside the highest death toll of any party to the conflict. So while the United States and Israel are paying in cash, mobilization, and casualties, Iran is paying in blood, damaged infrastructure, and wider economic disruption. That asymmetry is real. But Tehran's apparent response has been to widen the cost field so that others pay too. That is where the Strait of Hormuz becomes central

HISTORY sometimes reaches a point where confidence collapses faster than armies do. The ongoing war involving the United States, Israel, and Iran appears to be one of those moments. What was expected in Washington and Tel Aviv to be a short, punishing campaign has instead become a prolonged regional confrontation with mounting military losses, deepening economic consequences, and a growing challenge to the long-assumed aura of invincibility surrounding both Israel and the United States. What makes the present war historically important is not merely that it interrupted diplomacy again, but that it exposed how wrong the original assumptions were. If one follows the public statements of American officials from the start of this war, the message was unmistakable: Iran would be broken quickly, its strategic capabilities would be shattered, its people might rise, and the regime would either capitulate or collapse. Instead, the opposite has happened. Iran has not folded. It has absorbed punishment, retaliated across the region, and shown that even under intense assault it can still impose military and economic costs on its adversaries. That alone has altered the psychological landscape of the war. The human toll illustrates the scale of the confrontation. Country-by-country tally as of March 11, at least 1,270 people have been killed in Iran, while Iranian officials have in some statements put the civilian toll even higher. In Israel, 12 people had been reported killed. For the United States, seven service members killed and around 150 wounded, with several of the wounded suffering serious injuries. Additional deaths across the Gulf and neighboring states drawn into the conflict, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, underscoring how far this war has spread beyond its original battlefield. These casualties are strategically significant because they undermine the image of a clean, one-sided campaign. American bases have been hit. Troops have been killed. Installations have been damaged. Israeli civilian life has been repeatedly disrupted by missile and drone alerts. Iran, of course, has suffered by far the heaviest losses in lives and infrastructure, but the core point remains: the war has not stayed cost-free for those who initiated it. The United States, despite possessing the world's most advanced military machine, has not been able to shield all of its personnel or quickly neutralize Iran's retaliatory capacity. That matters politically as much as militarily.

The financial cost is also becoming harder to ignore. The Trump administration told Congress the first two days of the war consumed about \$5.6 billion in munitions alone. Another report said the administration estimated the first six days had already cost the United States more than \$11 billion. These are enormous sums for less than a week of war, and they do not capture the full future bill if the conflict drags on. Israel is also paying a steep price. Israel's Finance Ministry estimated damage to the Israeli economy could exceed 9 billion shekels a week, or about \$2.93 billion weekly, under war conditions. That figure reflects not just the direct expense of operations, but disruption to business, reserve mobilization, emergency response, and the continuing burden of missile defense. In other words, even before counting long-term reconstruction or strategic loss, the war is costing Israel billions every week. Iran's cost is harder to quantify precisely in credible public reporting, but it is clearly immense. The country has suffered extensive strikes on military, energy, industrial, and civilian-linked infrastructure, alongside the highest death toll of any party to the conflict. So while the United States and Israel are paying in cash, mobilization, and casualties, Iran is paying in blood, damaged infrastructure, and wider economic disruption. That asymmetry is real. But Tehran's apparent response has been to widen the cost field so that others pay too. That is where the Strait of Hormuz becomes central. About one-fifth of the world's oil and gas supply normally passes through this chokepoint and that tanker traffic effectively collapsed after the war began. Iran declared the strait closed and threatened ships trying to pass, while war-risk insurance surged and hundreds of vessels were left backed up in and around the Gulf. Reuters also reported damaged tankers, cancelled war-risk cover, and a near paralysis of the route. Iran may not be able to match the United States in airpower, but it can make the world pay for a war imposed on it. By choking the route, raising the risk premium, and forcing shipping and energy markets into crisis, Iran can externalize part of the war's cost. Instead of bearing the burden alone, it can push that burden onto energy importers, insurers, freight operators, and ultimately consumers around the world. That is why the warning from the global shipping sector matters. The head of Maersk warned that the extra cost created by the conflict would be passed through the chain to customers and then to consumers. Shipping rates are rising, freight detours are growing, insurance costs are soaring, and business-

es worldwide are already feeling the squeeze from the war's disruption of Gulf trade. The war is rattling businesses globally, squeezing supplies and raising doubts about critical trade routes.

So the war's cost is now operating on three levels at once. First, there is the direct military bill: billions for Washington, billions per week for Israel, and severe destruction for Iran. Second, there is the human bill: thousands dead or wounded across Iran, Israel, the United States, and the wider region. Third, there is the global consumer bill: higher oil prices, more expensive shipping, higher insurance, and rising inflation that ordinary people far from the battlefield will end up paying. If one carefully examines the public statements issued by the United States leadership—from the early declarations of the administration to the confident pronouncements made at the outset of the campaign—it becomes evident that Washington believed the war would be short and decisive. Senior officials repeatedly suggested that Iran's military capabilities would be dismantled within days and that overwhelming American power would quickly force Tehran into submission. That assumption has proven profoundly mistaken. Despite possessing the world's most powerful military machinery, the United States now finds itself engaged in a conflict that has not unfolded according to its expectations. American bases have come under attack, soldiers have been killed, many others wounded, and several installations across the region have been damaged. The broader political objective of encouraging an uprising inside Iran has also failed to materialize; instead of internal collapse, the conflict appears to have strengthened national unity within the country. In this sense, the war has produced an outcome that few strategists anticipated. Just as the brief but intense confrontation of June 2025 raised questions about Israel's long-assumed aura of invincibility, the ongoing conflict of 2026 has begun to cast similar doubts about the ability of the United States to impose swift military outcomes against determined adversaries. The lesson emerging from this war is stark: even the most formidable military power may find that modern conflicts are far more complex, costly, and resistant to quick resolution than early confidence suggests.

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## The Hidden Hands Behind Rising Regional Conflicts

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The strategic anxieties of Israel toward Iran are well documented. For years, Israeli leadership has openly identified Iran as the principal challenge to its security architecture. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that Iran's missile and nuclear ambitions constitute what he once described before the United Nations...

I N the intricate theatre of global politics, alliances often emerge not merely from shared values but from shared anxieties. The present turbulence stretching from the Middle East to South Asia appears to reflect the workings of a strategic alignment that many observers increasingly describe as an informal troika: Israel, India, and the United States. While each of these states pursues its own national interests, their overlapping concerns regarding the military capabilities of Iran and the nuclear deterrence of Pakistan have gradually converged into a pattern of coordinated pressure that is shaping the geopolitical environment of two volatile regions. The strategic anxieties of Israel toward Iran are well documented. For years, Israeli leadership has openly identified Iran as the principal challenge to its security architecture. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that Iran's missile and nuclear ambitions constitute what he once described before the United Nations as "the greatest threat to the future of the Middle East." His famous declaration in 2018 that Israel would "never allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons" reflected not only a security doctrine but a broader regional strategy aimed at containing Tehran's influence. Parallel to this, India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pursued a security narrative centered upon Pakistan. Since coming to power in 2014, Modi has increasingly framed Pakistan as the central obstacle to India's regional dominance. His statement following the 2019 Balakot episode that "India will not tolerate terror from across the border" became part of a wider diplomatic campaign to isolate Pakistan internationally. Analysts have long observed that New Delhi's strategic calculations often intersect with Israel's technological and intelligence cooperation, while simultaneously benefiting from the political umbrella of Washington. The United States, particularly during the presidency of Donald Trump, played a complicated role in this triangular alignment. Trump's foreign policy was characterized by an unmistakable tilt toward both Israel and India. His administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018, describing it as "a horrible, one-sided deal

that should never have been made." At the same time, his administration elevated strategic ties with India, referring to it as a "major defense partner" and a pillar of America's Indo-Pacific strategy. In effect, Washington's policies during this period reinforced the strategic confidence of both New Delhi and Tel Aviv. The crisis of May 2025 between India and Pakistan illustrated how fragile regional stability has become. India's military action, undertaken with an expectation of swift strategic advantage, encountered unexpected resistance. Pakistan's armed forces demonstrated both operational preparedness and deterrence credibility, forcing a rapid recalibration in the regional balance. In the aftermath, diplomatic maneuvering began almost immediately. Israel publicly signaled solidarity with India, while the United States adopted a more cautious posture, watching events closely before stepping forward as a mediator. Such mediation reflected a deeper strategic concern in Washington: the risk that prolonged confrontation might push Pakistan toward alternative geopolitical alignments. Pakistan's strategic geography, its nuclear capability, and its growing partnerships with emerging powers make it a state whose alienation carries consequences far beyond South Asia. Consequently, American diplomacy attempted to stabilize the situation, presenting itself as a balancing force even while maintaining its long-standing strategic partnerships. Yet the story did not end there. Following the military setback, India appeared to shift its emphasis toward indirect means of pressure. Proxy dynamics within Afghanistan once again became a source of concern for regional observers. During one of Modi's diplomatic engagements in Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly reaffirmed support for cooperation in the Afghan context, a statement that many analysts interpreted as a signal of broader strategic alignment. Meanwhile, the Middle East was entering its own phase of escalation. Israel, viewing Iran as a persistent strategic rival, intensified preparations for confrontation. Tehran's expanding missile program and its regional alliances were perceived in Tel Aviv as altering the balance of

power. While Washington initially maintained a degree of strategic ambiguity, the momentum of events gradually drew the United States closer to Israel's position. Yet conflicts rarely unfold according to carefully drafted plans. Iran's response to mounting pressure surprised many observers. The country demonstrated resilience and a capacity to absorb and retaliate against military pressure in ways that complicated the calculations of its adversaries. What was initially envisioned as a decisive strategic move risked turning into a prolonged and unpredictable confrontation.

For the Gulf states, these developments carry profound implications. Many of them have historically relied upon the United States as their principal security guarantor. Yet the unfolding crises have forced them to reassess the reliability and long-term sustainability of external protection. As the old Arab proverb warns, "He who rides the tiger may find it difficult to dismount." History offers numerous reminders that great-power strategies often generate unintended consequences. From the Cold War's proxy conflicts to the wars of the early twenty-first century, interventions designed to reshape regional orders have frequently produced instability rather than control. The current dynamics surrounding Iran and Pakistan appear to follow a similar trajectory. Ultimately, the evolving situation suggests that the security concerns of powerful states can become the driving force behind wider regional turbulence. Whether described as a troika or merely as overlapping strategic interests, the combined pressure of Israel, India, and the United States has undeniably contributed to an atmosphere of confrontation. Yet the resilience displayed by states such as Iran and Pakistan indicates that the geopolitical chessboard remains far more complex than any single alliance might anticipate. In the final analysis, power politics may ignite conflicts, but it cannot always dictate their outcomes. The unfolding events across the Middle East and South Asia serve as a reminder that in international relations, even the most carefully designed strategies may ultimately be reshaped by forces beyond the control of those who conceive them.

## Briefs

## Pak faces pressure to pick side in Saudi-Iran standoff

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Despite such appeals, Iranian strikes have continued, heightening pressure on Islamabad. Prime Minister Sharif's whirlwind visit aims to reaffirm Pakistan's unwavering support for Saudi Arabia's security while advocating for diplomatic solutions to end the conflict swiftly. Pakistan desires a quick resolution to the Iran-related ordeal, as prolonged instability exacerbates its own economic and security challenges. This high-stakes diplomacy highlights testing times for Pakistan, balancing alliances in a volatile region where neutrality grows increasingly difficult. The outcome of discussions could shape Islamabad's role in the unfolding Middle East crisis. Pakistan also wants Saudi Arabia to rollover its deposit for next 10 years, a proposal the Kingdom has yet to approve. The Saudi government had also promised Pakistan to invest another \$ 10 billion in refinery project in Gwadar, but that plan is still pending. The roll-over, refinery and other projects now are chiefly linked to Pakistan's future relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

## US to permanently close its Peshawar consulate: reports

FROM PAGE 01  
The Independent said. It added that the notification said consular services for American citizens and others would be handled by the embassy in Islamabad about 184 kilometres away. "The closure would not adversely affect the mission's ability to advance core US national interests, assist US citizens, or to conduct adequate oversight of foreign assistance programs because all of those functions would continue to be performed by US Embassy Islamabad," it said. Earlier this month, the US State Department said it had ordered non-emergency personnel at American consulates in Karachi and Lahore and their families to leave Pakistan due to security concerns in the wake of the protests. In a subsequent travel advisory, the US mission said the consulate in Peshawar had temporarily suspended operations.

## Govt may not increase petrol prices

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Highly placed sources told that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently told a consultative session — attended by federal and provincial representatives — that he and the military leadership had jointly decided that after the initial increase, there would be no further price hike, at least in the near future, regardless of the prices in the Middle East. The session, also attended by Field Marshal Asim Munir, was informed that the government would use block allocations for emergencies to absorb further price hikes. The prime minister told the meeting that no other emergency could be worse than what the whole nation was facing at the moment because of fuel supply disruptions. However, the sources said the cabinet members were still divided over the prime minister's announcement and technocrats, particularly those directly dealing with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), opposed disturbing the pricing buffers currently in place.

## Italian Olympian revives sports dream with Para snowboard gold

*"When that dream (to go to the Olympics) vanished, to go there, I just wanted to have a normal life because I didn't feel I could be classified (in the Paralympics)," he said*

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO: Italian Para snowboarder Emanuel Perathoner thought his sporting dreams were over in 2021, when a severe knee injury shattered his hopes of competing at the Beijing Olympics the following year. But on Sunday at the Cortina Para Snowboard Park, he stood on the podium in front of a crowd packed with his compatriots, a gold medal around his neck, as his proud parents looked on. He was the new Paralympic snowboard cross champion, and the first Italian to win gold at the Milan Cortina Paralympic Games.

"It's amazing to win here, in front of the home crowd, in front of my family, to hear all the crowd cheering," the 39-year-old said. Two-time Olympian Perathoner competed in snowboard cross until a crash on a short jump ended his Olympic career. What followed was a grueling period of knee replacement surgeries, a year of rehabilitation and several months on crutches. Despite the prognosis, Perathoner said he had initially hoped to make it to the Olympics. But as his recovery stretched further, he began to contemplate life out-

side top-level sport. "When that dream (to go to the Olympics) vanished, to go there, I just wanted to have a normal life because I didn't feel I could be classified (in the Paralympics)," he said. But Perathoner was mistaken, finding out he was eligible as an SB-LL2 snowboarder — a Para athlete with less severe leg impairments. So, he began his journey to represent Italy in 2026. "I never was negative when I got injured. I was searching for a goal. And now I'm here," he said. His extensive experience appeared to give him a boost on the slopes

in Cortina d'Ampezzo, as he romped to victory in his races, winning the final comfortably. Coming from the Olympics, Perathoner conceded that he had to overcome some initial preconceived notions about the Paralympics. Competing, he said, has given him a different perspective on the sporting event. "At first when I was competing at the Paralympics, I was comparing it (with the Olympics), but I'm not comparing it anymore, I'm just living my second career and loving it," he said. "It's a nice thing about a new career, you can start all over." — APP

## Real Madrid run riot as Valverde treble stuns Man City

MADRID: Federico Valverde's superb first-half hat-trick helped Real Madrid demolish Manchester City 3-0 in a surprise Champions League last 16 first leg rout on Wednesday. Los Blancos were missing several key players including Kylian Mbappe but Uruguayan midfielder Valverde's stunning treble, netted inside a 22-minute spell, crushed Pep Guardiola's team at the Santiago Bernabeu. Vinicius Junior missed a penalty in the second half as Madrid could have built further on their significant lead ahead of the second leg in Manchester next Tuesday. Even though Madrid are the record 15-time winners, their sketchy form offered little reason to believe they would pull off such a dominant result in what has become a modern Champions League classic. City, who won the competition for the first and only time in 2023, even beat Madrid in the league phase and have strengthened since then. However the Spanish giants produced their most convincing display of the season just when it mattered most to leave the Premier League

visitors stunned. "It was incredible, you dream of nights like this," Valverde told Movistar. "It's been a long time since I enjoyed a game like this. I'm really happy but above all because the team won." Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa, shorn of injured stars Mbappe, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo Goes among several others, started 18-year-old midfielder Thiago Pitarch after some recent bright displays. Arbeloa said he was expecting a surprise or two from former Barca coach Guardiola, and the Catalan selected a particularly attacking line-up, seeking to capitalize on the frailties Madrid have exhibited this season. Antoine Semenyo and Marc Guehi made their Champions League debuts and for an all-too-brief period City seemed to be settling in at the Bernabeu, before they unraveled. "Now it feels really bad, now it feels really dark," City midfielder Bernardo Silva told TNT Sports. "Tomorrow is another day and for sure next week we will go to the game thinking we have a chance." Madrid took the lead

against the run of play when Courtois thumped a long ball down the pitch in Valverde's direction. Nico O'Reilly misjudged it and the Madrid midfielder blazed through on goal. City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma came out to try and stop him but Valverde nipped around him and rolled home in the 20th minute. Seven minutes later Madrid's captain struck again. Vinicius Junior fed the midfielder who coolly drilled past Donnarumma to double the hosts' lead. After a difficult first half of the season, consigned to playing at right-back mostly under Xabi Alonso, Arbeloa's arrival in January has unleashed Valverde. The 27-year-old snatched a last-gasp winner at Celta Vigo in La Liga on Friday and said that victory was one which had raised the team's morale. It appeared he was grasping for optimism ahead of the City clash in which most imagined Madrid to be underdogs, but Los Blancos played like a side who had found belief again. Valverde completed a first career hat-trick before half-time with the best of his three strikes. Valverde neatly flicked Bra-

him Diaz's pass over the helpless Guehi and then volleyed home with aplomb as the Bernabeu crowd roared in delight. Finally they saw a Madrid they recognized, dynamic and, above all, competitive. Diaz nearly netted a fourth soon after half-time but Donnarumma denied him, with City continuing to struggle after the interval. Vinicius should have, after the Italian goalkeeper brought him down in the box, but Donnarumma read the Brazilian's intentions and saved his low penalty. Man City's top scorer Haaland was kept quiet all night by Madrid center-backs Antonio Rudiger and Dean Huijsen, with Guardiola replacing him even while chasing a goal. Instead City's best chance to pull one back fell to O'Reilly as Pitarch's focus waned, but Courtois made a stunning reaction save with his leg to deny him and secure a precious clean sheet. "The feelings we were getting from outside were not of much confidence in this team, (but) we showed we're Real Madrid and you can never count us out," a proud Arbeloa told Movistar. — APP

## HBL PSL 11 Trophy unveiled

KARACHI: The trophy of the HBL Pakistan Super League 11 was unveiled in a ceremony held at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, marking the beginning of a new era for the country's marquee T20 tournament. The unveiling ceremony was attended by HBL PSL Chief Executive Officer Salman Naseer, representatives of all eight teams, officials from title sponsor HBL, representatives of Hanif Jewellers and members of the media. The trophy designed and manufactured by Hanif Jewellers, has been handcrafted by 18 master artisans who devoted more than 2,600 hours to complete the masterpiece. The design reflects the journey and growth of the HBL Pakistan Super League over the past decade. At the base of the trophy, eight emerald-cut Gemstones represent the colours of the eight HBL PSL franchises, symbolising the pride of the cities they represent. The tall structure of the trophy signifies discipline, determination and teamwork required to reach the pinnacle of the competition, while the Crescent and Star at the top reflect unity, hope and national pride. The trophy is adorned with more than 1,600 Gemstones, highlighting the craftsmanship and attention to detail that went into its creation. Speaking at the ceremony, HBL PSL Chief Executive Officer Salman Naseer said, "This is a historic occasion for the HBL Pakistan Super League as we step into a new era after successfully completing 10 seasons. Over the years, the league has grown stronger with the addition of new teams, record-breaking player auctions, landmark broadcast agreements and ever-increasing support from fans across Pakistan and around the world. "We are grateful to HBL for standing with the Pakistan Super League from day one and playing a vital role in its success. I would also like to thank our franchise owners for their continued trust and commitment and Hanif Jewellers for crafting a magnificent trophy that truly reflects the prestige and ambition of this league." The 11th edition will feature eight teams and 44 matches across six venues with the opening match set to take place between defending champions Lahore Qalandars and Hyderabad Kingsmen on Thursday, 26 March. — Agencies

## Football: Kobe join Machida in ACLE last 8 as Hiroshima go out

KOBE: Vissel Kobe reached the Asian Champions League Elite quarterfinals the other day after beating FC Seoul 2-1 on the night and 3-1 on aggregate, but Sanfrecce Hiroshima went out 3-2 overall against Johor Darul Ta'zim despite their 1-0 second-leg win. Kobe joined fellow J-League side Machida Zelvia in the last eight after the ACLE debutants beat Gangwon FC of South Korea 1-0 at home in their second leg on Tuesday, with Hotaka Nakamura heading home the only goal over two legs in the 25th minute. After Kobe had won the first leg 1-0 away a week ago, Seoul's Patryk Klimala brought the tie level in the 20th minute at Noevir Stadium by nodding in from close range. But halftime substitute Yuya Osako got the crucial goal for Kobe in the 78th minute when the 35-year-old slid home his fellow former Japan forward Yoshinori Muto's cross from the right at the far post. "I got injured in the first match of the J-League season and have caused my team trouble," Osako said. "I was determined to definitely get a goal coming on from the second half and I'm glad to have done that." Yosuke Ideguchi sealed the comeback win on the night after intercepting Seoul keeper Gu Sung Yun's pass and lobbing the ball into the net from 20 meters out. Hiroshima came into the match at Edion Peace Wing Hiroshima having lost the first leg 3-1 away to Malaysia, where they went down to 10 men after defender Kim Ju Sung was sent off in the 26th minute. The J1 side had to wait until Kosuke Kinoshita's 90th-minute penalty for a breakthrough in the second leg at home. But their win on the night was not enough to help them progress. — Agencies

## Carlos Alcaraz powers into Indian Wells quarter-finals; Draper upsets Djokovic

CALIFORNIA: World number one Carlos Alcaraz continued his dominant run at Indian Wells, beating Norway's Casper Ruud 6-1 7-6(2), while Jack Draper upset world number three Novak Djokovic 4-6 6-4 7-6(5) on Wednesday to reach the quarter-finals in the California desert. Alcaraz relied on a near-flawless service game to seize control of the match, racing through the opening set in just 37 minutes after breaking Ruud's serve three times. Thirteenth-seeded Ruud raised his level in the second set and forced a tiebreak, hoping to push the match to a decider, but Alcaraz kept his foot on the gas to seal his 15th consecutive victory of the season to reach the quarter-finals for a fifth straight year. "The conditions were difficult to be honest. Today the ball was tough to control but we both played great," two-time champion Alcaraz said in his on-court interview. "My first set was incredible I'm really happy of playing that kind of level, really happy to get through and hopefully I'll play this level on the next round." Alcaraz will next face 2021 champion Cameron Norrie, who earlier beat Australia's Rinky Hijikata 6-4 6-2, with the Spaniard looking to avenge a defeat to the Briton at last year's Paris Masters. Defending champion Draper claimed one of the biggest wins of his career by beating Djokovic in a deciding-set tie-break after two hours and 35 minutes. Draper, who trailed after dropping the opener 6-4, stormed into the second set by breaking Djokovic early and surviving multiple break points before sealing it with

aggressive baseline play. Djokovic won a stunning 26-shot rally at 30-all in the opening game of the decider, but Draper surged to leads of 3-1 and 5-3 before the 38-year-old Serb battled back to 5-5 and then broke the Briton as he first served for the match. The 24-year-old kept his composure, forced the tie-break and dominated it to close out a statement victory. "I still don't feel like I'm playing anywhere near the way I want to play," Draper said in an on-court interview. "I came out here tonight and I won that match through determination and trying to problem-solve and do my best and have a great attitude. "I'm proud of the way I regrouped. I haven't been playing on the tour (in) a long time, so to put away guys who are top players, it's something that comes with confidence." Draper will next face Russian 11th seed Daniil Medvedev, who beat Alex Michelsen 6-2 6-4 in a commanding performance, needing just one hour and 27 minutes to dismantle the American and maintain his strong form after winning last month's Dubai Open. World number two Iga Swiatek delivered a dominant 6-2 6-0 victory over Czech 13th seed Karolina Muchova, reeling off 10 consecutive games to secure her fifth win over the Czech, whom she also beat at the same stage of the tournament last year. "I felt I was playing better and better, just great," Swiatek said. "I love playing here ... It's a great place to play tennis, hopefully I can keep doing that until the end." Swiatek, chasing a third Indian Wells title, will face ninth seed Elena Svitolina in the quarter-finals after the Ukrainian advanced when Katerina Siniakova retired injured. — APP

## Pakistan playing role of 'bridge builder'...

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"shuttling communications between Tehran and Riyadh to try to ease tensions". "Has that been Pakistan's role between Tehran and any other country?" the FO spokesperson was asked. In response, Andrabi said: "As regards the communication that we may have between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries — yes, we have had an open channel of communication." He then recounted the phone calls that PM Shehbaz and Dar had held with dignitaries in other countries, saying "there is a level of exchange of communication". "We are playing the role of a bridge builder. Our principal position on issues regarding sovereignty, international law and the UN Charter, and on dialogue and diplomacy, is respected in all regional capitals. So, this allows us to exercise a channel of communication between the relevant capitals," he added. Responding to other questions on this matter, he reiterated that Pakistan had "undertaken a high-level exchange between relevant states", and added that Islamabad's engagements with the US also continued. "There are various levels of engagement. You may recall that the foreign secretary had a telephone conversation with the US under secretary of state. Various other levels of diplomatic engagement continue with the US, and we will keep you updated on these developments as and when they happen," Andrabi said. He also mentioned that Pakistan had been "in touch with the State Department through our embassy in Washington. The US embassy here is also in touch. So, yes, these dialogues are ongoing". The FO spokesperson also said that PM Shehbaz had held a phone call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday and exchanged Ramadan greetings. "The prime minister offered condolences on the martyrdom of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei," he said, adding that in a follow-up to his letter to Mojtaba Khamenei — who has been elected the new supreme leader of Iran — the prime minister congratulated the Iranian president on Mojtaba's assumption of this "onerous responsibility". PM Shehbaz expressed hope that Iran would enjoy peace, stability, dignity, and prosperity in the years ahead, Andrabi added.

## Nehal Hashmi becomes...

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him on his proposed appointment as the governor. Once approved by the president, Hashmi will formally assume the office of the governor of Sindh and replace MQM-P's Kamran Khan Tessori. Speculation about a change in the Sindh governorship has been circulating for some time, as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which rules Sindh, was reportedly unhappy with Tessori's tenure. Meanwhile, the MQM-P began consultations over the government's decision to replace Tessori with Hashmi. According to sources, senior leaders of MQM-P are holding internal discussions to review the situation and formulate the party's stance. The sources added that the party is expected to issue its official reaction after completing internal consultations. Hailing from Karachi's Malir, Hashmi has been associated with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for several years. He served as adviser to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on law and justice from 1997 to 1999. In 2012, he served as the president of PML-N's Karachi chapter. Two years later, in August 2014, Hashmi, a lawyer by profession, was appointed general secretary of the party's Sindh chapter. In 2015, Hashmi — considered an active party worker — was elected as a Senate candidate of PML-N from a seat allocated to Punjab. His party membership was suspended in 2017 and later restored in 2021.

## Mekayial, Laplacette shine in President of Pakistan Polo Cup

FG Polo showed superior tactical coordination from the start, consistently increasing their lead in every chukker. The match began with a balanced exchange, as Amirreza Behbudi opened the account for DP/MP with a 30-yard penalty, followed by a field goal from Facundo Retamar

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The 5th President of Pakistan Polo Cup 2026 for the National Open Polo Championship, sponsored by Sarsabz and Kingdom Valley, got underway with a dominant performance by FG Polo, who outpaced Diamond Paints/Master Paints (DP/MP) by a convincing margin of 13-5 in the opening match at Jinnah Polo Fields. FG Polo's offensive charge was led by Mekayial Sami and Raul Laplacette, both of whom hammered in five goals each. Marcos Rivarola provided vital support with three goals. For Diamond Paints/Master Paints, Facundo Retamar scored three goals, while Amirreza Behbudi contributed two. The match drew a large number of spectators and families. Distinguished guests in attendance included Mian Abbas Mukhtar (Director, Sarsabz Pakistan), Club Secretary Major Adil Rao (Retd), Executive Committee member Sufi Muhammad Haroon, and several polo players. FG Polo showed superior tactical coordination from the start, consistently increasing their lead in every chukker. The match be-



gan with a balanced exchange, as Amirreza Behbudi opened the account for DP/MP with a 30-yard penalty, followed by a field goal from Facundo Retamar. However, FG Polo's Raul Laplacette responded with a swift field goal to keep the score close. FG Polo began to assert control in the second chukker. Marcos Rivarola and Raul Laplacette both found the back of the net with accurate field goals, putting DP/MP on the defensive. The third chukker proved to be the highest-scoring one of the match, featuring six goals. FG Polo's Mekayial Sami and Raul Laplacette were relentless, scoring two goals each. DP/MP attempted to stay in the contest through Facundo Retamar (60-yard penalty) and Amirreza Behbudi, but FG Polo ended the chukker with a significant lead. The fifth and final chukker saw both teams trading 30-yard penalties. Amirreza Behbudi scored his second for DP/MP, while Mekayial Sami rounded off a stellar individual performance with his fifth goal of the day, finalising the scoreline at 13-5 in favour of FG Polo. The match was officiated by umpires Nicanor Bruz Tacchetti and Tito Ruiz Guimazu.

## Briefs

## Azerbaijan, Indonesia to set up working group in agri sphere

BAKU: Majnun Mammadov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Agriculture, met with Berlian Helmy, Indonesia's Ambassador to the country. Minister Majnun Mammadov briefed the ambassador on Azerbaijan's state support for the agricultural sector. He noted that ongoing agricultural reforms in the country are designed to further advance the sector, with various government support measures being implemented to achieve this goal. The meeting focused on expanding agricultural cooperation, establishing a Working Group, boosting trade in high-export-potential products, enhancing business ties, supporting Indonesian entrepreneurs' participation in Azerbaijan's Agriculture Exhibition, transferring modern technologies, and implementing research and education programs.—APP

## Gold price falls by Rs 2,900 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat gold per tola decreased by Rs 2,900 on Thursday and was sold at Rs 540,362 against its sale at Rs 543,262 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 declined by Rs 2,486 to Rs 463,273 from Rs 465,759, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went down by Rs 2,279 to Rs 424,682 from Rs 426,961. The rates of silver also witnessed a decrease as the price of per tola silver fell by Rs 179 to Rs 9,175 from Rs 9,354, while the price of 10 grams of silver dropped by Rs 153 to Rs 7,866 from Rs 8,019. In the international market, the price of gold decreased by \$29 to \$5,176 from \$5,205, whereas the price of silver declined by \$1.79 to \$86.91 from \$88.70, the association reported.—APP

## Rupee gains 03 paise against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD, Mar 12 (AP): The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 03 paise against the US Dollar in inter-bank trading and closed at Rs 279.32 compared to the previous day's closing at Rs 279.35. According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 279.10 and Rs 280.4, respectively. The price of the Euro against the Rupee decreased by Rs 1.81 to close at Rs 322.68 from the previous day's close of Rs 324.49, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs 1.75, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a decline of Rs 1.04 and closed at Rs 374.11 compared to the previous day's Rs 375.15. The exchange rate of the Emiratis Dirham lost 01 paise to close at Rs 76.05 and the Saudi Riyal remained unchanged and closed at Rs 74.43.—APP

## Belarus, Russia discuss priorities for scientific coop

MINSK: Promising areas of bilateral scientific and technical cooperation were discussed during a working meeting between Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (NASB) Aleksei Trukhanov and Minister of Science, Higher Education, and Scientific and Technological Development of Russia's Arkhangelsk Oblast Aleksei Aksyonov, BeTFA learned from the NASB press service. The meeting also addressed the implementation of joint projects, including those in ecology and environmental management. In particular, the discussion focused on genetic and selective forest reproduction, production of sorbents based on raw materials from peat deposits in Arkhangelsk Oblast, genome modification of plants to increase productivity and improve consumer characteristics, and research into environmental pollution by microplastics. Attending the meeting also were Oleg Baranov, Academic Secretary of the NASB Department of Biological Sciences.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of blooming flowers on trees at green belt in front of CDA office in the Federal Capital.

## Pak-Qatar for enhancing food security partnership

Minister Jam Kamal Khan assured that Pakistan is taking steps to ensure its exporters remain competitive and responsive to the needs of the Qatari market, adding that new mechanisms are being introduced to facilitate improved pricing and supply arrangements.

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan held a virtual meeting with Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs of the State of Qatar, to discuss ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation, food security coordination and investment opportunities between the two brotherly countries. During the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Qatar relations and agreed to further expand economic engagement and cooperation between the two countries. The Qatari minister emphasized the importance of encouraging greater interaction between the business communities of both countries in order to further strengthen economic ties, said a release

issued here on Thursday. A key focus of the discussion was enhancing Pakistan's exports of rice and other food products to Qatar. Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed highlighted that rice remains an important component of Qatar's food security program and national food strategy, and expressed interest in increasing imports from Pakistan. Minister Jam Kamal Khan assured that Pakistan is taking steps to ensure its exporters remain competitive and responsive to the needs of the Qatari market, adding that new mechanisms are being introduced to facilitate improved pricing and supply arrangements. Both sides agreed that relevant departments and officials will coordinate closely to facilitate direct engagement between Pakistani exporters and Qatari

importers. In addition to food supply cooperation, the two sides discussed investment opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in infrastructure, logistics and energy sectors. Projects such as Karachi port expansion and other strategic initiatives were highlighted as potential areas for collaboration. The Qatari side welcomed the proposals shared by Pakistan and indicated that relevant authorities, including the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), would review them. During the discussion, Minister Jam Kamal Khan also expressed Pakistan's concern over the evolving regional situation and conveyed solidarity with the leadership and people of Qatar. The Commerce Minister noted that Pakistan supports all diplomatic efforts aimed at

de-escalation and regional peace, adding that the Prime Minister has been actively engaging with regional partners and friendly countries to encourage constructive dialogue and stability. Both ministers also agreed to activate the Pakistan-Qatar Joint Task Force to accelerate progress on economic cooperation and investment initiatives. It was decided that the task force will soon hold a virtual meeting to review proposals, strengthen coordination and facilitate greater private sector participation. The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their commitment to expanding cooperation and investment while exchanging best wishes for the remaining days of Ramadan and the upcoming blessed nights.—DNA

## Oil jumps 5% as Iran escalates attacks on Gulf shipping

LONDON: Oil prices rose sharply on Thursday as Iran stepped up attacks on oil and transport facilities across the Middle East, fueling concerns of a prolonged conflict and potential disruptions to oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz. Brent futures climbed \$4.89, or 5.32 percent, to \$96.87 a barrel at 2:24 p.m. Saudi time, having hit \$100 per barrel in earlier trading, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was up \$4.26, or 4.88 percent, to \$91.51. Brent hit \$119.50 a barrel on Monday, its highest since mid-2022, then dropped after US President Donald Trump said the Iran war could be over soon. The war in the Middle East is causing the biggest oil-supply disruption in the history of global markets, the International Energy Agency said on Thursday, a day after approving the release of a record volume of 400 million barrels of oil from strategic stockpiles. Middle East Gulf countries have cut total oil production by at least 10 million barrels per day — a volume equalling almost 10 percent of world demand — as a result of the conflict, the agency said in its latest monthly oil market report. The market pricing is taking the IEA release with a pinch of salt, as its timeline is not established, PVM analyst John Evans said, adding that it is presumed to span 90 days, equating to approximately 4.5 million barrels per day. Goldman Sachs forecasts Brent crude to average \$98 per barrel in March and April before declining to \$71 by the fourth quarter, but warns that in an upside-risk scenario, where flows through the strait are disrupted for a month, the March and April average could surge to \$110. "The only way to see oil prices trade lower on a sustained basis is by getting oil flowing through the Strait of Hormuz," ING analysts said. "Failing to do so means that the market highs are still ahead of us.—Agencies

## China imports reached 3.11 trillion, surge year-on-year

BEIJING: China's foreign trade has begun the year with unusual vigour. In the first two months alone, the country's trade in goods returns to the "double digit era", recording a 18.3% surge year-on-year. Imports reached 3.11 trillion yuan, up 17.1%, China Economic Net reported on Thursday. A defining feature of China's latest trade boom is diversification. In the first two months of the year, total trade between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reached 1.24 trillion yuan, up 20.3%. Trade with the European Union climbed 19.9% to 998.9 billion yuan. Commerce with Belt and Road countries rose 20% to 4.02 trillion yuan. "Robust global demand is certainly something we shouldn't neglect. South Korea and Vietnam, saw double-digit export growth as well," Tianchen Xu, Senior Economist from the Economist Intelligence Unit told China Economic Net. Behind the headline figures lies a shift in the composition of exports. High-tech products exported from China rose 26.9% in the first two months of the year. Mechanical and electrical goods—long the backbone of the country's export sector—reached 2.89 trillion yuan, increasing 24.3% and accounting for a growing share of overall shipments. Robotics illustrates the trend. In 2025 Chinese-made intelligent handling robots and welding robots were widely deployed in overseas infrastructure and transport projects, with export growth exceeding 60%. Optical transceiver modules used in high-end graphics processors—critical for data centres and artificial-intelligence workloads—also recorded export growth approaching 60%. China is also supplying hardware for the world's expanding digital infrastructure. Exports of large transformers, energy-storage batteries and other electrical equipment rose 18.8%, reflecting booming demand from global data centres and energy systems. "China is among the largest importers of iron ore, copper and crude oil, and robust exports feeds into import demand as well," Xu expressed. Increasingly, the country's imports mirror its technological ambitions. Rapid development in autonomous driving has driven lidar imports up by more than 20%, while demand for artificial-intelligence computing power lifted computer component imports by 20%. In the first two months of this year, imports of mechanical and electrical products reached 1.21 trillion yuan, up 21.3%, pushed by strong demand for electronic components and computer parts that support industrial upgrading. Commodity imports remain steady as well. China imported 210 million tonnes of iron ore, up 10%, and 96.9 million tonnes of crude oil, an increase of 15.8%. This pattern—importing raw materials and intermediate inputs while exporting industrial goods—has become a hallmark of China's economic ties with other developing economies, providing resource exporters in the Global South with a reliable market while supplying them with affordable manufactured products, lowering the costs of industrialisation. According to China's Ministry of Commerce, China's imports from more than 130 countries and regions recorded growth in 2025, while the country became a major export destination for nearly 80 economies worldwide. Trade flows are also reshaping the global financial landscape. Data from China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange show that cross-border yuan settlements rose by 24.8% last year. The currency's share in China's cross-border trade payments has climbed from 16% in 2020 to nearly 30% in 2025. The world's laboratory: International businesses with operations in China are feeling the momentum more directly. Foreign-invested enterprises recorded 2.2 trillion yuan in imports and exports in the first two months of the year, an increase of 15.3%. In 2025, China established 70,392 new foreign-funded firms, up 19.1% from the previous year, with strong inflows into e-commerce services, medical equipment manufacturing and aerospace industries.—DNA

## War threatens food supplies in Asia as fertilizer prices soar

RIYADH: How could a missile strike on a Qatari gas facility drive up the price of rice in Bangladesh? The answer lies in an unappealing commodity, yet one that forms a significant part of the world's food supply: fertilizer. Qatar burns natural gas to produce ammonia, which is then converted into urea. Urea is added to the soil, where grain is grown. According to the South China Morning Post, disrupting the first step, as Iran did when it struck QatarEnergy's liquefied natural gas processing facility on March 1, will have cascading effects along the food production chain. The price of urea in Southeast Asia has jumped by more than 40 percent since the Qatari LNG plant went offline. By March 9, prices for April and May shipments had surpassed \$700 per tonne, their highest level since the third quarter of 2022, when the Russia-Ukraine War disrupted global supplies. The Gulf region currently accounts for about 45 percent of global urea exports. But the Iranian attacks have made passage through the Strait of Hormuz extremely risky. As a result, shipments representing about one-third of the world's fertilizer trade have been halted, with Asia being among the most vulnerable regions. To estimate by analytics firm Signal Ocean, between 3 and 4 million tonnes of fertilizer per month will not reach markets as long as the Strait of Hormuz remains closed. The impact will be particularly severe on South Asia. Pakistan imports most of its LNG from Qatar and

the UAE, while Qatar supplies India with more than 40 percent of its LNG imports and about two-thirds of Bangladesh's. All 32 ammonia plants in India — one of the world's largest producers of nitrogen fertilizers — run on gas. According to Indian media reports, one plant has shut down due to shortages, while three others have reduced production. CRU Group vice president of market intelligence and pricing Chris Lawson believes the three South Asian countries will have to "pay a very high price" for fertilizers if they can obtain them on the open market. If they cannot, it will ultimately affect their upcoming harvests. Timing is crucial, as farmers in northern India and Pakistan typically fertilize their summer monsoon crops, such as rice, sugarcane, corn, and cotton, between April and July. CRU Group estimates that if the disruption to Gulf supplies continues until early April, South Asian buyers could need up to 1.5 million tonnes of additional supply per month. That makes managing this impending crisis even more difficult is that its effects are not immediate. Fertilizers not purchased in March do not necessarily mean empty shelves in April, but rather a decline in crops in August, by which time the season will be over and nothing can be done about it. In an analysis distributed to clients earlier this month, CRU Group warned that if the Gulf crisis continues beyond March 20, "the main risk will shift to wider supply disruptions" due to restricted ex-

port routes and limited storage capacity. Even if tensions subside, restarting idle production capacity will take an additional two weeks, resulting in a "significant reduction" in Middle East supplies until at least late March. Disruptions of this magnitude have triggered a chain reaction in the past, according to Signal Ocean. Farmers use less fertilizer, marginal land requiring more inputs is left uncultivated, and producers switch to crops with lower nitrogen requirements. For example, soybeans may replace corn, leading to a surplus in one market and a shortage in another. If enough producers abandon corn cultivation, animal feed will become scarce and prices will rise, followed by higher prices for farmed meat and fish. According to Signal Ocean, India and China are the most vulnerable to supply disruptions, as each relies on the Gulf for approximately 20 percent of its fertilizer imports. The company explained that the likely outcome would be lower global crop yields, higher feed and food prices, and increased volatility in agricultural commodity markets. Alternative exporters, most notably the US and Brazil, may attempt to compensate for some of the shortfall, but the company indicated that the timing and scale of this response will be crucial in determining the severity of the impact. For individual farmers at the periphery of supply chains, the effects could be devastating, according to Alexandra Brand, vice president of sustainability.—DNA

## Tallest Saudi flagpole installed in Makkah

MAKKAH: The Holy Makkah Municipality completed the installation of the tallest Saudi flagpole in Makkah, standing at over 80 meters on Prince Mohammed bin Salman Road in celebration of Saudi Flag Day, observed annually on March 11. The initiative reflects the status and national symbolism of the Saudi flag and expresses pride in the banner of monotheism that represents the Kingdom's identity and its deeply rooted values. The installation coincided with a national event organized by the municipality titled "A Flag Bearing the Message of Monotheism and the History of a Nation" at Makkah Yard The event featured interactive activities and accompanying events targeting various segments of society to enhance national awareness and reinforce the values of belonging and pride in national symbols, while introducing visitors to the history of the Saudi flag and its deep religious and national significance.—APP

## 8 killed in Israeli strike on central Beirut

BEIRUT: An Israeli strike on central Beirut's seafront killed eight people early on Thursday, Lebanon's health ministry said, another attack in the heart of the capital, as Iran-backed Hezbollah launched more missiles at Israel. The Israeli military said separately it had carried out strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs overnight against Hezbollah, which had announced a major new operation against Israel. In a statement, the Lebanese health ministry said "the Israeli enemy strike on Ramlet Al-Bayda" in the center of Beirut killed eight people and wounded 31.

An AFP correspondent at the scene saw a damaged motorcycle and two damaged cars, with the area sealed off by security forces. Blood stains were on the sidewalk, with a small hole in the ground "We saw dead people on the ground," said Aseel Habbaj, a displaced woman who had been sheltering in a nearby tent after fleeing Israeli bombings in other areas of Lebanon. "We were all asleep in my tent, when suddenly we heard a noise," Habbaj told AFP. "We jumped up and went to see what was happening," before a second strike wounded her husband. Her 40-year-old neighbor Dalal Al-Sayed said she had opted to pitch her tent at the seaside after fleeing attacks in southern Lebanon "because the last thing we expected was Israel to hit Beirut." Her family could not afford to rent apartments, she said.—APP

## World faces largest-ever oil supply disruption on ME war

LONDON: The war in the Middle East is creating the biggest oil supply disruption in history, the International Energy Agency said on Thursday, a day after the agency agreed to release a record volume of oil from strategic stockpiles. Global supply is expected to drop by 8 million barrels per day in March due to the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow channel along the Iranian coast, since the US and Israel began a campaign of airstrikes on Iran on Feb. 28. Middle East Gulf countries have cut total oil production by at least 10 million bpd — a volume equal to almost 10 percent of world demand — as a result of the conflict, the IEA said in its latest monthly oil market report, adding that without a rapid restart of shipping flows these losses were set to increase. "Shut-in upstream production will take weeks and, in some cases, months to return to pre-crisis levels depending on the degree of field complexity and the timing for workers, equipment and resources to return to the region," the agency said.—APP

## Briefs

**Barhan arrests four for spaying for Iran**

DNA

MANAMA: Bahrain has detained four citizens suspected of spying for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as Tehran's retaliatory strikes on Gulf states show no signs of letting up. Bahrain's General Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Forensic Science identified the four detainees as Murtadha Hussain Awal, 25; Ahmed Isa Al Haiki, 34; Sarah Abdulnabi Marhoon, 36; and Elias Salman Mirza, 22. A fifth suspect, Ali Mohammed Hassan Al Shaikh, 25, remains at large abroad. Investigators said Murtadha Hussain and his cohorts, acting on IRGC instructions, used high-resolution equipment to photograph and record coordinates of vital locations in Bahrain, transmitting the data to the IRGC via encrypted software. The arrests come as Iran escalates attacks across the Gulf. Bahrain's Interior Ministry issued an advisory urging residents in Hidd, Arad, Qalali and Samaheej to stay indoors and seal windows against smoke from fires sparked by Iranian strikes. Fuel tanks at a facility in Muharraq Governorate, northeast of Manama, were among the targets. Oman's Port of Salalah also battled blazes at fuel storage tanks following separate Iranian drone strikes. Elsewhere in the region, two Iranian drones struck near Dubai International Airport, wounding four people, though flights continued uninterrupted.

**Ukraine war echoes in Hungarian elections**

DNA

BUDAPESH: War-torn Ukraine "will stop at nothing" to prevent Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party winning the upcoming Hungarian elections, the Hungarian government claims. Physical violence against the prime minister and his family, and attacks or sabotage of key energy installations, are being prepared, ministers allege. The Ukrainian government, in turn, accuses its Hungarian counterpart of whipping up a hate campaign against it to frighten Hungarians into voting Fidesz back into office. The Financial Times reported on Wednesday morning that the Social Design Agency, a Kremlin-linked media consultancy firm, was preparing a mass disinformation campaign in Hungary, to bolster Orbán and discredit the opposition Tiszta Party and its leader, Peter Magyar. With just 30 days to go until the parliamentary election in Hungary, some analysts believe the anti-Ukraine hysteria proves that Orbán is panicking in the face of probable defeat.

## China positions itself as force for global stability

But for the world's second largest economy, its growing rivalry with the United States revolves around a different battle: the development of the cutting-edge technologies shaping the 21st century

DNA

BEIJING: While much of the world's attention is on the Iran war, that hasn't stopped China from moving ahead with national priorities with global repercussions. Not that China doesn't care about the war and its impact on energy supplies and geopolitics. But for the world's second largest economy, its growing rivalry with the United States revolves around a different battle: the development of the cutting-edge technologies shaping the 21st century. That message came through in a five-year plan formally endorsed Thursday by the National People's Congress at the end of its annual meeting, the nation's biggest political event of the year. If anything, China is doubling down on a push to transform its economy and be at the forefront of technology. State media described China's determination to stay the course on economic development as a force for stability in an uncertain world.

"A stable and developing China injects more stability and certainty into a world fraught with change and turbulence," the official People's Daily newspaper said in a front-page column on Wednesday. Other state-media echoed that view. The commentaries and official statements didn't mention US President Donald Trump, whose tariffs and use of military force from Venezuela to Iran are shaking up the global order that has governed international relations in the post-World War II era. China publicly defends that system, while calling for making it more equitable to reflect the interests of developing countries as well as rich ones. Trump is due to visit Beijing in three weeks to hold talks with his counterpart, Chinese leader Xi Jinping. The National People's Congress also rubber-stamped three laws, including one governing ethnic minorities, at its closing session. The votes are ceremonial and nearly unanimous, designed to show unity behind the ruling Communist Party's vision for the nation. The five-year plan was approved with 2,758 votes in favor, one against, and two abstentions.

## Escalating Middle East War

# Iran accuses enemies of targeting civilians

Despite heavy bombardment killing senior leaders including former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Iranian officials insisted the government remains stable and not at risk of collapse

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran intensified its retaliation in the ongoing US-Israel war, launching attacks on merchant vessels in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. At least five to six ships were struck in recent days, including tankers and cargo vessels near Iraq and the UAE, setting some ablaze and halting traffic through the vital chokepoint that carries one-fifth of global oil. Iranian officials claimed the "enemy" - referring to US and Israeli forces - deliberately

## Stocks tumble as Middle East crisis deepens

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Pakistan's benchmark KSE-100 Index closed lower on Thursday, shedding 1,437.04 points, 0.92 per cent, after a highly volatile trading session. The decline followed a turbulent start to the day. At the open, the market had dropped more than 1,700 points by 9:55am before staging a brief recovery, rising 968.93 points later in the morning. During the session, the index recorded an intraday high of 157,080.28 points and a low of 153,503.70 points, highlighting sharp swings in investor sentiment. Trading volume stood at 202,928,283 shares at a value of 20,373,653,824. The top active stocks were led by Haseco Petroleum Limited, which gained 7.71pc to Rs17.46 with a

volume of 38,337,773 shares. It was followed by K-Electric Limited, which rose 1.34pc to Rs7.59 on a volume of 38,053,693 shares, and Dost Steels Limited, which fell 2.48pc to Rs5.50 on 25,149,001 shares. The volatility comes as global oil prices surged more than 9 per cent, pushing crude back above \$100 a barrel after fresh Iranian strikes on energy supplies and infrastructure in the Middle East overshadowed a record stockpile release by the International Energy Agency. Brent crude jumped 9.3pc to \$100.50, while West Texas Intermediate rose 8.8pc to \$94.92 at around 03:05 GMT. Similar volatility was seen in Wednesday's session, when the index ultimately slipped 318.65 points, or 0.2pc, to close in the red after gaining nearly 2,000 points during intraday trading.

ately targeted hospitals, neighborhoods, schools, and civilian infrastructure in Iran. Tehran accused strikes of hitting residential areas, medical facilities, and even a girls' elementary school in Minab, where a preliminary US probe attributed over 175 deaths (mostly children) to a "targeting error" involving outdated intelligence and a Tomahawk missile. Global markets reacted sharply: Brent crude surged past \$100 a barrel - briefly nearing \$120 earlier in the conflict - amid fears of prolonged supply disruptions. Shares slid worldwide as energy concerns deepened. Despite heavy bombardment killing senior leaders including former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Iranian officials insisted the government remains stable and not at risk of collapse. Tehran vowed continued attrition warfare, warning oil could reach \$200 if attacks persist. The conflict, now in its second week, has spread to shipping lanes, with Iran deploying drones, missiles, and possibly mines. US forces reported eliminating Iranian minelayers. Analysts warn of a broader energy crisis unless de-escalation occurs soon.

## Punjab to be made South Asia's AI hub

DNA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has approved Punjab's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) Roadmap, setting an ambitious target to transform the province into South Asia's leading AI-driven region by 2029. Under the initiative, the world's first AI Delivery Unit will be established in Punjab to accelerate the adoption of artificial intelligence across governance and public services. The chief minister will serve as the chairperson of both the AI Delivery Unit and the Special Project Team overseeing the roadmap's implementation. During a briefing on the AI roadmap, Provincial Adviser on AI Ali Dar informed the meeting that the initiative is expected to generate more than 100,000 employment opportunities over the next three years. The programme could also increase Punjab's GDP by 5 to 10 percent and potentially raise foreign exchange reserves by \$10 to \$20 billion through technology-led growth. The roadmap outlines the development of key pillars including AI infrastructure, AI administration, AI citizen services, job skills development, AI-driven economic growth and AI governance. Four cross-functional teams will be established focusing on special projects, data management, strategic operations and strategic communications.

## Govt completes 5 G auction

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan generated \$510 million (Rs142.6 billion) from the landmark auction of Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS) spectrum, while the telecom regulator on Thursday completed the position assignment auction to determine the exact placement of 5G spectrum blocks acquired by operators. The announcement was made by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman during a press briefing alongside Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja following the completion of the multi-band spectrum auction process. He said that 480 MHz of spectrum was sold during the bidding held on March 10, generating \$507 million in revenue, equivalent to about Rs142 billion for the national exchequer. The position assignment held today generated an additional \$3 million following multiple rounds of bidding, bringing the total proceeds to \$510 million (Rs142.6 billion). Describing it as one of the largest spectrum sales globally in terms of volume, the PTA chief said the government had fulfilled its responsibility by conducting the auction, and it was now the telecom operators' turn to transform the spectrum into improved services for consumers.



LAHORE: In Lahore, Tashkent Region Governor Zoir Mirzaev met Punjab's leadership. The regions agreed to become "sister regions," focusing on cooperation in agriculture, textiles, and tourism. This engagement strengthens the economic partnership between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. - DNA

## Iran war unsettles India's packaged water makers

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: The Iran war is rattling India's \$5 billion packaged water market just ahead of the sweltering summer season. One of the world's fastest growing bottled water markets is seeing some manufacturers hike prices for distributors, as supply disruptions linked to the war fuel higher costs in everything from plastic bottles to caps, labels and cardboard boxes. Though retail prices are yet to feel the heat and bigger companies are absorbing the pain, about 2,000 smaller bottled water makers have increased rates for their resellers by around 1 rupee per bottle, a 5 percent hike, which will rise by a further 10 percent in coming days, according to the Federation of All India Packaged Drinking Water Manufacturers' Association. Consumers usually pay less than 20 rupees, or around 20 US cents, for a one-liter bottle. "There is chaos and within the next 4-5 days, this will start impacting customer prices" said Apurva Doshi, the federation's secretary general. Rising oil prices have increased the cost of polymer, which is made from crude oil and is a key material for the industry's plastic bottles.

## Pakistan backs Bahrain, Russia resolution on ME

Russia also presented a draft resolution on the military escalation in the Middle East at the meeting, but it was vetoed by the US

DNA

WASHINGTON: Pakistan has outlined the rationale behind its votes on two competing draft resolutions at the United Nations Security Council, stating that both were aimed at curbing regional escalation and promoting an immediate return to dialogue. On March 11, the Security Council adopted a Bahrain-led resolution condemning recent missile and drone attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran on several Gulf states - including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan - and demanding an immediate cessation of all such attacks. Russia also presented a draft resolution on the military escalation in the Middle East at the meeting, but it was vetoed by the US. The resolution received four votes in favour - from Russia, China, Somalia, and Pakistan - while the United States and Latvia voted against it. Nine members abstained. Explaining Pakistan's vote at a Security Council meeting on the "Situation in the Middle East," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Pakistan's Permanent Representative

to the UN, said Islamabad supported resolutions introduced by both Bahrain and the Russian Federation because each addressed urgent aspects of the crisis. "The consequences of the conflict we are witnessing right now are clear - everyone is impacted," he said, warning that violations of international law threaten peace and calling for an "immediate and complete cessation of hostilities" alongside a return to dialogue. Describing the Gulf states as having supported dialogue and diplomatic engagement during heightened tensions before the conflict erupted, he said they "should not have had to face the worst consequences of war," adding that Pakistan stood in "complete solidarity" with their governments and peoples. He also expressed regret that the Council could not unite behind a comprehensive response to end the conflict, but emphasised the importance of acting in light of "genuine concerns" arising from the deteriorating situation. Pakistan's vote in favour of the Bahrain-drafted resolution, he said, reflected its "strong solidarity" with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan.

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