



# Islamabad POST

Monday, March 16, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

**Pakistan committed to combat trends of Islamophobia**

Detailed News On Page-08

**Sarfraz Ahmed retires from Int'l cricket**

Detailed News On Page-06

**ICC calls for steps to shield economy in war**

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## Briefs

*Punjab govt defends plane purchase*

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: The Punjab government has decided to initiate legal proceedings against individuals and platforms spreading what it described as false claims regarding the use of the provincial government's official aircraft, Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Sunday. Taking to X, the minister said a "deliberate and malicious campaign of lies and fabricated stories" was being carried out by what she termed "known pathological liars and peddlers of fake news" over the use of the Punjab government's official plane. She said the provincial government had decided to approach courts under the Defamation Law 2024 against every individual and platform involved in spreading the alleged disinformation. "Disinformation will no longer go unanswered. Those who think they can malign institutions and mislead the public without consequence should prepare to face the law," she said. She further said that the Punjab government would seek the maximum penalty under the law to send a clear message that "fake news is not journalism but defamation."

*One killed as train derailed*

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI/LAHORE: At least one person died and 13 others were injured on Sunday after Lahore-bound Shalimar Express collided with a goods train at Lakha Road Railway Station in Sindh's Naushahro Feroze district on Sunday, Rescue 1122 said. In a statement, Sindh's Rescue 1122 said a body was recovered from the site, while the injured were rescued and provided with first aid. The rescue service listed the names and ages of the 13 injured, with the wounded aged between 15 and 60 years. Rescue 1122 said its Urban Search and Rescue teams from the Bandhi satellite station had reached the site of the incident soon after receiving the alert. But, Pakistan Railways (PR) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Amir Ali Baloch maintained while speaking to Dawn that no casualties were reported in the incident. Sources earlier told Dawn that as Shalimar Express approached Lakha Road Station, the interlocking system was set such that the train veered toward a loop line, where a goods train was parked.

*UK looking at all options to secure Strait of Hormuz*

NEWS DESK

LONDON: The UK is looking at "any options" - including working with the US and allies - to secure key oil shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz, Ed Miliband has said. It comes after US President Donald Trump on Saturday threatened to open the channel "one way or another" and urged countries including the UK, China, and France to send warships to the waterway. The energy secretary told the BBC it was "very important" that the strait be made safe for shipping, but refused to give details of options being considered by the government. Iran's effective blockage of the strait, one of the world's most important shipping channels, has had a catastrophic impact on global supply chains and energy prices.

## Middle East crisis

# War to continue till Israeli PM killing, says Iran

FM Araghchi denies Iran targeted civilian areas in Middle East, says Tehran ready to help probe attacks

CENTRELINE REPORT

TEHRAN: The escalating US-Israel-Iran war, now in its third week as of March 15, 2026, continues to intensify with direct threats, military strikes, and widening regional implications. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has issued a stark vow to "pursue and kill" Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, labeling him a "child-killing criminal." In statements via Sepah News, the IRGC declared they would continue the pursuit "with full force" if he remains alive, amid rumors and speculation about his status. This threat follows Netanyahu's own warnings and comes as missile exchanges persist. Tehran has escalated warnings to civilians in the United Arab Emirates, urging immediate evacuation of major ports including Jebel Ali (Dubai), Khalifa (Abu Dhabi), and Fujairah. Iranian military statements claim these sites host US "hideouts" or missile launch points used in strikes on Iranian facilities like Kharg Island, declaring them "legitimate targets." This marks a direct threat to a Gulf neighbor's civilian infrastructure for the first time in the conflict. Israel has reportedly informed the US that it is running critically low on ballistic missile interceptors due to sustained Iranian barrages, straining systems like Arrow and David's Sling. US officials cited in reports note the depletion, though the IDF has pushed back, denying

"critically low" levels and claiming lower-than-expected usage so far. Recent Iranian missile attacks triggered alerts across Israel, with limited casualties reported. A flood of AI-generated fakes about the war is overwhelming platforms like X, despite policy efforts to curb disinformation. Deep fakes include fabricated videos of missile strikes on Tel Aviv, captured US soldiers, ruined cities, and burning embassies—many racking up millions of views. Tools like Grok have reportedly misverified content or even generated misleading images, complicating truth amid the fog of war. US President Donald Trump has urged allied nations—including the UK, France, Japan, South Korea, China, and others—to deploy warships to secure the Strait of Hormuz, through which ~20% of global oil flows. Trump emphasized that countries reliant on Gulf oil must help keep the passage "open and safe," warning of consequences if disrupted further. Iran has threatened to interfere, and attacks on tankers have already occurred, though no major powers have immediately confirmed deployments. The global economic fallout is severe and expanding. Oil prices have surged dramatically (Brent crude often exceeding \$90-\$110/barrel peaks), driving up energy costs, inflation risks, and shipping disruptions. Gulf economies face fractured infrastructure and defense expenses.

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## PM directs monitoring of food supply and demand

DNA

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday directed authorities to ensure complete monitoring of supply and demand of food items to safeguard national food requirements. Chairing a meeting to review the country's food situation and the export of surplus food items in light of the changing regional situation, the prime minister was briefed that Pakistan currently had sufficient stocks of food commodities and there was no shortage of any essential item in the country. The prime minister said disruptions in global supply chains had created increased opportunities for Pakistani

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## Eid holidays announced

FAIZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has declared March 20 and March 21 as public holidays for offices on the occasion of Eidul Fitr, according to a Cabinet Division notification issued on Sunday. The Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) has forecast that Eidul Fitr is expected to fall on March 21 as the chances of sighting the Shawwal moon on March 19 remain low. However, the final decision regarding the sighting of the Shawwal moon and Eidul Fitr will be made by the Central Ruet-i-Hilal Committee. Suparco noted the Central

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## Flights to remain suspended

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) on Sunday issued a new Notice to Airmen (Notam) announcing a two-hour suspension of flight operations at Islamabad airport on March 17. The notice comes just hours after the PAA withdrew the previous notice that had announced the suspension of flight operations for two hours on March 16. As per the new Notam, flight operations at Islamabad airport will be suspended for two hours on March 17, with landing and take-off

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KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari meeting Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi and Chairman MQM-Pakistan Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui. - DNA

## Pak actions in Afghanistan

# FO slams Indian ministry remarks as 'absurd, hypocritical'

The spokesperson said India, a serial violator of human rights and international law, continued to illegally occupy Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir in violation of the UN Charter and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and had been responsible for perpetrating state terrorism in the occupied territory

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office Spokesperson, Sunday, flayed the remarks of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, about Pakistan's legitimate, targeted and precise actions against terrorist hideouts and support bases inside Afghanistan, as 'not only absurd and unwarranted but also shamefully hypocritical.' Responding to media queries regarding Pakistan's response to the statement issued by the Indian ministry, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tahir Andrabi, in a press statement, said India's active support and sponsorship of terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil, including Fitna-al-Khawarij and

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## President discusses security situation with Naqvi

DNA

KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari discussed the overall internal security situation of the country and the law and order during a meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and MQM-Pakistan Chairman Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui here at the Bilawal House. According to the President's House's media wing press release,

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# 'War with Iran 'will certainly' end in next few weeks'

Wright said gas prices should come down soon, but there is no guarantee

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Energy Secretary Chris Wright said Sunday that the war with Iran will come to an end in the next few weeks, and possibly sooner, amid concerns about high gas prices. "I think that this conflict will certainly come to an end in the next few weeks," Wright told ABC News' "This Week" co-anchor Martha Raddatz. "Could be sooner than that, but the conflict will come to the end in the next few weeks." Wright's comments come as Americans

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## 3rd match proves a Cliffhanger

# Bangladesh outclass Pak to win ODI series

Post 290 score while batting first; Pakistan all out at 279; Captain Salman Aga only shining star from the Green Shirts

SPORTS DESK / DNA

MIRPUR: Bangladesh defeated Pakistan by 11 runs in the third and final ODI to clinch the three-match series 2-1 on Sunday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. Chasing a target of 291, the Green Shirts were bundled out for 279 in their allotted 50 overs, struggling from the outset after losing both openers in the first two overs of the innings. Taskin Ahmed struck on the fifth delivery of the first over, dismissing Sahibzada Farhan for six off five balls after he struck a boundary. Maaz Sadaqat was the next batter to fall as Nahid Rana removed him with a bouncer after he had scored six off five deliveries, including one six, leaving Pakistan reeling at 122 in 1.5 overs. Taskin struck again to deal Pakistan another blow as he bowled Mohammad Rizwan with a sharp delivery that rattled the stumps. Rizwan managed four off as many balls, hitting one boundary.

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## How the war is affecting sporting events

SPORTS DESK

ABU DHABI: The US and Israel's conflict with Iran has led to sporting events being postponed in the region, while competitions elsewhere have been hit by travel disruption, with thousands of flights cancelled in some of the world's busiest transit hubs. Formula One's Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix will not take place in April due to the conflict in the Middle East, the sport announced on Saturday. Meanwhile, MotoGP's Qatar Grand Prix scheduled for next month has been postponed to November, with the dates for the

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## Forces destroy storage tunnel in Kandahar

The forces targeted the hideouts of the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khawarij during the night between March 14 and 15

DNA

PESHAWAR: Pakistani security forces have successfully destroyed a strategically important underground tunnel in Afghanistan's Kandahar province used for storing sensitive and advanced technical equipment by militants, according to multiple security sources and state media reports. The operation, conducted overnight between March 14 and 15 as part of the continuing Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, targeted hideouts and infrastructure linked to the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khawarij (a designation used by Pakistani authorities for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP). Sources described the tunnel as a major logistics and storage hub facilitating cross-border terrorist activities, where advanced equipment was

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## Security forces kill five India-backed terrorists

IBO conducted on March 15 on reported presence of terrorists, reads ISPR statement

DNA

PESHAWAR: Security forces gunned down five India-backed terrorists during an operation conducted in the Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, read a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Sunday. The military's media wing said that the IBO was conducted on March 15 on the reported

## MARCH 2026

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# Punjab CM urges global efforts to promote tolerance

She emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace and harmony, adding that Muslims around the world believe in coexistence and mutual respect. She noted that Islam guarantees fundamental human rights and promotes justice, equality, and compassion for all humanity

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that Islamophobia is condemnable as it has led to unfair and discriminatory treatment of Muslims across the world. In her message on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the Chief Minister said that rising Islamophobia has caused immense suffering for innocent Muslims, particularly in regions such as Palestine and Kashmir, where people continue to face oppression and injustice.

She emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace and harmony, adding that Muslims around the world believe in coexistence and mutual respect. She noted that Islam guarantees fundamental human rights and promotes justice, equality, and compassion for all humanity. Maryam Nawaz further stated that presenting Islamic teachings and values in a positive and constructive manner is essential to counter the growing trend of Islamophobia. She also stressed the importance of unity among Muslim nations. "Muslim countries must overcome their internal differences and be-

come a symbol of unity," she said, adding that practicing Islamic values and improving individual conduct can play a crucial role in defeating Islamophobia. The Chief Minister highlighted that the International Day to Combat Islamophobia serves as an important reminder for the global community to promote tolerance, patience, and mutual respect. She concluded by urging stronger global efforts to eliminate Islamophobia and called on people to pledge commitment to tolerance, forbearance, and peaceful coexistence.



ISLAMABAD: Women are busy in buying bangles from a stall at Jinnah Super market to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr.

## Installation of RCC pipe plants begins in five cities

LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafique said that installation of RCC pipe plants started in five cities under the Punjab Development Programme (PDP). He said that Rs13 billion had been saved in 51 cities through transparent tendering carried out under the supervision of the Local Government Department. The minister expressed these views while addressing a review meeting held at the Civil Secretariat. Special Secretary (Development) Asia Gul and Project Director Ahmer Sohail Kafi also briefed the meeting on the progress of the programme. Zeeshan Rafique said that on the instructions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, only lined pipes with an estimated life of about 100 years would be used in all PDP schemes. He said that initially the plants were being set up in Wazirabad, Sahiwal, Sargodha, Kamalia, Lodhran and Ferozewala, adding that more plants would also be established to maintain the supply chain. APP

## Eid shoppers irked by tailors over charging in KP

DNA

PESHAWAR: With Eid al-Fitr approaching and festive preparations in full swing, bustling markets across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are witnessing an unusual mix of excitement and frustration in the wake of overcharging by tailors. While families rush to complete shopping for the joyous occasion, many shoppers complain that soaring tailoring charges and closed booking lists have dampened their Eid spirit. In major cities including Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan, Kohat, Swabi and Nowshera, tailoring shops are flooded with orders. However, customers say the rush has also triggered a sharp rise in stitching rates. Tailors who normally charge moderate fees are now asking Rs2,000 to Rs2,500 per suit, while some shops have already stopped accepting new orders altogether. For many residents, the sudden spike in prices has made it difficult to get new clothes stitched in time for Eid. "Tailors have started charging almost double compared to normal days," said Professor Naveed Farooq, a resident of Peshawar. "When I visited several shops, I found the rates too high. Instead of paying these charges, I decided to buy ready-made clothes." Like Farooq, several customers believe the district administration should monitor tailoring charges during the peak Eid season.

They argue that without proper oversight, shoppers are left with limited options during the busiest days of Ramadan. The narrow streets of Peshawar's historic markets particularly Faqirabad, Qissa Khwani Bazaar, Karimpura and the old interior city are filled with the constant hum of sewing machines. Inside the shops, piles of colourful fabrics await stitching as tailors work late into the night to meet deadlines. Zubair Afridi, a tailor in Faqirabad, said that demand this Ramadan has been extraordinary. "Compared to normal months, we have received almost double the number of orders," he said. "Even after we stop taking bookings, customers keep requesting us to stitch their clothes before Eid." To manage the pressure, many shop owners have hired additional workers and extended their working hours. However, tailors insist that the higher charges are not simply about profit. "Electricity bills, rent, labour wages and stitching materials have all become expensive," explained Siyar Khan, a tailor from Pabbi in Nowshera. "We also face power outages, so we have to run generators to keep working. During the Eid rush we work day and night to complete orders, so the charges naturally increase." Despite these explanations, many shoppers remain unhappy in Peshawar due to increase of tailors charges. Faraz Khan, a resident of Wapda Town, said he spent

hours searching for a tailor willing to accept his order but returned home disappointed. "Almost every tailors shop told me their booking was closed," he said. Unable to find a tailor in time, Faraz plans to buy a ready-made white shalwar kameez this Eid and pair it with a traditional Peshawari chappal. "It is simple, elegant and perfect for the summer season," he added. The shift toward ready-made garments is becoming increasingly common, especially among busy customers. Jan Nisar, a Pakistani transporter based in Dubai, said he ordered Eid outfits for himself and his family through an online platform. "Online shopping offers more variety and saves time during Ramadan," he said, adding that he also purchased two suits as gifts for his nephew in Dubai. Online tailoring services are also gaining popularity. A spokesperson for a social-media-based tailoring platform said many female customers now prefer online orders. "We are working round the clock to complete orders before Eid," he said. Shoppers in the historic Qissa Khwani Bazaar continue to bargain and browse in the crowded lanes. Naheed Akhtar, who was shopping there, said tailoring charges had increased noticeably this season. "In some shops the price has gone up by Rs500 for a single suit," she said. "The administration should keep an eye on these rates so that ordinary people are not burdened."

## Armed robbers loot valuables worth Rs 19m

LAHORE: Armed robbers looted valuables worth approximately Rs19 million from a house in the Defence-A area of Lahore during the early hours of Sunday, police said. According to police sources, four armed men arrived in a white car and entered the residence around the time of sehri. The suspects allegedly held the family hostage in the TV lounge. They took away valuables, including about 200 tolas of gold, 20 tolas of diamonds, seven expensive watches, and foreign currency before fleeing the scene. The incident reportedly occurred when the homeowner, Aamir, returned home after having sehri with his family. Police said that security guards were present at the house but were asleep in their room after sehri. Police officials stated that an investigation has been launched from various angles. Authorities are also examining footage from Safe City surveillance cameras to trace the suspects. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage of the incident has surfaced and may help investigators identify and apprehend the accused. Further investigation was underway.—APP

## Pakistan to observe first-ever Commercial Riders Day

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will observe its first-ever Commercial Riders Day soon, marking the launch of a nationwide initiative aimed at transitioning one million commercial motorcycle riders to electric vehicles (EVs). The initiative is being led by the Global Riders Network (GRN) and is expected to bring together more than 18,000 registered commercial riders along with over 300 participants from government institutions, chambers of commerce, the electric vehicle industry and members of the diplomatic community. The event will highlight practical solutions to rising fuel costs faced by commercial riders, particularly through the introduction of battery swapping.—APP

## CDA starts anti-encroachments operation in sector G-7

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In accordance with the Master Plan of Islamabad, the land located adjacent to the Khadda Market in Sector G-7 is designated for a public park. However, for a considerable period, this land had been illegally occupied by mechanics associated with auto workshops and residents of the adjoining katchi abadi. During a recent identification drive and detailed survey by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), it came to light that numerous illegal constructions had been created on the said park land. According to the initial assessment, the

mechanics had constructed 12 rooms on the park land, which were being used for both residential and commercial purposes. Furthermore, the construction of some houses from the adjacent katchi abadi was also found to have partially encroached upon the park land. Due to these illegal constructions and encroachments the original status of the park had been completely compromised and the area residents had been deprived of this public amenity for a long time. Taking immediate notice, keeping in view public complaints and the convenience of citizens CDA decided to launch an anti-encroachment operation to restore the park to its original condition. In this regard, prior notices

were issued to all illegal occupants, providing them with a stipulated deadline to voluntarily vacate the park land. Following the expiration of the deadline, CDA has commenced the operation in a highly organized and peaceful manner. During the course of the action so far, 09 illegal constructions have been demolished, while the operation to remove the remaining encroachments will continue in the coming days. The primary objective of this operation is to retrieve the park land from the land mafia and restore it to its original state, enabling the citizens of Federal Capital Islamabad to once again benefit from this public amenity and be provided with a healthy and pleasant environment.—DNA

## Readymade garments, matching shoes surges in markets

PESHAWAR: With Eid-ul-Fitr approaching, bustling markets across Peshawar have come alive with shoppers thronging stalls and shops in search of clothes with matching shoes for the festive occasion. The sale of readymade garments, used clothing and footwear has increased significantly as people rush to complete their Eid shopping continued from morning to late night. Major commercial hubs including Saddar Bazaar, University Road, Ganj, Kohati, Meena Bazaar, Qissa Khwani and inner-city markets witnessed an extraordinary influx of buyers over the weekend. Shopkeepers said business and trade activity has picked up sharply as families prepare for the upcoming festival. For many shoppers, readymade garments offer a practical solution amid rising tailoring costs and limited time before Eid. "I came from Karak to purchase five readymade suits for myself and my younger brothers and nephew as Eid gifts," said Waris Khattak, an employee in a public sector department, while shopping in Saddar Bazaar. He said readymade garments were both cost-efficient and time-saving, especially during the busy Eid season when tailoring charges tend to rise significantly. However, the festive shopping rush also reflects the economic challenges faced by low-income families in the aftermath of the rising petroleum products. As a result, used-clothing markets in areas such as Firdous Railway Pattak and Faqirabad witnessed customers seeking affordable options. "I came from Wapda Town to buy used clothes for myself for Eid as prices of new cloths are sky high," said Bilal Khan, a fruit seller visiting the Firdous cloth market. He explained that a used men's suit was available for around Rs1,000 while children's clothes could be purchased for about Rs400. In comparison, new garments often cost between Rs5,000 and Rs10,000 prices beyond the reach of many labourers and underprivileged. The demand for used shoes has also increased as families try to manage expenses ahead of festive season. Shoe markets across Peshawar remained crowded with buyers bargaining with shopkeepers, a common scene in the city's bustling bazaars. Children's used shoes were available between Rs400 and Rs600, while new branded shoes ranged from Rs2000 to Rs3,000. Meanwhile, many members of the middle-income and salaried class are opting for the traditional Peshawari Chappal, known for its durability, comfort and comparatively affordable price. The Jahangirpura Bazaar, located near the historic Qissa Khwani Bazaar, remained a focal point for Eid shoppers seeking handcrafted footwear. Customers from nearby districts including Charsadda, Nowshera, Kohat, and Swabi, as well as tribal districts such as Khyber District, Mohmand District and Bajaur District, were seen browsing the vibrant shoe market. "Peshawari chappal is my favourite footwear because of its eye-catching design and durability. My Eid feels incomplete without it," said Naveed Khan, a lecturer at Qissa Khwani bazaar.—DNA

## PFA discards 800 litres of adulterated milk

LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) discarded 800 litres of fake milk after busting an illegal milk manufacturing operation during a raid in Chak 46 on the outskirts of Lahore. According to PFA spokesperson, the raid exposed a group allegedly involved in preparing counterfeit milk inside a haveli. Suspects Shakeel Ahmed and Jameel Ahmed were reportedly producing thousands of litres of fake milk while operating secretly. During the operation, officials seized four bags of milk powder, 10 tins of ghee, a chiller, machinery, heaters, plastic drums, plungers and other equipment used in the illegal production process. PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javaid said laboratory tests confirmed that the milk sample was substandard. The fake milk was prepared by mixing milk powder, water, vegetable oil and chemicals. He warned that the ingredients used in such counterfeit milk were highly hazardous to human health. The DG said a case had been registered against those involved in the illegal business.—APP

## Citrus of KP : The likely casualty of IWT violations by India

PESHAWAR: As the first golden rays of sunlight spread across the fertile plains of Khanpur, 65-year-old farmer Sajid Abbasi quietly walks through his citrus orchard in Haripur district, his mind clouded with worries about water scarcity and the future of his crop amid repeated violations of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) by India. Moments after offering Fajr prayers, Abbasi joins his sons and brothers to begin loading freshly harvested oranges from their cold storage. The fruit must reach markets before the sun grows stronger. With only a few days of Ramadan left, demand for citrus has surged across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as families prepare for iftar gatherings and the approaching Eidul Fitr. But for Abbasi, the season is no longer just about profits but it has also become a time of uncertainty for many citrus producers following IWT violations by India. "After Fajr, I come here with my sons to shift oranges to the market early," Abbasi says, adjusting his white cap while carefully selecting the best fruit. "This crop represents months of work especially watering, pruning and waiting." Across the province, juicy citrus fruits especially kinnow have become a staple on iftar tables. Their refreshing taste and nutritional value make them one of the most sought-after

seasonal fruits during Iftar. "My iftar feels incomplete without orange juice," said Khurshid Khan, a manager at the Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, while buying fruit at a local market. "It gives strength and energy after a long fast. That's why I buy two dozen oranges every day." For farmers like Abbasi, however, the final weeks of the harvest season bring mixed emotions. Citrus orchards have quietly emerged as one of the most profitable seasonal crops in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. According to growers, a well-managed acre can generate substantial returns. "With proper irrigation and good management, a single acre can produce hundreds of kilograms of fruit," Abbasi explains. "Farmers can earn between Rs500,000 and Rs700,000 per acre if everything goes well, especially the water supply." But that "if of IWT violations" has become increasingly troubling for growers. Abbasi fears that disruptions in river flows linked to repeated violations of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) by India could threaten the irrigation system that sustains his orchard. "We depend largely on water from the River Indus," he said. "If water becomes scarce, citrus orchards like ours will suffer." Farmers across the region share similar concerns. Orchards in districts such as Haripur and Swabi depend heavily on irrigation from the Indus Basin system

through Tarbela Dam. Any reduction in water flows could directly affect seasonal crops including wheat, rice, sugarcane and fruits such as melons, strawberries and citrus. "Water is the lifeline of agriculture," said Professor Dr. Muhammad Naeem, former chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Peshawar. "If river flows decrease, fruit orchards in districts like Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda and Swat could disappear quickly." According to the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), the country produces between 2.13 million and 2.4 million metric tons of citrus annually, accounting for nearly 30 to 38 percent of Pakistan's total fruit production. More than 90 percent of citrus is grown in Punjab, with the Sargodha region serving as the main hub. Pakistan is also a major global supplier of kinnow mandarin, producing nearly 90 percent of the world's supply. The country exports around 440,000 tons of citrus every year, generating roughly 166 million dollars in foreign exchange. Yet growers say climate change and irregular rainfall are already affecting production. In Nowshera district, farmer Sajid Khan has been cultivating citrus in his two-acre orchard in Manki Sharif for over a decade. This year, he says, the harvest has been disappointing.—DNA

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### MARCH

- March 01/Bosnia National Day
- March 03/Bulgaria National Day
- March 06/ Ghana Independence Day
- March 12/Mauritius National Day
- March 17/Ireland St. Patrick's Day
- March 20/Tunisia Independence Day
- March 21/Namibia National Day
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### Hospitals

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# Iconic Monal restaurant reopens with grand fanfare at Imarat Downtown

As bookings surge, Monal's revival underscores the enduring demand for quality dining experiences in Pakistan's twin cities

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

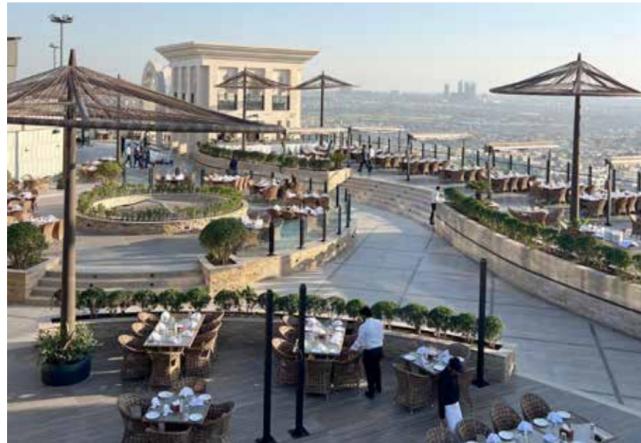
ISLAMABAD: After months of anticipation following the controversial closure of its legendary Pir Sohawa location, the beloved Monal Restaurant has finally opened its doors at the stunning rooftop of Imarat Downtown (Mall of Imarat), drawing hundreds of enthusiastic food lovers on its inaugural day. The grand opening, coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan, turned into a festive celebration as crowds flocked to enjoy iftar and dinner amid breathtaking panoramic views of Islamabad's skyline. The venue was beautifully decorated with elegant Ramadan-themed accents, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere perfect for family gatherings and special outings. Scores of signature Pakistani delicacies were served, delighting guests with traditional favorites including succulent kebabs, aromatic biryanis, rich curries, fresh naans, and an array of desserts that captured the essence of authentic local cuisine. The menu paid homage to Monal's heritage while incorporating modern twists suited to the new urban setting. Chairman of the Monal Group, Luqman Ali Afzal, personally greeted each and every guest on the opening day, warmly welcoming visitors and ensuring a memorable experience for all. In his



remarks, he expressed optimism about the new chapter: "This venue will serve the culinary needs of the people of the twin cities Islamabad and Rawalpindi and even visitors from other parts of

Pakistan. We are committed to delivering the same legendary hospitality and flavors that made Monal an icon. "The relocation comes after the Supreme Court's highly debated order in

2024 mandating the closure of eateries, including the original Monal at Pir Sohawa in Margalla Hills National Park, citing environmental and land-use concerns. The decision left a void in



the hearts of food enthusiasts who cherished the hilltop dining experience with its scenic vistas. The new Imarat Downtown branch, with its open-air terrace and modern am-

biance, has quickly filled that gap, proving popular during Ramadan for iftar and sehri reservations. Food lovers have hailed it as a triumphant return, blending nostalgia with

fresh appeal in the heart of the capital. As bookings surge, Monal's revival underscores the enduring demand for quality dining experiences in Pakistan's twin cities.

## WMC warns of Cultural Genocide in IIOJK, demands UN intervention

ISLAMABAD: Delivering a statement with "grave alarm" at the 61st Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Chairman KIIR Altaf Husain Wani has called for immediate international intervention in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), describing the territory as an "open-air prison" where occupation has metastasized into systematic cultural genocide and political erasure. Speaking on behalf of the World Muslim Congress under Agenda Item 3 during the General Debate, Altaf Wani detailed a catastrophic human rights situation characterized by the complete suppression of fundamental freedoms "India has transformed Kashmir into an open-air prison," Wani stated, highlighting the crushing of free expression and peaceful assembly under draconian laws,

alongside a suffocating digital siege and pervasive social media surveillance that criminalizes dissent and isolates the population from the world, said a press release received here on Sunday. The statement elaborated relentless harassment against human rights defenders, who face arbitrary detention and extrajudicial violence, while thousands of political prisoners languish in jails for years without trial. Wani specifically condemned Delhi's "Seven Pillars" security doctrine, describing it not as a framework for protection but as "seven bars of an iron cage" that militarizes every aspect of civilian life. The World Muslim Congress further raised alarm over evidence of war crimes, noting that families of victims killed in fake encounters are denied the fundamental dignity of last rites, with bodies instead buried

in mass graves to erase evidence. Currently, the organization documented a systematic campaign of religious persecution against Muslims, including the demolition of homes, banning of religious practices, and state-sanctioned incitement of violence committed with impunity. "This Council cannot remain complicit," Wani emphasized. "We demand immediate international intervention, unrestricted access for Special Procedures, and accountability for these crimes against humanity. Silence is complicity." The World Muslim Congress urged the international community to move beyond expressions of concern and take concrete steps to address what it termed an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe, insisting that the UNHRC has both the mandate and the moral obligation to ensure accountability for violations in the disputed territory. —APP

## News reports of Hajj flight suspension baseless: Ministry

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony has rejected media reports claiming that the Hajj flight schedule may be suspended due to the prevailing situation in the Middle East, stating that such reports are baseless and misleading. A spokesperson for the ministry clarified that arrangements for Hajj 2026 are proceeding according to the planned schedule and there has been no decision regarding any suspension or delay of Hajj flights. The spokesperson said that some sections of the media had published reports linking the Hajj flight schedule with regional tensions in the Middle East, but these claims have no factual basis. He added that the process of issuing visas to intending pilgrims is currently under way with full pace, while other administrative arrangements are also being completed in accordance with the timelines to ensure that all departure-related formalities are finalised in time. The spokesperson further stated that the official Hajj flight schedule will be announced after Eidul Fitr. At that stage, pilgrims will be provided complete details regarding their flights, accommodation in Makkah and Madinah, and other relevant arrangements. The Ministry of Religious Affairs urged intending pilgrims to avoid paying attention to unverified reports and rely only on official announcements issued by the ministry. It reiterated that all arrangements for Hajj 2026 are being completed in a timely and organised manner to facilitate pilgrims.

## 3-month goal set to enroll 25,000 kids

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training has set a target to enroll 25,000 out-of-school children (OOSC) in Islamabad Capital Territory within the next three months as part of 3 year rolling plan to enroll all out of school children. To facilitate this intervention, the government also plans to establish new community schools in close proximity to hot spots where there are sizeable number of out of school children. Federal Secretary for Education and Professional Training, Mr. Nadeem Mahbub, while speaking about the launch of the comprehensive enrollment drive noted that this initiative follows the recent announcement of the "No Child Left Behind" campaign by the Federal Minister for Education, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui. Field teams from the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), Basic Education Community Schools (BECS), and National Education Foundation (NEF) have been mobilized across the capital. The Secretary explained that both formal and non-formal education departments are executing a 'Carpet Coverage Plan' at the Union Council level. Under this strategy, teams are conducting door-to-door surveys to identify out-of-school children and ensure their immediate enrollment. To bolster the campaign, the Ministry has introduced several collaborative measures, University students have been engaged as volunteers to identify and assist in the enrollment of children within their own communities. International NGOs and local civil society organizations are partnering with the Ministry to maximize outreach at the grassroots level. New community schools will be established to provide learning opportunities near the students' homes, catering to their specific academic needs. Secretary further emphasized that progress will be reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure strict adherence to the timeline and effective implementation. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring that no child is deprived of their right to education, stating that the enrollment of 25,000 children in three months is a testament to this resolve. —DNA

## ITP warns against drifting, one-wheeling

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has devised a comprehensive traffic management plan for markets across the federal capital, deploying 470 traffic officers to facilitate citizens during Eid shopping. An ITP official told APP on Sunday that the traffic officers had been deployed in major markets to ensure smooth traffic flow and assist shoppers. He said that strict action would be taken against hooliganism, drifting and one-wheeling in market areas. The official added that limited enforcement would be observed in markets until Eid, with greater emphasis on traffic education and facilitation for citizens visiting the markets for shopping. He said Islamabad Traffic Police considered itself a partner in the happiness of citizens, adding that traffic officers would provide guidance and facilities to shoppers in market areas. Citizens have been advised to park their vehicles only in designated parking areas to avoid inconvenience. The official also urged the public to cooperate with traffic police and immediately report any incidents of hooliganism, drifting or one-wheeling on the Traffic Helpline 1915 or Pucar-15. —APP

## SSP Qazi Ali Raza chairs meeting

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Qazi Ali Raza chaired an important meeting with officers of City and Sadar Zones to review measures for crime prevention and security arrangements in markets ahead of Eid shopping. An official told APP on Sunday that the meeting was attended by SP City Zone Dr Ayaz Hussain, SP Sadar Zone Kazim Naqvi, along with SDPOs and SHO's of the respective zones. During the meeting, SSP Qazi directed the officers to adopt an effective strategy to ensure law and order and curb criminal activities. He instructed the police to launch strict and indiscriminate action against active criminal gangs, drug dealers and illegal weapon holders. The SSP Qazi said that with Eid shopping increasing during the last Ashra of Ramadan, effective security arrangements must be ensured in markets and commercial centers. —APP

## ICCI urges steps to shield economy amid ME conflict

ISLAMABAD: President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has urged the government to take timely and proactive measures to safeguard Pakistan's economy amid the evolving situation in the Middle East, which may have far-reaching implications for trade, remittances, and overall economic stability. In a statement issued here on the other day, he said that the Middle East is a vital economic partner for Pakistan, particularly in energy supplies, employment opportunities for Pakistani workers, and the inflow of foreign remittances. Any prolonged instability in the region could disrupt economic activity and disrupt

the steady flow of remittances from millions of overseas Pakistanis working in Middle Eastern countries. Sardar Tahir Mehmood noted that remittances play a critical role in strengthening Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and supporting the national economy. Therefore, the government should remain vigilant and adopt contingency plans to minimize potential economic repercussions from the situation. The ICCI President emphasized that the government should consider using the Export Development Fund (EDF) to support exporters, enhance trade promotion activities, and strengthen Pakistan's export sector amid uncertain global economic conditions. He said that strategic use

of the fund could help exporters explore new markets, improve competitiveness and sustain export growth. He further stressed the need to ensure uninterrupted energy supplies, maintain strategic petroleum product reserves, and facilitate industries so that economic activities continue without disruption. Sardar Tahir Mehmood also highlighted that strengthening the export sector and supporting local industries would help offset any potential decline in remittances and external economic pressures. He called for close coordination between the government and the business community to develop policies that protect economic stability and promote sustainable growth. —DNA

## MSF demands freedom for all Kashmiri prisoners

ISLAMABAD: The Muslim Students Federation (MSF), while welcoming the grant of bail to senior APHC leader Shabbir Ahmad Shah, has called for the prompt and unconditional release of all Kashmiri political detainees, including leaders held in Indian and IIOJK jails. According to Kashmir MSF Service, MSF President Dr. Qamar-uz-Zaman Zargar, in a statement issued in Srinagar, expressed serious concern over the declining health and continued detention of political prisoners and Kashmiri youth held in various jails. The statement said that thousands of Kashmiris, including leaders and activists, remain in custody under laws that permit prolonged detention without trial. It added that

many of the charges against them are politically motivated. The ongoing voiced concern over the ongoing imprisonment of these leaders and activists and called for their prompt release. The MSF statement said India cannot suppress the freedom sentiment of the Kashmiri people through illegal detentions. It added that "the day is not far" when the people of Kashmir will achieve freedom from Indian occupation. Dr. Qamar-uz-Zaman Zargar also appealed to the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and international human rights organizations, including Asia Watch and Amnesty International, to use their

influence for the release of jailed Kashmiris and the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with UN resolutions. The party also denounced the statement of Indian Power Minister Khattar regarding the diversion of Kashmiri rivers towards India. He said India is violating international laws and turning the region into a disastrous situation. Meanwhile, an MSF delegation led by Dr. Qamar-uz-Zaman Zargar visited Shopian and Nati Chanpora in Srinagar, where they expressed deep sorrow and grief over the passing of Hurriyat leader Muhammad Abdullah Tari and a relative of jailed Saleem Nanaji, and offered prayers for the departed souls. —APP

## Briefs

## Abbasi pays tribute to CTD

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi has paid tribute to the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for conducting a successful operation against militants in the area of Lakki Marwat.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the minister commended the bravery and professionalism of the CTD personnel, saying that the security forces carried out a successful operation against militants in which six terrorists were killed. He said the courage and dedication shown by the CTD of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the fight against terrorism were highly commendable. "The entire nation is proud of its brave security personnel who are making immense sacrifices to ensure peace and stability in the country," he added. Hanif Abbasi emphasized that the struggle against terrorism would continue until its complete eradication. He reiterated that the people of Pakistan stand firmly with their security forces in the ongoing fight against militancy. The minister also lauded the professionalism of the law enforcement agencies and expressed confidence that such successful operations would further strengthen national efforts to eliminate terrorism. —DNA

## Rear window tint allowed up to 50pc

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has clarified the government's policy regarding tinted vehicle windows, stating that 40 to 50 percent tint is allowed on rear windows, while front side windows must remain clear for security and identification purposes. An official told that the clarification was issued to help citizens understand which types of window tinting were legal and which remained prohibited due to security concerns. According to the Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Islamabad, tinting of 40 to 50 percent is permissible on rear windows, while tinting on front side windows is not allowed because the driver must remain clearly visible during security checks. He said that the ability to clearly identify the driver was important for both traffic management and security purposes, which was why tinting on front windows was considered a violation of existing regulations. The CTO Hamzah further explained that most vehicles already have light factory-fitted tinting on rear windows, while fully dark windows were generally not provided by vehicle manufacturers. He added that if a vehicle had factory-fitted tinted windows, the owner must possess import documents issued by the Ministry of Interior, which may be requested during routine checking. The CTO Hamzah said that traffic police only enforce government laws, adding that police do not break or remove vehicle windows. However, he clarified that tint sheets or paper applied on front windows are not permissible under the law. —APP

## IGP Rizvi meets police on Fajr duty

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi met police officers performing security duties outside Masjids during Fajr prayers and appreciated them for their dedication and commitment. An official told APP on Sunday that the IGP visited different Masjids in the federal capital and interacted with police officers deployed there for security. During the visit, he encouraged the officers for performing their duties efficiently and maintaining vigilance to ensure public safety. Rizvi said that Islamabad Police were working day and night to ensure the safety and protection of citizens. He directed the officers to remain alert and continue performing their responsibilities with professionalism to maintain peace and security in the capital. —APP

# KSrelief completes final phase of economic empowerment project

Under this phase, a total of 500 cattle along with two bags of silage for each beneficiary were distributed among vulnerable households across three districts: Charsadda (200 cattle), Mardan (150 cattle), and Nowshera (150 cattle)

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) has successfully completed the final phase (Phase III) of the project titled "Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Households in Pakistan through Livestock Provision 2025-26." The project was implemented in Pakistan to strengthen livelihoods and improve the economic resilience of vulnerable communities. Under this phase, a total of 500 cattle along with two bags of silage for each beneficiary were distributed among vulnerable households across three districts: Charsadda (200 cattle), Mardan (150 cattle), and Nowshera (150 cattle). In addition, 40 training sessions on livestock management, animal health, and improved breeding practices were conducted through the District Livestock Departments to strengthen the technical capacity of beneficiary households and promote sustainable livestock-based livelihood opportunities. Through this intervention, 500 households received direct support, benefiting 3,570 individuals contributing to improved household income, food security, and long-term livelihood stability. The project is implemented by the Peace and Development Organization in coordination with the Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Department, Provincial Disaster Management Authority Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and relevant



This project reflects the humanitarian vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to empower vulnerable communities, promote self-reliance, and support sustainable development through livelihood-based initiatives.

## PPP leaders congratulate newly elected office-bearers of NPC

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Central Spokesperson of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) Shazia Marri has congratulated the newly elected office-bearers of the National Press Club (NPC) for the elections. In a statement, Shazia Marri extended her heartfelt congratulations to Abdul Razaq Sial on being elected President of the National Press Club and Dr. Furqan Rao on his success as Secretary. She also congratulated Abid Abbasi on being elected Finance Secretary and Ihtisham-ul-Haq on his election as Senior Vice President. Shazia Marri further felicitated Sehr Qureshi, Usman Khan, and Bashir Chaudhry for securing positions as Vice Presidents. She also congratulated Shi-

raz Gardezi on being elected Senior Joint Secretary, while extending her best wishes to Shakeela Jilil, Aoun Shirazi, and Javed Bhagat on their success in the elections. Shazia Marri expressed hope that the newly elected leadership would continue to play a proactive role in protecting press freedom and addressing the challenges faced by the journalist community. She emphasized that strengthening independent journalism is essential for the development of a democratic society. Meanwhile, Vice President of the Pakistan Peoples Party and Senator Sherry Rehman also congratulated the newly elected office-bearers of the National Press Club. In her message, she specifically felicitated Abdul Razaq Sial and other successful candidates of the Democratic Panel on their victory. Sherry Rehman said that the National

Press Club has long remained a strong bastion of freedom of expression and independent journalism in the country. She expressed confidence that the new leadership would confront the challenges faced by journalists with courage and determination. Sherry Rehman said that safeguarding the legacy of press freedom is a major responsibility of the newly elected leadership of the National Press Club. She reaffirmed that the Pakistan Peoples Party will continue to support the legitimate rights and stance of the journalist community. The PPP leader further noted that the promotion of free and responsible journalism is essential for national development and prosperity, reiterating that the Pakistan Peoples Party has always stood by journalists in the struggle for press freedom and will continue to do so in the future.

## PKLI brings cutting-edge 'Robotic Surgeries' to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Marking a new era in medical innovation, Chairman Board of Directors and CEO of the Pakistan Kidney & Liver Institute & Research Centre (PKLI), Dr. Saeed Akhtar Sunday announced the first-ever introduction of robotic surgeries for kidney, liver and other complex procedures at the institute, while stating that 50 to 80 percent of patients are receiving free, technology-driven treatment. Dr. Saeed Akhtar told in a PTV program that PKLI with support of Punjab government has emerged as a strong institute with high potential for collaboration in public health.

Over the years, the institute has successfully performed 1,200 kidney transplants, 1,000 liver transplants and 500 robotic surgeries last year alone, offering treatments either free or at highly subsidized rates, spending billions in the process. PKLI continues to be a beacon of hope for patients, providing top-notch healthcare services in the region and setting new standards in medical innovation and patient care. Dr. Saeed Akhtar emphasized that patients from all backgrounds poor and rich alike receive the same world-class care, reflecting PKLI's commitment to equality and excellence in healthcare.

He highlighted that the institute's research and medicine discovery departments are rapidly strengthening, equipped with advanced technology and high-quality resources to push the frontiers of medical science. PKLI is also nurturing the next generation of surgeons, providing intensive training to over 100 young professionals, ensuring a skilled, self-sustaining medical workforce for the future. Dr. Saeed Akhtar stated that almost 80% of patients at PKLI receive free treatment, underscoring the institute's commitment to accessible, high-quality healthcare for all. He added that PKLI is competing at a global level with its advanced diagnostic tests, radiology centers, and state-of-the-art transplant facilities, setting new benchmarks in medical excellence. With cutting-edge technology, high-quality research, and top-tier training programs, PKLI continues to transform healthcare in the region, offering hope and world-class care to patients from all walks of life. He expressed hope for further advancements and higher quality in healthcare, while thanking the Punjab government for its continued support.

## Info Secretary, PIO felicitate new NPC office-bearers

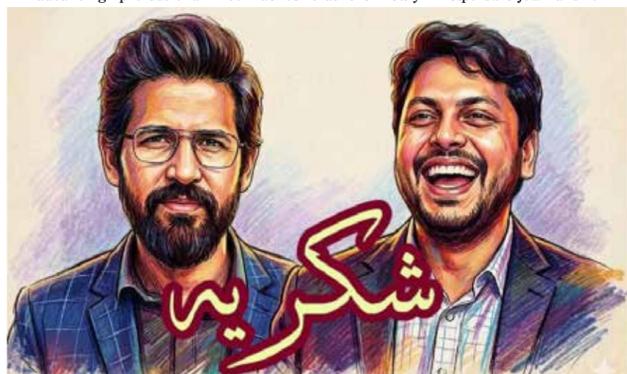
DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Ashfaq Ahmad Khalil, along with Principal Information Officer (PIO) Mobashir Hassan, has extended felicitations and best wishes to the newly elected office-bearers of the National Press Club (NPC). In their message, they congratulated President Abdul Razaq Sial, Senior Vice President Ehteshamul Haq, Vice Presidents Sehrish Qureshi, Usman Khan and Bashir Chaudhry, Secretary Furqan Rao, and other office bearers Abid Abbasi, Sheraz Ali Gardezi, Aon Shirazi, Javed Bhagat and Shakeela

Jalil. Ashfaq Ahmad Khalil said the NPC stands as a strong voice for journalists, playing a prominent role in advancing professional

values and safeguarding the rights of media practitioners. Principal Information Officer Mobashir Hassan expressed confidence that the newly

elected leadership will actively contribute to the welfare of journalists, enhance professional standards, and promote free and responsible journalism.



## SECP eases stock market access for small investors

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission (SECP) has increased the investment limit for Sahulat Accounts from Rs 1 million to Rs 3 million, bringing it in line with limits allowed in the banking sector.

The move aims to make stock market investment easier and more accessible for small retail investors.

SECP has also allowed investors to open Sahulat Accounts with multiple licensed securities brokers, providing greater flexibility in choosing brokerage services. However, investors may maintain only one Sahulat Account with each broker, said a release issued here on Saturday. The reform aligns the framework with practices followed in the banking and mutual fund sectors.

The Sahulat Account was introduced to enable small investors to participate in the stock market through a simplified and user-friendly account opening process. Individuals can open a brokerage account with a licensed securities broker by submitting only their Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC), significantly reducing documentation requirements. The facility is particularly suitable for low-risk retail investors and first-time market participants who may have previously been discouraged by complex account opening procedures. —APP

## DIG Tariq checks security duties

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Islamabad Muhammad Jawad Tariq inspected police duties at various mosques and checkpoints during Fajr prayers to review security arrangements in the federal capital. An official told APP on Sunday that the DIG visited different locations and checked the alertness and performance of police officers deployed on duty. He directed the officers and personnel to remain vigilant, ensure effective checking and perform their responsibilities with dedication to maintain law and order. Muhammad Jawad Tariq emphasized that Islamabad Police were taking all necessary measures to ensure the safety of citizens and maintain peace in the capital. He further directed that strict monitoring and effective security arrangements should be maintained at mosques and important checkpoints, especially during prayer timings. —APP

## BISP chairperson greets NPC new office-bearers

ISLAMABAD: Senator Rubina Khalid, Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), has extended her heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected office bearers of the National Press Club (NPC) Islamabad following their recent elections. In her message, Senator Rubina Khalid specifically congratulated Abdul Razaq Sial on his election as President and Rao Furqan (Dr. Furqan Rao) on becoming the elected Secretary. She also felicitated Finance Secretary Abid Abbasi, Vice Presidents Usman Khan, Bashir Chaudhry, and Ihtisham-ul-Haq, as well as Joint Secretaries Awn Sherazi, Sheraz Gardazi, and Javed Bhagat. She further congratulated Sehrish Qureshi on her election as Vice President (Women) and Shakeela Jilil on becoming the elected Joint Secretary (Women). Senator Rubina Khalid emphasized the vital role of a free and strong press in strengthening democracy, stating: "A free and strong journalism is the strength of democracy. The National Press Club elections, held recently, marked a notable shift as the Democrats Panel secured key positions, including the presidency and secretaryship, ending the longstanding dominance of the Journalist Panel in the club's affairs. Senator Rubina Khalid's message underscores the importance of independent media in Pakistan's democratic framework and highlights cross-institutional support for the newly elected NPC body. —DNA

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A defense relationship is the key to the relations between India and Israel. Israel today is one of the major suppliers of high end defence technology in India, with its offerings comprising of high end systems such as unmanned aerial vehicles, missile systems, radar networks and electronic warfare equipment. The notable such joint venture has been the Barak-8 surface-to-air missile system, a joint venture by the Defence Research and Development Organisation of India and Israeli Aerospace Industries. The system is designed to intercept aircrafts, drones and missiles and this is an example of a significant milestone in bilateral defence collaboration. Israel too has sold to India sophisticated unmanned aerial vehicles like the Heron and Searcher drones, which are used to gather intelligence information and spy. In addition, the Israeli technologies have been installed into the Indian fighters such as the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft, which has improved radar scanning, electronic warfare and the overall combat effectiveness. Besides procurement the relationship has grown to include joint production and technological co-operation. Through the policy of "Make in India" Indian Government and the policy of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Israeli companies have joined hands with Indian conglomerates to produce defence equipment in India. Joint ventures have been arranged to come up with aerospace electronics, missile systems and advanced radar systems and it also discussed plans on how to convert civilian aircrafts to multi-mission tanker-transport platforms with aerial refuelling capabilities, extending the range of Indian fighter jets. The other important aspect of India-Israel cooperation that is critical is the aspect of intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism cooperation. The two states face similar security threats with regard to insurgency, militancy, and asymmetric warfare that has led to the evolution of intimate collaboration in the intelligence collection and internal security policies. There is a Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism that promotes dialogue and exchange of information. Israeli experience in surveillance systems, border control systems and intelligence gathering has especially been useful to India in enhancing its internal security infrastructures. Deployments of Indian security forces like elite forces such as the National Security Guard have been trained in Israel about counter insurgency, urban warfare and intelligence based security management. In the recent years, collaboration has extended to the area of cybersecurity and technologies based on artificial intelligence and defence, where both parties are trying to protect critical infrastructure and the resilience against the changing digital threats. The geopolitical convergence of India and Israel has its reflection in the strategic partnership. The country has a good relationship with the United States and is gradually adapting its security policies to the global counter-terrorism frameworks in both states. The India-Israel relations are a subset of the wider multi-alignment foreign policy of India in the Middle East that includes being involved with the states in the Gulf, Iran and Israel all at the same time. Indian officials insist that liaison between India and Israel is made without considering the connection of India with other parties in the region. However, the association has become more pronounced and politically obvious during the Modi government, replacing the previous set of interactions between the two in the paradigm of discreet interaction. Diplomatic visits, defence contracts and speeches highlight the increased strategic significance of this alliance in the global politics.

## India-Israel Nexus against Pakistan

MUHAMMAD FAZEEL

THE historical development in the relationship of diplomacy between Israel and India is an incredible change in the scope of the international relations theory. The bilateral relations have shifted since the establishment of Israel in 1948 and independence of India in 1947, but have been changing to a more assertive relationship with each other, with increasing strength of strategic alliance. In the early Cold War period, India had a low level of contact with Israel, a policy of advocacy of Palestinian interests and embracing of the Non-Alignment policy. The end of the Cold War, however, brought about new geopolitical patterns that saw the two states re-evaluate their foreign policies. Diplomatic relations were established in 1992 hence establishing accessibility to collaborative relations in the areas of defence, technology, agriculture and trade. In the next decades, common security interests, technological stakes and strategic have continued to bring the two states closer. However, currently the growing India-Israel relationship is often viewed by Pakistani analysts as a strategic nexus, with potential implications to the South Asian security relationship. Although the relationship is officially defined as the defence modernisation and collaboration in combating terrorism, it is rather contentious, considering the depth of this relationship and how it is likely to affect the security environment in Pakistan and its region in general.

The first policy that India adopted towards Israel was skepticism even though they noticed the State of Israel in 1950. The Nehru government was careful in forging any full diplomatic relationship on the basis of internal political reasons and also, it did not want to undermine its strong relationship with the Arab states and the entire Muslim world. The stand was also supported by the fact that India was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, which was demonstrated by the support of the Palestinian Arabs by Mahatma Gandhi in his speech in India as well as his subsequent attacks at the partition of Palestine. As a result, India voted against the Partition Plan of 1947 by the United Nations and against admitting Israel to the United Nations. However, there was slow development of covert security cooperation. In 1962, Israel provided military aid to India, but quietly during the Sino-Indian War and the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965. Collaboration also grew in 1971 Indo-Pakistani conflict as India sought the help of Israel via diplomacy. Another landmark was reached in the year 1992 when India formed full diplomatic relations with Israel and since then bilateral relations between the two countries grew at a very fast rate. The high-level visits became common and in 2003, the Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon paid a visit, and later, the further visits became even more intense with the leadership of Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu. In 2017, the historic visit of an Indian prime minister, Modi, to Israel was symbolic of the change of the relationship between the two countries, which had been mild cooperation to direct strategic partnership.



## World Powers: Burning Oil Fields are Burning Our Future

Prof Dr Shujaul Mulk Khan

Public awareness and activism also play a critical role. The images of burning oil fields, often circulated through media and social platforms, are powerful symbols that can drive global demand for change. Citizens, environmental organizations, and civil society groups must hold governments and corporations accountable for energy practices that threaten both the climate and human life. Collective pressure has historically driven technological innovation, legislative reform, and international agreements—proof that global awareness can translate into tangible action. The long-term global consequences extend beyond immediate human suffering...

IT'S a scene that obsess the imagination: endless rivers of black smoke twisting into the sky, flames consuming everything in their path, and families fleeing villages as if the world itself were on fire. From the deserts of the Middle East to the oil-rich plains of Africa, burning oil fields have become a tragic pattern of our times - a stark warning that the pursuit of power and profit is costing us our planet, our health, and our future. The devastation is immediate and undeniable. Areas near burning oil fields are choked with toxic smoke, their skies darkened by thick clouds of soot. Children cough, eyes watering, as the acrid air makes it hard to breathe. Farmers watch helplessly as their crops wither under layers of pollution; their livelihoods destroyed in an instant. Rivers turn black, poisoned with oil and chemicals, while animals flee or die, unable to escape the flames. The Kuwaiti oil fires of 1991 were once the world's most notorious example, but today, similar tragedies are unfolding quietly, away from headlines, leaving scars that may never heal.

Yet these fires are more than environmental disasters - they are the human cost of global politics and energy greed. Oil has long been a symbol of power. Nations that control it wield influence over economies, markets, and militaries. This power often comes at a deadly price. During conflicts, oil fields are burned deliberately - strategically destroyed to deny resources to enemies, to gain leverage in negotiations, or simply as a tool of war. But in these calculated acts, civilians pay the highest price. Families lose their homes, schools, and hospitals. Children grow up with life-long respiratory illnesses, and communities are forced to abandon the only land they have ever known.

The consequences do not stop at borders. The smoke from these fires drifts across continents, bringing disaster to places far removed from the conflict zones. Burning oil fields release massive amounts of carbon dioxide, methane, and black carbon into the atmosphere, accelerating global warming. Scientists warn that each barrel of oil burned in conflict-driven fires contributes directly to the rising global temperatures that are already destabilizing weather systems around the world. Droughts intensify in East Africa, heatwaves scorch Europe and South Asia, and hurricanes grow stronger in the Atlantic. The flames that devastate a single region are, in effect, threatening the entire planet.

The long-term impacts of these fires on global warming are profound. Climate change is not a distant threat; it is unfolding here and now. Rising temperatures melt glaciers and polar ice caps, raising sea levels and threatening coastal cities from New York to Mumbai. Low-lying islands are already at risk of disappearing, and millions of people could become climate refugees in the coming decades. Ocean currents are disrupted, altering rainfall patterns and making storms more frequent and severe. Wildfires rage in regions that were once temperate, while deserts expand, rendering fertile land barren. Every flame that consumes an oil field contributes to a chain reaction that stretches

far beyond the immediate crisis, threatening the stability of ecosystems, economies, and human societies globally. The human cost cannot be overstated. Communities living near oil fields face chronic health risks from exposure to toxic smoke and contaminated water. Children are particularly vulnerable, suffering from asthma, developmental delays, and other long-term health problems. Beyond physical health, these communities often experience economic and social disruption. Farms and fisheries—the traditional lifelines of local populations—are destroyed, forcing families to migrate in search of safety and livelihood. This displacement fuels further instability, creating a cascade of humanitarian crises that are often overlooked in discussions of global energy security.

Consider the story of a mother in northern Iraq, her home reduced to ashes by an oil fire set during a skirmish. She holds her child tightly, struggling to breathe as soot and smoke fills the air. This is not a singular narrative; it is repeated thousands of times wherever oil fields are caught in the crossfire of human ambition. Behind every plume of smoke are real lives, real families, and real futures at stake. The fires themselves are also a warning about humanity's collective choices. For decades, global energy policy has prioritized short-term economic and political objectives over long-term sustainability. Fossil fuels remain the primary energy source for transportation, industry, and electricity generation worldwide. Even as renewable energy technologies have matured, the global economy remains tethered to oil, creating a strategic imperative for nations to control these resources at almost any cost. This reliance drives conflicts and entrenches destructive practices, such as environmental sabotage during war and reckless extraction methods in peacetime. The legacy of these choices is clear: rising global temperatures, collapsing ecosystems, and an uncertain future for the next generations.

Addressing the crisis of burning oil fields requires a multi-pronged approach. First, the international community must strengthen mechanisms to protect critical energy infrastructure during conflicts and enforce accountability for deliberate environmental destruction. Second, nations must accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Solar, wind, geothermal, and green hydrogen technologies are no longer experimental; they are viable, scalable alternatives that reduce the world's strategic dependence on oil while mitigating environmental damage. Third, energy policy must integrate climate considerations into every decision, from production and consumption to conflict prevention and reconstruction. Only by aligning geopolitical strategy with sustainability can nations prevent the recurrence of catastrophic oil fires and the global damage they bring.

Public awareness and activism also play a critical role. The images of burning oil fields, often circulated through media and social platforms, are powerful symbols that can drive global demand for change. Citizens, environmental organizations, and civil society groups must hold govern-

ments and corporations accountable for energy practices that threaten both the climate and human life. Collective pressure has historically driven technological innovation, legislative reform, and international agreements—proof that global awareness can translate into tangible action.

The long-term global consequences extend beyond immediate human suffering. Burning oil fields amplify climate change, which, in turn, triggers a cascade of crises: rising seas swallow coastal cities, extreme heatwaves endanger lives and food systems, storms grow more powerful, and water scarcity intensifies conflicts over diminishing resources. Entire economies could collapse under the weight of climate-related disasters, from flooding of major ports to the loss of agricultural productivity. For many countries in the Global South, the impact is particularly severe, as limited resources constrain their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing climate. In this sense, burning oil fields are not merely a local catastrophe - they are a forewarning of a global emergency that demands immediate, collective action.

And yet, despite the urgency, the world continues down the same path. Oil remains central to modern life - from the fuel in our cars to the energy that powers industries and homes. This dependence gives oil-producing regions immense strategic importance, often turning them into battlegrounds where human lives and the environment are treated as expendable. The result is a cycle of conflict, destruction, and displacement: fires ignite, families flee, ecosystems collapse, and world powers move on, leaving devastation behind.

Ultimately, the flames are both literal and metaphorical. They are consuming lives today and warning of infernos that may engulf the planet tomorrow if we fail to act. Every plume of smoke is a cry for humanity, for foresight, for a chance to choose life over greed. They remind us that the choices of world powers are not abstract political maneuvers - they are moral decisions that will shape the health, safety, and survival of generations to come.

We can no longer afford complacency. Protecting our future requires leadership that values foresight over short-term gain, sustainability over dominance, and humanity over profit. Nations must commit to reducing dependence on oil, investing in renewable energy, and safeguarding both people and ecosystems from the destructive consequences of conflict. Citizens, too, must demand change, because each individual action - whether supporting clean energy, advocating for climate policies, or raising awareness - can contribute to altering this trajectory.

The burning oil fields are more than news stories - they are a mirror reflecting the unsustainable, human cost of our energy choices. If the world continues to treat oil as a weapon or a tool of dominance rather than a resource to manage responsibly, these fires are only the beginning. Our future is at stake. Every moment of inaction allows the smoke to spread further, the flames to climb higher, and the damage to grow deeper.

## Strategic Restraint: Pakistan's Diplomacy in a Fragmenting Gulf

T.M Awan



Iran, for its part, appears acutely aware of this economic reality. The Gulf's financial architecture remains deeply intertwined with the petrodollar system. Oil revenues are largely denominated in US dollars, and a substantial portion of these earnings is reinvested in American financial...

THE escalating tensions in the Middle East are often viewed simply as a geopolitical confrontation between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. However, such a narrow lens overlooks several strategic dynamics shaping the region's current trajectory. One of the most significant yet understated dimensions of this evolving crisis is Pakistan's potential diplomatic role. Pakistan's cautious and balanced stance amid rising tensions between Tehran and Riyadh is neither accidental nor merely symbolic. It reflects a strategic necessity shaped by geography, economic dependence, and internal security considerations. Islamabad's current posture is therefore less about neutrality for its own sake and more about navigating a complex web of regional obligations. On one side, Pakistan's economic linkages with the Gulf states are profound. Millions of Pakistani workers are employed across Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf economies. Their remittances form a critical pillar of Pakistan's foreign exchange inflows. In addition, energy arrangements, financial support, and deferred oil facilities from Gulf partners have repeatedly helped Islamabad stabilize its economy during difficult fiscal periods. Under such circumstances, openly antagonizing Saudi Arabia or other Gulf partners is neither politically nor economically viable.

On the other side lies Iran, a neighboring country with whom Pakistan shares a sensitive and strategically significant border. Stability along this frontier is vital for Pakistan's internal security. Border management, counter-militancy coordination, and regional connectivity projects all require a working relationship with Tehran. Moreover, Pakistan's domestic social fabric adds another layer of complexity. A sizeable Shia population—often estimated between ten and fifteen percent of the country's population—means that any overtly hostile posture toward Iran could trigger internal sectarian tensions. Given Pakistan's historical struggles with sectarian violence, such risks cannot be ignored. Consequently, Islamabad's policy reflects a careful balancing act. Pakistan seeks to maintain its defense commitments

with Saudi Arabia while simultaneously avoiding any direct confrontation with Iran. The objective is clear: prevent the regional escalation from dragging Pakistan into a conflict that would carry severe economic and security consequences.

Recent diplomatic signals reinforce this approach. Pakistan has reportedly advised Saudi Arabia to avoid direct military confrontation with Iran while also urging Tehran to refrain from expanding retaliatory actions toward Saudi targets. Pakistan's foreign minister reiterated this balanced policy in his recent address to the National Assembly, emphasizing that Islamabad supports regional stability and diplomatic restraint. Yet the broader regional context suggests that this crisis extends beyond the triangular dynamics of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. A closer look reveals that several Gulf states are also exercising caution. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, has signaled reluctance to allow its territory to be used as a direct operational platform for attacks against Iran. This cautious posture is rooted largely in economic vulnerability. Gulf economies rely heavily on oil exports, aviation hubs, transit routes, logistics networks, and global financial flows. Sustained conflict with Iran—particularly if it leads to attacks on infrastructure—could quickly disrupt these economic systems. Even limited strikes on energy facilities or shipping routes would reverberate through global energy markets.

Iran, for its part, appears acutely aware of this economic reality. The Gulf's financial architecture remains deeply intertwined with the petrodollar system. Oil revenues are largely denominated in US dollars, and a substantial portion of these earnings is reinvested in American financial markets. Any disruption to this cycle would not only affect Gulf economies but could also produce ripple effects in global financial systems. This dynamic helps explain the somewhat paradoxical behavior currently visible in the region. Iran has targeted assets associated with American presence, while Arab governments have issued strong

statements condemning violations of sovereignty. Yet none of the major Arab states has formally joined a US-led war effort against Iran. Diplomatic relations remain intact. Iranian ambassadors have not been expelled, and there have been no decisive military responses from Gulf capitals.

The contrast between rhetoric and action suggests that most regional actors are attempting to avoid a full-scale war. Within this environment, Pakistan's diplomatic position becomes particularly relevant. Some policy circles in Washington view countries like Pakistan as potential facilitators in eventual de-escalation. Should the confrontation intensify to a point where diplomatic off-ramps become necessary, Islamabad's neutral posture could allow it to serve as a bridge between opposing sides.

In other words, Pakistan's current neutrality may not only protect its own strategic interests but could also position it as a potential mediator when the time comes to reduce tensions. At present, the conflict appears to be gradually shifting toward maritime dynamics, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz—a critical chokepoint through which a significant portion of the world's oil supply passes. Any disruption there would have immediate global consequences. For now, the crisis remains contained but unresolved. It has not escalated into a full-scale war, yet neither has it moved decisively toward diplomatic settlement. This suggests the possibility of a prolonged period of controlled confrontation rather than a short, decisive conflict. In such a scenario, Pakistan's challenge will be to continue navigating a narrow strategic corridor: safeguarding its economic lifelines in the Gulf, maintaining stability with Iran along its western border, and supporting diplomatic efforts aimed at preventing a wider regional catastrophe. Because in the Middle East, wars rarely remain confined to their original battlefield—and the costs of escalation are seldom limited to the region alone.

— The writer is a journalist, Media & Communication strategist based in Islamabad.

## Briefs

## War to continue till Israeli PM...

FROM PAGE 01 while broader effects threaten food security (via higher fertilizer prices), supply chains, and potential recession if the Strait remains choked. Analysts warn of uneven but profound shocks, with emerging markets particularly vulnerable. The conflict shows no immediate signs of de-escalation, with fresh US-Israeli strikes reported on Iranian sites (e.g., Isfahan killing at least 15) and Iranian/Lebanese (Hezbollah) retaliations continuing. Mediation efforts appear stalled.

## Forces destroy storage...

FROM PAGE 01 stockpiled before distribution to militant networks. Key details from official and media accounts: Pakistani forces struck multiple positions, including technical support infrastructure and an equipment storage facility in Kandahar, inflicting significant damage and disrupting militant operational capabilities. A separate strike specifically neutralized the tunnel housing technical gear purportedly shared or used by both Afghan Taliban elements and TTP operatives. The strikes are described as precise retaliatory actions in response to ongoing threats, including recent militant attacks inside Pakistan and alleged use of Afghan soil for staging.

## Security forces kill five India..

FROM PAGE 01 presence of terrorists. "During the conduct of operation, our troops effectively engaged the khawarij location and after an intense fire exchange, five khawarij were sent to hell," read the communique. The security forces also recovered weapons and ammunition from the killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area. Following the IBO, security forces began a sanitisation operation to eliminate any other India-sponsored khawarij found in the area, the ISPR release said.

## Bangladesh outclass Pak to win...

FROM PAGE 01 Debutant Ghazi Ghori and Abdul Samad then joined hands to stabilise the innings, putting together a 50-run partnership which also took the team's total past the 50-run mark. Nahid Rana struck on the final delivery of the 14th over to break the stand as Ghori departed after scoring 29 off 39 balls, including three fours and a six, with Pakistan reduced to 67-4.

## How the war is affecting...

FROM PAGE 01 Portuguese Grand Prix and the season finale in Valencia also changed as a result. The 'Finalissima' match between European champions Spain and Copa America winners Argentina that was scheduled to be held in Qatar later this month has been cancelled.

## 'War with Iran 'will certainly'...

FROM PAGE 01 "There's no guarantees in wars at all," Wright said. "This is short-term pain to get through to a much better place." Still, Wright pointed out that gas prices are lower than when prices hit a record high in 2022 under the Biden administration, and he argued that the situation fueling these increases - the U.S. military action against Iran - will lead to a meaningful difference in policy. "We had \$5 gasoline in the middle of the Biden administration," Wright said.

## Sarfraz Ahmed announces retirement from int'l cricket

Former captain thanks teammates, coaches, family and fans for unwavering support throughout his career

DNA

KARACHI: Former Test captain Sarfraz Ahmed has announced his retirement from international cricket, bringing an end to a distinguished career spanning around two decades, according to a press release issued by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Karachi-born wicketkeeper-batter, who made his ODI debut in 2007 before making his Test and T20I debuts in 2010, went on to represent Pakistan in 54 Tests, 117 ODIs and 61 T20Is. He scored 6,164 runs across formats, including six centuries and 35 half-centuries. Behind the stumps, he grabbed 315 catches and completed 56 stumpings during his international career. Sarfraz captained Pakistan in 100 international matches across formats, including 50 ODIs, 37 T20Is, 13 Tests, and led the side to the No 1 ranking in T20I cricket. During his captaincy, Pakistan achieved a world-record streak of 11 consecutive T20I series victories and recorded six clean sweeps, which include against West Indies (2016 and 2018), Sri Lanka (2017), Australia (2018), New Zealand (2018) and Scotland (2018). Sarfraz's leadership era also saw the



emergence of several future stars, including Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman and Shadab Khan, whom he backed at the start of their international careers. Sarfraz led Pakistan to historic triumph in the ICC Champions Trophy, beating India by 180 runs in the final at the Oval in England.

With that victory, he became the first Pakistan captain to win the Champions Trophy and the only captain till date to win ICC titles at both junior and senior levels, having earlier led Pakistan to win in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup in 2006 in Sri Lanka. In recognition of his services and the Champions Trophy triumph, Sarfraz

was awarded the Pride of Performance in 2018, becoming the youngest Pakistan captain to receive the honour. Talking about his individual records, Sarfraz has the Pakistan record of 10 catches in a Test match, which he took against South Africa in Johannesburg in 2019. He is to date the only Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter to score an ODI century at Lord's, which he scored against England in 2016. Sarfraz, who played his first international match (ODI) in 2007, made his last international appearance in an international match (Test) against Australia in Perth in 2023. "It has been the greatest honour of my life to represent Pakistan. From leading the U19 team to a world title in 2006 to lifting the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017, every moment in Pakistan colours has been special. I am grateful to my teammates, coaches, family and the fans for their unwavering support throughout my career," the former skipper said in a statement. "Captaining Pakistan across all formats was a dream come true. I always tried to play fearless cricket and build a united team. Seeing players like Babar, Fakhar, Hasan, Shaheen, Shadab and others grow into match-winners during my captaincy is one of my proudest achievements," he added.

## FO slams Indian ministry...

FROM PAGE 01 Fitna-al-Hindustan, are well known. "Therefore, India's frustration at the destruction of its terrorist franchise in Afghanistan, as reflected in such statements, is quite understandable," he added. The spokesperson said India, a serial violator of human rights and international law, continued to illegally occupy Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir in violation of the UN Charter and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and had been responsible for perpetrating state terrorism in the occupied territory. "Guided by Hindutva extremist ideology, it also continues to systematically marginalise its minorities, spread Islamophobia, and has even weaponised water in contravention of its treaty obligations. India has not only played the role of a spoiler in Afghanistan, but also in the entire region," he added.

## President discusses security...

FROM PAGE 01 Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Chairman Muttahida Quami Movement - Pakistan (MQM-P) Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui called on President Asif Ali Zardari here at Bilawal House. The participants also reviewed the evolving regional situation and its potential implications for Pakistan. The meeting underscored the need for joint efforts to promote peace, stability, and the rule of law in the country. President Zardari stressed the importance of strengthening internal security and ensuring the protection of citizens.

## PM directs monitoring of food...

FROM PAGE 01 products in regional markets. He directed that special attention should be given to meeting the food requirements of Gulf countries while ensuring their food security. PM Shehbaz Sharif instructed the relevant authorities to formulate a comprehensive strategy for exporting surplus food items to Gulf countries without affecting domestic food needs. He also emphasized that high quality standards must be ensured in the export of food products to friendly Gulf states. The prime minister directed the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation to take necessary steps to facilitate the export of food items to Gulf countries through sea routes.

## Eid holidays announced

FROM PAGE 01 Ruet-i-Hilal Committee was the "sole competent authority to announce the beginning of Islamic months on credible witness testimonies and verified observations from across the country". Earlier, the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) also predicted that Ramazan was likely to last 30 days this year and the Shawwal moon was unlikely to be visible on the evening of March 19, thereby Eidul Fitr would likely commence on March 21.

## Flights to remain suspended

FROM PAGE 01 activities halted between 08:30am and 10:30am. Six sectors under the Lahore Flight Information Region (FIR) will also remain closed temporarily for commercial flights on March 17. The PAA had previously announced that commercial aircraft would not be able to land or take off from Islamabad International Airport between 8:30am and 10:30am on March 16. The notice had instructed aircraft captains to ensure additional fuel reserves, noting that flights already in the air during the restricted period may have to remain in holding patterns before landing at the Islamabad airport.

## Bulgaria cancer screenings to begin amid probe

DNA

SOFIA: Pilot screening for cervical and colorectal cancer is expected to begin in June in three regions of Bulgaria, caretaker Minister of Health Mihail Okoljiski told reporters on Friday. The two programmes were originally due to start last year. In early March, Okoljiski said the Public Financial Inspection Agency (PFIA) would review public procurement procedures for cervical and colorectal cancer screening tests, with the Prosecutor's Office to be involved if necessary. "It is unclear how the specific test type was selected, and some details of the procedure remain unclear to us," he said on Friday. He added that there were indications similar tests had been offered at lower prices. "We will handle the screening issue with full responsibility. Both screening programmes are highly justified, as these diseases cause the highest mortality

in the European Region of the World Health Organization (WHO)," Okoljiski said. "We have fought for more than 20 years to introduce this kind of screening, and we will do everything in our power not to undermine the idea of population-based screening," he added. Tests are already available, but other key elements are still missing, including contracts with the National Health Insurance Fund, doctors and laboratories. Okoljiski said the screening now being organized would use the tests already purchased. He added that contracts with the NHIF still have to be signed and funding secured, as no money has yet been allocated for them. The cervical cancer screening programme will cover women aged 25 to 65, while the colorectal cancer programme will target men and women aged 45 to 75. Participation in both programmes will be open to everyone, regardless of health insurance status, Okoljiski said. Bulg-

aria has so far received an initial 51,020 diagnostic kits for colorectal cancer and 22,068 kits for cervical cancer. The Bulgarian Medical Association has already developed protocols for implementing the two screening programmes, but contracts between the NHIF and service providers, doctors and laboratories have yet to be signed. The logistics of applying those protocols and payment for the services also remain unresolved. Okoljiski said the protocols were based on European best practice, but added that "there are elements and aspects that do not reflect the logic of the state interest or the interest of all medical specialists," citing the involvement of a private limited company, the Center for European Health Policies, which had been authorized to conduct market research and help shape parts of the procedures set out in the protocols. He said this needed to be reviewed, as the two screening programmes could not

be effectively implemented under the current arrangements. Test results are meant to be entered in real time, but, to their surprise, they were to be uploaded to a system developed by the Center for European Health Policies rather than the National Health Information System, he said, adding that this would also be reviewed. An inspection by the Ministry of Health's Internal Audit Directorate is under way, PFIA inspectors are also on site, and a submission has been prepared for the Prosecutor's Office so the entire procedure for the two programmes, including the supply of tests and reagents, can be examined, Okoljiski added. Later on Friday, the Bulgarian Medical Association (BMA) firmly rejected Okoljiski's claim that the protocols for the two screening programmes required test results to be entered into a system developed by the Center for European Health Policies instead of the National Health Information System.

## Using IWT as weapon poses serious threat to regional peace

ISLAMABAD: Undermining the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) would have disastrous consequences for regional peace and stability, cautioned Chief Organizer of the Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad. With India's unilateral abrogation of the treaty, Pakistan faces grave threats to its agricultural survival and food security. In an interview with APP, Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad said India's reduction of Pakistan's allocated water under the treaty is tantamount to an act of war, giving Pakistan the full right to respond to such a violation. He added that using water as a weapon poses a serious threat to regional peace and stability. Jawad stated that there is no legal justification for placing the treaty in "abeyance" or suspending it. According to him, no changes can be made to the treaty without mutual consent. He emphasized that stopping another country's water is a grave offense, noting that the rivers covered under the treaty flow through areas including Jammu and Kashmir and large parts of Pakistan, making Pakistan a primary stakeholder. He stressed that Pakistan will ensure the implementation of the IWT at all costs and will not allow anyone to infringe upon its rights. Jawad pointed out that more than 80 percent of Pakistan's agriculture depends on the irrigation system linked to the Indus basin. He further said that India's unjustified, illegal, and stubborn actions regarding the treaty could intensify challenges related to agriculture and climate change in Pakistan. Increased glacier melt and irregular monsoon patterns could threaten the long-term availability of water resources. Moreover, a reduction in river flows could lead to a decline in groundwater levels in Pakistan. Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad also warned that India's alleged "water aggression," by using water as a weapon, could seriously undermine global food security goals. He noted that the Indus Waters Treaty, which has remained in force for more than six decades, serves as a cornerstone of agricultural stability in South Asia and is vital for food supply, rural employment, and livelihoods for millions of people. - APP

## Salman Ali Agha reprimanded for breaching ICC code of conduct

Agha admits offence and accepts penalty, eliminating need for formal hearing

LAHORE: Pakistan all-rounder Salman Ali Agha has been officially reprimanded by the International Cricket Council (ICC) for breaching its code of conduct during the second one-day international (ODI) against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Friday. According to the apex cricketing body, Agha was found to have breached Article 2.2 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to "abuse of cricket equipment or clothing, ground equipment or fixtures and fittings during an International Match". Furthermore, one demerit point has been added to the all-rounder's disciplinary record. This was Agha's first offence in the 24-month period. The unusual incident occurred in the 39th over of Pakistan's innings when Bangladesh skipper Miraz bowled a flatter delivery, which Mohammad Rizwan nudged back. The ball spun and rolled directly towards Salman Agha, who was stationed at the non-striker's end. The Pakistan all-rounder initially attempted to dodge the ball, which, however, was intercepted by Miraz through his right foot. - DNA

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has announced a flash humanitarian appeal of \$308.3 million to support civilians there, after ongoing Israeli strikes on Lebanon and Hezbollah's rocket counter-attacks left around 816,000 Lebanese internally displaced, a figure that is set to rise. "I am here on a visit of solidarity with the people of Lebanon," he said on Friday in Beirut, capital of the war-ravaged country. "Solidarity in words must be matched by solidarity in action. This aid is urgently needed. The military escalation across the region is taking a terrible toll, including in Lebanon," the UN chief added. Amid the ongoing Middle East crisis, hundreds of civilians have been killed - including many children - and entire communities have been uprooted as "lives have been turned upside down." Access to food, water, healthcare, education and basic services has been dangerously disrupted, and evacuation orders now extend across more of the country than ever before. In addition, more than 90,000 people - mostly Syrians, but also Lebanese - have crossed into Syria. The appeal's success depends on swift, flexible funding and on ensuring that humanitarian workers can safely reach those most in need, the Secretary-General emphasized. "These are immediate needs, but there will be a lot that Lebanon needs in solidarity from the international community," he said. "Helping to establish and immediate ceasefire that both sides must accept, creating the conditions for negotiations that will allow Lebanon to become in the shortest possible period, a country that sees its territorial integrity fully respected and where the State has the monopoly of the use of force," he said, adding that the UN stands ready to support the government.

## UN appeals for \$308 million for Lebanon

"These are immediate needs, but there will be a lot that Lebanon needs in solidarity from the international community," he said

Guterres said that for years, Lebanon has opened the doors to those fleeing conflict, showing the world the true meaning of hospitality, solidarity and resilience. "Now, the world must show the people of Lebanon our strongest support in this hour of grave danger and profound need," the UN chief said. "In the face of this upheaval, we have seen exceptional courage and solidarity on the ground," he continued, pointing to schools that have opened their doors to shelter displaced families and health workers who continue to serve under immense pressure. "United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners are working closely with national authorities to respond with urgency, delivering hot meals, safe drinking water, hygiene supplies and essential relief items," he said. "These efforts are saving lives, but they need a big boost of support." The newly launched flash appeal will sustain and expand lifesaving assistance over the next three months, including food, clean water, health care, education, protection and other vital services, he said. - DNA

## PFF President donates his allowances to rising star

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: In a groundbreaking move aimed at encouraging emerging talent, Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) President Syed Mohsen Gilani has launched a pioneering initiative by pledging to distribute his allowances from Congress and Executive Committee meetings among the country's top-performing footballers - a practice he intends to make a regular feature to motivate and reward outstanding players.

The PFF president launched the initiative by handing over his allowance for attending the Congress meeting on December 29, 2025, to Pakistan Men's Under-20 team player Mohammad Abdullah during a brief visit to the Jinnah Stadium, Islamabad, where the team is preparing for the upcoming SAFF Under-20 Championship. Mohsen Gilani observed the team's training session under head coach Shahzad Anwar on Saturday and interacted with the players, who will depart for the Maldives on March 21 to participate in the SAFF Under-20 Cham-

pionship. Reaffirming his commitment that the PFF will continue to support players and coaches across the country, Mohsen Gilani expressed confidence that the Men's Under-20 team would give their best in the SAFF Under-20 Championship, where Pakistan will face India and Bangladesh in the group stage. Abdullah became the first recipient of the PFF president's allowance award for his outstanding performances in the SAFF Under-17 Championship. The young striker finished as the tournament's top scorer with six goals, helping Pakistan reach the semi-finals. "I

am not just the president of a federation, but the president of all the players," Gilani said. "Every player needs motivation, and we want all of you to perform well. We will try our best to support you in every possible way. This is a small token of appreciation from my side, and this practice will continue in the future." Abdullah's father, former Pakistan international Tahir Pervaiz, also hailed the initiative taken by the PFF president. "This has never happened in the past, and the current lot of players is fortunate to have Mohsen Gilani as the figurehead of the PFF," he said.



## Briefs

## Beetroot can boost sugar exports: FPCCI Convener

LAHORE: With coherent policy support, sustained investment, and market-driven ambition, the beetroot sugar could emerge as one of Pakistan's most quietly transformative agricultural success stories.

Convener of FPCCI Regional Committee on Food, Shahid Imran stated this in a meeting with progressive farmers delegation led by Ms Sana Abdullah Chaudhry here Sunday

Pakistan's beetroot sugar export, he added, are still small in volume with one percent share in total sugar production of the country, whereas globally, beet is cornerstone of industrial agriculture. Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait have emerged as primary destinations, driven by demand for refined and specialty sugar products. Export prices averaged over USD 3,300 per tonne in 2024, signalling improving quality, packaging, and market acceptance, he mentioned.

Shahid Imran was of view that expanding beetroot sugar can reduce dependence on sugarcane; smooth seasonal supply fluctuations; conserve water resources; and unlock non-traditional export revenues.

"At a time when climate volatility and global price swings threaten agricultural stability, diversification is not simply prudent – it is essential," he remarked.

The Convener said, sugar beet cultivation remains concentrated in regions with favourable temperatures, soil structure, and irrigation access. Farmers in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have beginning to recognise that sugar beet is not merely a substitute crop, but a structural solution to rising water stress, declining soil health, and volatile cane pricing, he added.—APP

## Pope renews appeal for peace in Middle East

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV renewed his appeal for peace in the Middle East on Sunday, calling for an end to the war and reopening of dialogue "Dear brothers and sisters, for two weeks the peoples of the Middle East have suffered the atrocious violence of war," the US pontiff said at his weekly Angelus prayer at the Vatican. "Thousands of innocent people have been killed, and countless others have been forced to flee their homes. 'I renew my closeness to all those who have lost loved ones in the attacks that have hit schools, hospitals, and residential areas.'" Leo said the situation in Lebanon was a particular cause for concern. "On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East and of all women and men of goodwill, I address those responsible for this conflict," he said in Italian. "Cease fire! Let paths of dialogue be reopened! 'Violence can never lead to the justice, stability and peace that people await.—APP

## Iran ready to help investigate strikes on civilian areas

ABBAS ARAGHCHI: Tehran would welcome any initiative that could guarantee a complete end to the US-Israeli war on Ira DUBAI: Iran's foreign minister denied on Sunday that Iran has targeted civilian or residential areas in the Middle East and said Tehran is ready to form a committee with its neighbors to investigate the responsibility for such strikes. Gulf countries have called upon Iran to cease its attacks on their territories, which have not only sustained strikes on US military bases but also damage to energy facilities and residential areas Abbas Araghchi's Telegram channel quoted him as saying in an interview with Al-Araby Al-Jadeed website that Tehran was in communication with various Gulf capitals and would welcome any initiative that could guarantee a complete end to the US-Israeli war on Iran.—APP



LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting to review food stocks and export of surplus to the Gulf countries.

## Oil may extend gains as conflict threatens deeper Gulf supply losses

RIYADH: Oil prices may extend gains when markets reopen on Monday as the US-Israeli-Iran conflict enters a third week, with fresh attacks on energy infrastructure and continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz threatening the largest global oil supply shock in years. Analysts warn crude could remain above \$100 per barrel following the latest escalation, raising fears of a prolonged energy shock and a sharp hit to consumers' real incomes. The escalation follows US strikes on military targets near Kharg Island, Iran's main crude export hub, and subsequent Iranian drone attacks on a major oil terminal in the UAE, intensifying concerns over supply security across the Gulf. Brent Crude and West Texas Intermediate have already surged more than 40 percent this month to their highest levels since 2022 after Iranian authorities halted commercial shipping through Hormuz, a route that normally carries about one-fifth of global oil supply, Reuters reported. Against that backdrop, JPMorgan said a global oil supply shortfall of about 7 million barrels a day caused by the conflict can only be offset by an equivalent decline in consumption. Aside from a roughly 400,000 barrel-a-day drop in demand linked to reduced air travel in the Middle East, global consumption has remained largely intact, the bank said in its latest analysis. "The impact on the oil supply would likely be limited. If loading jetties, storage tanks, and pipelines remain intact, Iran's export capacity would be largely unchanged, and the country could still ship roughly 1.5-1.7 million bpd of crude. Any disruption would likely be temporary and precautionary," said JPMorgan.

The analysis, however, warned that the attack on Kharg marks a new escalation in the conflict, because the island is a cornerstone of Iran's economy and a major source of revenue for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

In the days leading up to the US-Israeli attack, Iran ramped up exports from Kharg Island to near-record levels, loading over 3 mbd between Feb. 15 and Feb. 20, nearly triple the normal export pace of around 1.3-1.6 million bpd, suggesting Iran was accelerating shipments ahead of the anticipated escalation. Citing data from Kpler, JPMorgan added that the storage capacity on Kharg Island is estimated at roughly 30 million barrels. Some 18 million barrels of crude are currently stored on the island, equivalent to roughly 10-12 days of exports under normal conditions. "If Kharg Island were disabled, the loss of its storage buffer and the scarcity of viable export alternatives would rapidly trigger upstream shut-ins across major southwest fields. With production near 3.3 million bpd and exports around 1.5 million bpd, as much as half of national output could be at risk if the hub remains offline, and the previously assumed 20-day buffer would vanish from day one," said the report. The analysis added that the global market is currently facing an acute shortage of products, including diesel, jet fuel, and liquefied petroleum gas, as well as naphtha, as they are not available. According to JPMorgan, the oil market is beginning to feel the physical reality of a supply disruption, as the war enters its third week. Cargoes that departed the Gulf before the Strait's closure are still arriving at their destinations, but new shipments

have largely stopped. As a result, incoming supplies are running dry and could be exhausted by the end of this week for Asia-bound shipments and by the end of next week for Europe. The report also warned that crude oil supply cuts are on track to reach nearly 12 million barrels per day by the end of this week, making the deficit highly visible across physical markets. In India, struggling to meet domestic LPG demand, the government invoked emergency powers, ordered refiners to maximize LPG production, and cut industrial sales to protect household supply. In Sri Lanka, long queues formed at fuel stations as fears of shortages returned; authorities said stocks were still available but moved to stop hoarding.

Myanmar has already imposed fuel rationing for private vehicles, citing shipping disruptions. In a separate release, Rystad Energy said that Gulf shut-ins could reduce regional crude output by 70 percent if the US-Iran war drags on. "In just over a week since the US-Israeli strikes on Iran triggered the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, more than 12 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd) of Middle East oil and gas production has been taken offline, including 7 million bpd of crude supply – equivalent to roughly 7 percent of total global liquids demand," said Rystad Energy.

According to the report, Iraq has been hit hardest, with over 60 percent of its pre-conflict volume curtailed. Projecting a worst-case scenario, Rystad Energy said that Middle East crude output could fall to approximately 6 million bpd, a region-wide reduction of 70 percent from the pre-con-

flict baseline. "Further cuts from major Middle East oil producers cannot be ruled out as storage tanks fill to the brim, bypass infrastructure approaches its limit, and the conflict shows no sign of a near-term resolution. Although the likelihood of oil supply falling to 6 million bpd is not our central case, it is still very much in the cards," said Aditya Saraswat, research director for the Middle East and North Africa region at Rystad Energy.

He added: "If and when the crisis reaches an end, it will take months to restore operations to pre-conflict levels, with the questions of infrastructure integrity and a recalibrated geopolitical order still at play." According to Saraswat, a potential winner in this geopolitical turmoil could be Russia, which could provide some additional barrels, as stronger drilling activity may lift Urals supply by around 200,000 to 300,000 bpd, but even that would only cover a fraction of any potential loss of Iranian crude. The research director added that there are no viable replacements for Arab Heavy and Arab Medium in the near term, triggering a historic supply crisis if the conflict is not resolved in the coming weeks. In a separate study, Oxford Economics said oil prices above \$100 per barrel would deal a significant blow to consumers' real incomes and weigh on spending growth this year, offsetting the fiscal boost from larger tax refunds. "With the disruption to global energy supplies more widespread and persistent than we assumed in our March baseline, we will revise our growth forecasts lower in our second March baseline," said Michael Pearce, chief US economist at Oxford Economics.—DNA

## Nowruz, the Persian new year looms as war steals Iranians' joy Even so, many families are trying to find some joy for their children, for whom Nowruz is also a holiday of gifts and treats. "I have a six-year-old boy who has no real sense of the war

NOWRUZ, meaning "new day," will ring in the year 1405 on the Persian calendar and the arrival of spring on the afternoon of March 20 But this year, the festive spirit eludes many. The dazzling "fire festival" (Chaharshanbe Suri) that kicks off the holiday season will be closely watched on Tuesday evening. It is the first moment for Iranians to gather in public outside state-organized rallies in support of the authorities. On the night of bonfires, Iranians jump over flames to ward off misfortune and welcome renewal. Over the past two decades, the ancient celebration has become a powerful outlet for young people despite the disapproval of authorities and much of the Shia clergy, who deem it a "pagan" ritual. Whether Iranians will be allowed to gather at all this year is unclear. Security forces are out in large numbers across major cities and the country remains in a 40-day mourning period following the death of supreme leader Ali Khamenei on the first day of the war. "Normally in the days before Nowruz, everyone is cleaning their home and getting ready for the holiday," the Bukan resident said. "This year that feeling is completely gone." In Tehran and many other cities, bazaars – typically the heart of pre-holiday life – are nearly empty. Many shops and markets remain shut two weeks after the war was launched by the US and Israel on Feb. 28. In Piranshahr, in the northwest, "the lively, energetic mood of past years has disappeared," said a 40-year-old man, also contacted from Paris and requesting anonymity. The downturn is another blow to shopkeepers who normally make much of their annual income during the pre-Nowruz rush. "My cousin has a clothing shop, but he hasn't been able to open because it's in a city where there are many explosions," said a resident of the capital, Tehran. A 48-year-old Afghan migrant who has returned home to seek safety said the streets and bazaars should be packed at this time. "But when I went to the market, I didn't see anyone." Even so, many families are trying to find some joy for their children, for whom Nowruz is also a holiday of gifts and treats. "I have a six-year-old boy who has no real sense of the war. All he wants are new clothes, sweets and traditional cakes for Nowruz," the Bukan resident said. "People try to buy chocolates and snacks for their kids. They want to reassure them," said a father living near Tehran. "But the children know and understand everything.—Agencies

## Japan to release oil stocks as US says buy American

TOKYO: Japan plans to start releasing oil from its stockpiles on March 16 to soften the shock from the US-Israeli war on Iran, a stark reminder of the oil crisis half a century ago that prompted Tokyo to create reserves. As gasoline prices across Japan started to rise with the war disrupting supplies from the Gulf's Strait of Hormuz, Tokyo pledged to release a record 80 million barrels of oil, about 45 days of supply for the resource-poor nation. The government has asked Japan's refiners to use the released crude, which will reduce the national reserves by 17 percent, to secure domestic supplies. It is not known how much of the oil will go to a global release of 400 million barrels being coordinated by the International Energy Agency to address the war's supply shock and price volatility. Japan's release shows how seriously Tokyo views the disruption, said Yuri Humber, CEO of Tokyo-based consultancy Yuri Group. "The reserves can help stabilise supplies and prices in the short term but they mainly buy time. They can't fully offset a prolonged disruption in the Strait of Hormuz," he said. Any potential release from 12 million barrels jointly held in Japan by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait would be in addition to the announced 80 million barrels, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry says. Japan started its national oil reserve system in 1978, several years after the Arab oil embargo. The Group of Seven nation, reliant on the Middle East for around 90 percent of its oil, now stockpiles 254 days of consumption. It will start releasing 15 days' worth of private-sector oil on March 16 and a month's worth from the state reserves from late this month, according to METI. As private companies prepare to tap Japan's stockpiles, METI Minister Ryosei Akazawa said they are also looking for supplies from the US, Central Asia, South America and Gulf nations that can bypass the Strait of Hormuz. Japan gets around 4 percent of its oil from the US after largely stopping purchases from Russia following Moscow's 2022 Ukraine invasion – when Tokyo last tapped its reserves. "When you look at the conflict in the Middle East ... you're reminded of all that crude oil that has gone from Alaska to Japan was never targeted with a successful terrorist attack," US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin told Reuters. "This conflict ... is a reminder that along the Indo-Pacific, a lot of other nations can look to the United States, where we have the resources." —DNA

## Egypt incurs \$10b in Suez Canal losses since 2020

JEDDAH: Egypt has suffered about \$10 billion in cumulative losses from global and regional crises affecting the Suez Canal since 2020, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said during the Egyptian Family Iftar held at the Air Force House. He also highlighted mounting economic pressures on the country, noting that annual petroleum consumption for electricity generation and industry costs around \$20 billion. The remarks come as Egypt faces growing strain from disruptions to global trade routes and rising energy costs. The Suez Canal, one of the country's most important sources of foreign currency, has been repeatedly affected by geopolitical tensions and shipping disruptions in recent years, reducing traffic and government revenues. In a post published on the Egyptian presidency's official Facebook account, El-Sisi said the state entered an economic reform program in 2016 and that, since 2020, "we have been exposed to crises and negative matters that were difficult to avoid, resulting in Egypt losing about \$10 billion in Suez Canal revenues, equivalent to 500 billion Egyptian pounds, which has certainly had repercussions on the state's ability to act." The gathering was attended by key government figures, including Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly; Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Hussein Essa; and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense and Military Production Lt. Gen. Ashraf Salem Zahir. He reiterated Egypt's condemnation of attacks targeting "brotherly Arab states," emphasizing full support for Arab countries while calling for de-escalation, dialogue, and adherence to international law. "These conflicts and the tense environment have cast a heavy shadow over the global economy, disrupted supply chains, and driven up energy and food prices worldwide," El-Sisi said, noting that Egypt has not been immune to these effects. He explained that the government's economic measures, including the recent fuel price hikes, are necessary to ensure the supply of strategic goods, safeguard the national economy, and protect citizens' resources. "We fully understand the pressures on the Egyptian citizen and the negative sentiments regarding the recent increase in fuel prices," he said, noting that the realities of the situation sometimes necessitate taking difficult measures to avoid harsher consequences. Egypt raised prices on a wide range of fuel products on March 10, citing surging global oil and gas prices and disruptions to Middle East output caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran, the Petroleum Ministry said.—DNA

## Saudi sports sector could surpass \$22b by 2030

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's sports sector could surpass its projected \$22.4 billion end-of-decade value as institutional expansion, infrastructure investment and private sector participation accelerate under Vision 2030, according to sports law expert Francesca Petriccione. The Kingdom's sports industry is currently estimated at roughly SR32 billion (\$8.52 billion), with projections suggesting it could contribute around \$16.5 billion annually to the gross domestic product by the end of the decade, driven by large-scale infrastructure projects, professional league development and growing participation rates. According to a report released in December 2024 by SURJ Sports Investments, a company under the Public Investment Fund, the sector could be valued at above \$22 billion by 2030. Petriccione is bullish over that figure, and said: "For me, we can go also beyond that number." She added that Saudi Arabia's sports economy is expanding beyond elite football and major tournaments into a broader commercial ecosystem spanning media rights, tourism, infrastructure and human capital. Petriccione, an international mergers and acquisitions lawyer specializing in sports law – as well as a professor of international law at the University of Milan – advises leading international football clubs on strategic expansion projects in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. According to the interview, structural growth across the sports ecosystem has been significant in recent years. The number of sports federations in the Kingdom increased to 98 in 2024 from 32 in 2015, while the number of multi-sport clubs rose to 126 in 2024 from nine in 2019. Petriccione said the

expansion reflects a deliberate government policy aimed at embedding sports more deeply within the national economy and society. "Sport is no longer treated merely as entertainment," she said, describing it instead as a strategic sector capable of supporting economic diversification and international partnerships. Participation levels have also increased significantly, with about 48 percent of Saudis now engaging in weekly sports or physical activity, a shift Petriccione said is critical to building a sustainable sports industry. Beyond grassroots participation, privatization initiatives are expected to play a key role in attracting capital into the sector. The ongoing privatization of football clubs, she said, is introducing new ownership structures that could bring long-term investment and more commercially driven management models. Modern stadiums are financially stronger when they function as experience and events platforms rather than simply football grounds. Sports infrastructure development is another major component of the sector's expansion. Saudi Arabia is building a portfolio of stadiums and venues designed not only for football matches but also for concerts, conferences and large-scale entertainment events. "Modern stadiums are financially stronger when they function as experience and events platforms rather than simply football grounds," Petriccione said. She also highlighted a shift toward private sector participation in the operation of sports facilities, with the government increasingly offering opportunities for companies to manage and operate venues. "The value is not only in construction," she said. "It is also in operations, facility management, venue

technology, hospitality, naming rights, premium seating and non-match-day monetization." As Saudi Arabia prepares to host more international sporting events and expand its domestic leagues, Petriccione said the sector's economic impact could continue to exceed current forecasts. Another key driver of growth is the Kingdom's push to attract international investment into the sports ecosystem through structural reforms and privatization initiatives. Petriccione said the ongoing privatization of professional football clubs represents one of the most significant institutional changes shaping the future of Saudi sports. "Privatization fundamentally changes the economic logic of football governance," she said, noting that under traditional models many clubs functioned primarily as publicly supported institutions. Introducing professional ownership structures allows clubs to operate as economic assets capable of attracting long-term capital and implementing sustainable financial strategies. For international investors, Saudi football presents a relatively early-stage market with significant growth potential. Governance frameworks, commercial strategies and club valuations are still evolving, creating opportunities for investors to participate in the formation of a rapidly expanding sports market. Petriccione said Saudi clubs are increasingly positioned as "platform assets" that connect football with broader sectors of the economy, including tourism, media, entertainment and urban development. This integration is expected to create diversified revenue streams and strengthen the commercial sustainability of sports organizations in the Kingdom.—DNA

## China, COMSTEC discuss expanding science coop for OIC states

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) science body COMSTEC discussed expanding cooperation in science, technology and health during a meeting in Islamabad. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary, coordinator general of COMSTEC, met Xu Hangtian, minister-counselor at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, to review ongoing projects and discuss possible new initiatives involving universities, research institutes and training programmes for OIC member states, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Sunday. The two sides reviewed existing cooperation with Chinese institutions, including COMSTEC-HUCM training programmes and a 19-day certificate course on applied biomedical artificial intelligence organised with Ningbo University for researchers from OIC countries. The meeting also covered plans for a proposed COMSTEC-Zhejiang joint laboratory, a possible OIC-COMSTEC office in Beijing and further training links with Chinese institutions, including Xinjiang Medical University. Two sides discussed an upcoming April visit by a 27-member Chinese delegation.—APP

## Modern energy infrastructure key to economic growth

LAHORE: Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saifur-Rehman Sunday said that modern energy infrastructure is key to industrial competitiveness, export growth, urban productivity and employment creation. Addressing a seminar on "Public-Private Partnerships in Energy" here, he added, power distribution companies, responsible for last-mile delivery, are burdened with high technical losses, weak recovery performance and persistent financial stress. These structural shortcomings have been a central driver of the power sector's cumulative circular debt. The Coordinator said, government must rethink public-private partnerships in energy sector for reliable power to industrial production, urban growth, small businesses and household. He said emerging markets offer equally instructive lessons. Brazil's electricity reforms in the 1990s demonstrate how private participation, under effective oversight, can deliver tangible operational gains. As private distributors expanded networks and modernized systems, technical and commercial losses declined sharply, while access and service quality improved.—APP

## Iraq warns of strikes near prison housing Daesh detainees

BAGHDAD: Iraq warned on Sunday that drone attacks near Baghdad airport threatened the security of the nearby prison housing Daesh group suspects recently brought from Syria. In February, the United States completed the transfer of 5,700 Daesh detainees from Syria to Iraq. They have been held since in Baghdad's Al-Karkh prison, once a US Army detention center known as Camp Cropper, which is part of Baghdad airport's complex. Justice ministry spokesperson Ahmed Laibi said in a statement that "the areas surrounding Baghdad International Airport and the airport prison (Al-Karkh Central) have been subjected to repeated strikes." Some strikes hit "near the facility, raising concerns regarding the impact on the security of a prison that houses high-risk terrorist inmates," Laibi added. The most intense strikes took place Saturday hitting "in very close proximity to the prison," he said. Since the start of the Middle East war, Tehran-backed armed groups have been claiming daily drone and rocket attacks against US bases in Iraq. Baghdad airport houses a US diplomatic facility and until recently also hosted troops from the US-led international coalition against militants.—APP

Briefs

US State Deptt urges Americans to leave Iraq

WASHINGTON: The US State Department has instructed Americans still in Iraq to leave the country immediately, a warning that comes after a missile struck the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. "Iran-aligned terrorist militias have encouraged and conducted indiscriminate attacks on U.S. citizens and targets associated with the United States throughout Iraq, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). U.S. citizens should leave Iraq now," a security alert from the department said. They also urged Americans not to travel to the embassy or the U.S. consulate in Erbil, citing Iranian missile and drone attacks. All "routine" services at both of the offices are suspended regardless, the State Department added. The agency advised Americans to travel by land to either Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey, given that Iraqi airspace is closed at least until Monday. "Land borders are generally open. Travelers should expect long delays. Local ground transportation options are functioning. Americans should depart now via one of these overland routes," it said. Meanwhile, the State Department also said on Saturday it had ordered non-emergency government employees and the family members of government employees to leave Oman, citing safety risks as the US-Israeli war on Iran continues. Additionally, on Saturday, operations at the Lanaz refinery in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil were suspended until a fire caused by a drone strike was extinguished, provincial officials said. - APP

Rising oil prices jolt Pak's fragile economy

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Pakistan imports more than 85% of its crude oil from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates through a single maritime route via the Strait of Hormuz, and the escalating conflict in the region has disrupted that passage, further destabilising the country's already fragile economy, media reported, citing The New York Times. Farmers say they are struggling to cope with rising fuel costs ahead of the harvest season, while some schools are due to shift online on Monday. With nearly half of Pakistan's 250 million people living in poverty, according to the World Bank, many children lack access to a laptop, tablet or reliable internet. Ahead of Eid ul Fitr, many families are also cancelling trips to their hometowns, dimming what is usually a festive period marking the end of Ramadan. "Pakistan is already bankrupt and surviving loan by loan," said Kaiser Bengali, a Pakistani economist, referring to the loans that the South Asian nation has received from the International Monetary Fund.

Deputy PM Dar says Pakistan committed to combating Islamophobia

Dar stressed that the international community must stand united in condemning Islamophobia while also addressing the structural conditions that allow it to flourish

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister / Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Sunday, expressed Pakistan's solidarity with the Muslims worldwide over the issue of Islamophobia and reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to combating prejudice, discrimination, hostility, and violence directed against Muslims. In a message on 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia,' he said Pakistan remained firmly committed to advancing international efforts to counter Islamophobia. "In this regard, we are working with OIC Member States and the UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia on the development of a UN Plan of Action that would provide a structured framework to understand better, prevent, and eliminate this challenge," he added. Dar stressed that the international community must stand united in condemning Islamophobia while also addressing the structural conditions that allow it to flourish. "Pakistan calls upon all nations to undertake sustained efforts to promote mutual respect, dialogue, and understanding among communities, and to uphold the values of tolerance, dignity, and peaceful coexistence," he further emphasised. The DPM/FM said working closely with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Pakistan played a crucial role in the United Nations General Assembly's historic decision to designate 15 March



as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. "This marked an important milestone in the international community's efforts to promote harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among religions, cultures, and civilizations," the Foreign Office Spokesperson, in a press release, quoted the DPM/FM as saying. Dar further said Pakistan also played a pivotal role in the adoption of another UN General Assembly resolution aimed at strengthening international efforts to counter Islamophobia, including the request for the appointment of a United Nations Special Envoy to address this challenge. In this regard, he said, they welcomed the appointment of the United Nations Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in May 2025, as well as the appointment of the Special Envoy of the OIC Secretary-General on Combating Islamophobia in May 2024, reflecting the growing international resolve to address this challenge in a coordinated and sustained manner. The DPM/FM said that in recent years, the alarming rise in Islamophobia has manifested in deeply troubling incidents across many parts of the world, including the desecration of the Holy Quran, attacks on women for wearing the hijab, vandalism of mosques, religious profiling, and the open expression of anti-Muslim hatred in public discourse and media. Islamophobia exacerbated existing tensions and conflicts, creating a vicious cycle that threatened international peace and security, he added.

US, China chiefs to meet in Paris

DNA

PARIS: Top US and Chinese economic officials are set to launch a new round of talks in Paris on Sunday to iron out kinks in their trade truce and clear a smooth path for US President Donald Trump's trip to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the end of March. The discussions, led by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, are expected to focus on shifting US tariffs, the flow of Chinese-produced rare earth minerals and magnets to US buyers, American high-tech export controls and Chinese purchases of US agricultural products. The two sides will meet at the Paris headquarters of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, a source familiar with their planning said. China is not a member of the club of 38 mostly wealthy democracies and considers itself a developing country. US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer will also join the talks, which continue a string of meetings in European cities last year aimed at easing tensions that threatened a near collapse of trade between the world's two largest economies.

Nehal vows to better education system

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Newly appointed Sindh Governor Nehal Hashmi on Sunday vowed that the federal government would bring more job opportunities and improve education for youth across the province. Addressing his maiden press conference after his oath-taking ceremony in Karachi, Hashmi said: "It is of immense joy that we will bring the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) to Sindh as well, with cooperation." The governor recalled that he conveyed to PMYP Sindh Coordinator Fahad Shafiq that the "employment, education and training opportunities provided to Pakistan's youth will also be extended here [in Sindh]". Hashmi further said there would not just be "youth programme and computer training, but an entire comprehensive subject and chapter on education".

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia step up diplomacy to avert wider conflict

Both sides agree to reduce hostilities, prevent further escalation and promote unity among Muslim nations

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are making concerted efforts to ensure that the ongoing regional tensions are resolved peacefully and do not escalate into a conflict among Muslim countries, media reported citing sources familiar with high-level talks in Jeddah. The understanding emerged during a brief but important visit to Saudi Arabia by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday. The prime minister was accompanied by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Asim Munir and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, who held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman amid rising tensions in the Middle East. Sources said both sides agreed that the current situation in the region requires urgent diplomatic efforts to prevent escalation and

ensure that disputes are resolved through dialogue rather than confrontation. Both reiterated their consistent policy that conflicts within the Muslim world must be avoided and that every effort should be made to prevent the situation from turning into a wider confrontation among the Muslim states. During the discussions, the Pakistani delegation expressed strong solidarity with Saudi Arabia and reaffirmed that Pakistan has always stood by the Kingdom's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity. Officials said the Pakistani leadership also emphasised the special significance of Saudi Arabia as the custodian of Islam's holiest sites, describing their protection as a matter of honour and responsibility for Pakistan and its military. The sources also noted the symbolic importance of Field Marshal Munir attending the meeting in a combat uniform, which was seen as a signal that Pakistan's civil and military leadership remain united in their commitment to Saudi Arabia's security.

Good news for dogs drying of cancer

"It raises the question, if we can do this for a dog, why aren't we rolling this out to all humans with cancer? It gives hope to a lot of people, and it's something we're passionate about trying to chase up here"

NEWS DESK

SYDNEY: An experimental cancer treatment using an mRNA vaccine, which was developed with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), is offering hope to humans after a successful run with a dog with cancer in Sydney. The Australian reported on Friday, Rosie - an eight-year-old rescue dog - was adopted by Sydney-based tech entrepreneur Paul Conyngham in 2019. She was diagnosed with a deadly mast cell cancer in 2024. After showing no improvement following the initial treatment, Conyngham turned to a chatbot to brainstorm ideas for her treatment, which led to him partnering

with elite medical scientists to find a cure. The vaccine produced in the result, which Rosie was given over the Christmas break in 2025, caused one of her tumours to shrink by half. According to The Australian, "the recovery has astounded researchers at the cutting-edge of human cancer treatments". Martin Smith, an associate professor of computational biology and director of the Ramaciotti Centre for Genomics at the University of NSW, where a team of scientists worked on the vaccine, recalled the development, saying, "It was like holy crap, it worked!" "It raises the question, if we can do this for a dog, why aren't we rolling this out to all humans with cancer? It gives hope to a lot of people, and it's something we're passionate about trying to chase up here." According to The Australian, Conyngham "used a chatbot to brainstorm possible cures for Rosie's cancer - then harnessed artificial intelligence to process gigabytes of genetic data to create the blueprint for an mRNA vaccine". Conyngham has 17-years of experience in machine learning and data analysis. Conyngham then went to Australia's "most sought-after" scientists. ChatGPT pointed Conyngham to the UNSW's genomics centre, where he asked them to "DNA sequence his dog".



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan Dr. Ifran Neziroglu greeting newly-appointed Chairman of HEC Dr. Niaz. DNA

Afghan Drone Attack: an act of Aggression Chinese scholar

As a sovereign nation, Pakistan possesses the inherent and inalienable right to defend its territorial integrity, national security, and the safety of its people

DNA

BEIJING: Afghanistan's recent attempt to target military facilities near Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, using drones constitutes a blatant act of aggression against a sovereign state. This move flagrantly violates international law and gravely undermines regional peace and stability. Such a reckless and provocative act has also aggravated the already strained ties between the two neighboring countries, which share profound historical and cultural bonds. These views were expressed by Prof Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow at the Charhar Institute, a non-governmental Chinese think-tank on diplomacy and international studies based in Beijing. He remarked that it is crucial to emphasize that there is an essential difference between the military operations conducted by Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's cross-border military operations are aimed at combating terrorism, whereas Afghanistan's cross-border military operations constitute a serious violation of the sovereignty of another sovereign state and amount essentially to supporting terrorist activities. As a sovereign nation, Pakistan possesses the inherent and inalienable right to defend its territorial integrity, national

security, and the safety of its people. The Afghan drone attack was not merely a direct provocation; it represented a dangerous escalation that could trigger a cycle of retaliation and plunge the entire region into deeper chaos. Prof Cheng said that the South Asian region has long been victim of terrorism, and cross-border tensions, and such unprovoked attacks only fan the flames of conflict. Beyond endangering the lives and property of innocent civilians, these acts undermine long-standing efforts to promote regional cooperation, mutual trust, and peaceful coexistence among neighboring states. The international community must firmly condemn this act of aggression, urge Afghanistan to immediately cease all hostile actions and respect Pakistan's sovereignty. Upholding regional peace and stability is a shared responsibility of all countries in the region and the wider international community. In an era of growing interdependence, no country can achieve security and development in isolation. Only by unwaveringly respecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity, abandoning the zero-sum mindset, and committing to peaceful negotiation and mutual accommodation can we build a secure, stable, and prosperous future for the people of South Asia and advance lasting peace in the region, he added.

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